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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

P. 1–3 What is the Meaning Mindset?

Paul T. P. Wong

Articles

P. 4–30 The Quest to Capture Personal Meaning in Psychology

Zvi Bellin

P. 31–44 Family and Meaning: Examining The Four Needs for Meaning as Mediators

N. M. Lambert, R. F. Baumeister, T. F. Stillman, & F. D. Finchman

P. 45–59 Franklian Metapsychology Revisited: Is There a Franklian Epistemology?

Troy Bruner

P. 60–66 Logotherapy: Infusing Counselor Education With a Meaningful Spirit

Trace Pirtle

P. 67–78 “The Quiet Revolutionary”: A Timely Revisiting of Carl Rogers’ Visionary Contribution to Human Understanding

Kathleen O’Dwyer

P. 79–88 Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation

D. Dionne Bates

Death and Dying

P. 89–99 The Journey of Shakespeare’s *Pericles*: Young People Discover Personal Meaning Through The Theme of Death and Resurrection

Alistair Martin-Smith

P. 100–106 Moral Distress in Healthcare: The Value of Dying With Dignity

Corry Roach

P. 107–121 A Meaningful Death as a Function of a Meaningful Life: An Integrity Model Perspective

Danielle Nahon & Nedra Lander

P. 122–128 Death Acceptance Through Ritual

Nancy Reeves

P. 129–134 Exploring Attitudes Towards Death and Life Through Story and Metaphor

Zvi Bellin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Book Review

P. 135–139 *Flourishing: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, By
Martin E. P. Seligman
Paul T. P. Wong

THE MEANING MINDSET: MEASUREMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

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In an ideal world, most reasonable people will want to live a life of pleasure, positive engagement, and meaning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, throughout life we often have to make tough choices between what is right and what is profitable or between what is meaningful and what is pleasurable. The tough choices people make are more likely to reveal more of their core values and basic life orientation.

A related issue has to do with the ultimate concern or primary objective of one's life. It seems fair to assume that most people desire happiness and aspire to live a good life. What does the good life mean to them? What really matters to them? Their life purpose and goals also reflect their basic value orientation.

We believe that there are at least two fundamentally different life orientations. One orientation is primarily concerned with how to live a meaningful life—a virtuous life of serving a higher purpose and making a significant difference in the world. This is akin to Aristotle's ideal of eudaimonia.

The other orientation is primarily concerned with how to live a personally successful and happy life. People with this orientation are less identified with humanity and less concerned about global issues of poverty and injustice.

The following figure, modelled after Frankl (1985), reflects the differences between these two basic life orientations.

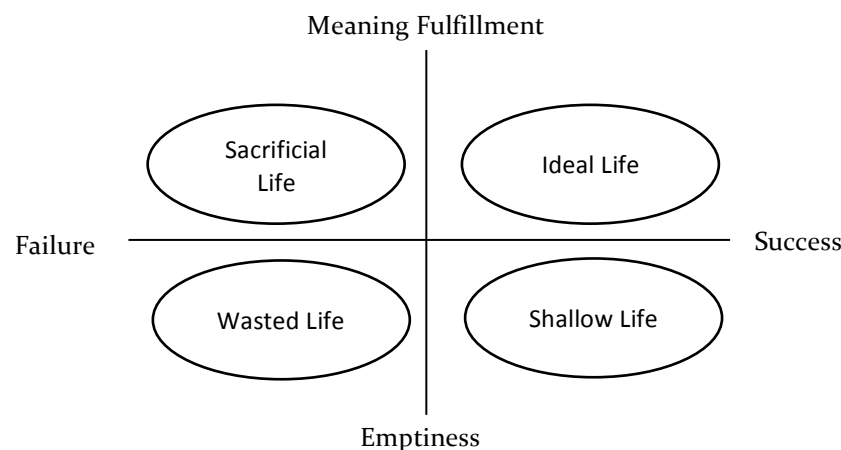


Figure 1. Meaning-mindset vs. success mindset.

These two different mindsets can exert pervasive influences on our lives and society, from career choices, relationships, and character strengths to civic virtues and community development. It is difficult to develop a harmonious, compassionate, and virtuous society without a significant number of people subscribing to the meaning-mindset. For a fuller explanation of the vital role of the mindset, please refer to Wong (2011, 2012).

I have developed a tentative Life Orientation Scale (LOS) to measure the meaning-mindset as per the following Table. In terms of content validity, LOS reflects a positive-mindset with strong emphasis on moral excellence and altruism. This test is consistent with the lifestyle of individuals (e.g., Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa) who chose to sacrifice personal success and happiness and give of themselves to a higher cause.

We can also predict that people who score high in LOS will be more likely to devote themselves to humanitarian relief work, social reform advocacy, or religious vocations. Such individuals are more likely to show more altruism, more eudaimonia, and more spirituality.

Personally, I believe that a meaning-mindset is exactly what we need to create a culture that values social responsibility, civic virtues, and service to humanity. Ultimately, a meaning-mindset will result in a kinder and more harmonious society and more sustainable development. I invite all psychologists to prove me wrong.

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Table 1. Life Orientation Scale

The Life Orientation Scale (LOS)

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Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling a number on the 5-point scale that best corresponds to your personal belief and attitude.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

Items 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are worded in the negative direction. The higher the total score is, the greater the meaning mindset.

THE QUEST TO CAPTURE PERSONAL MEANING IN PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In this literature review the construct of personal meaning is explored through the disciplines of psychology, theology, and philosophy. Emphasis is placed on the translation of meaning theory into the research of personal meaning. The connections between meaning and religion and spirituality are explored. Several meaning measurements and their shortcomings are reviewed; narrative analysis is offered as a contemporary advancement in meaning research.

The interdisciplinary construct of meaning is hard to capture. Philosophers associated with existentialism, such as Heidegger (1949) and Levinas (Lechte, 1994), and existential literature, such as *Nausea* by Sartre (1964) and *Siddhartha* by Hesse (1951), have struggled with the question of meaning in existence. Meaning has become a focus in psychology (Maslow, 1968; May, 1983; Frankl, 1962; Baumeister, 1991; Maddi, 1998; Wong, 1998) and nursing (Anderberg, Lepp, Berglund & Segesten, 2007). In the field of theology, meaning has been discussed by Tillich (1980; Fisher, 1976), Buber (1958), and Kushner (1981) in the West and Hahn (1998), and Chödrön (2003) in the East. Meaning is also important in the fields of linguistics (Chomsky, 1990), cultural anthropology (Quinn, 1995; Jessor, Colby & Shweder, 1996), and education (Merriam & Heuer, 1996). The present article will focus on capturing the arc of the personal meaning construct in the form of a literature review.

Mascaro & Rosen (2008) pooled various definitions together to define meaning in a life. They defined meaning as a “possession of a coherent framework for viewing life that provides a sense of purpose or direction, which, if lived within accord, can bring about a sense of fulfillment” (p. 579). The authors admitted that even this definition does not capture every nuance of people’s use of the term meaning.

Frankl and the primal drive for meaning

Frankl (1962) brought meaning to the attention of interdisciplinary scholars after his analysis of his experience surviving the Holocaust. According to Frankl, each individual possesses a “will to meaning” which is a primary motivation in one’s life. This idea is in contrast to the theory that the primary motivator in a person’s life is the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Frankl wrote, “man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life” (p. 136). Indeed, it is meaning which has expanded the inner world of the human beyond feeling pleasure or pain into a complex system of emotions (Baumeister, 1991).

Frankl seemed to profoundly understand the primal origins of meaning, as is supported by the evolutionary perspective exemplified by Klinger (1998). Klinger suggested that as motile beings, humans developed the drive to relentlessly seek out what they needed from their environment. This translated into goal fulfillment and a sense of purpose. Once a sense of purpose is in place an encounter with an unconditioned

experience in the environment would have to be sorted out within the framework of this developed purpose. An experience may be seen as neutral, and thus be ignored, or it might cause discomfort. The discomfort would then trigger a need to search for the relative meaning of the experience. What evolved then was a biologically-motivated compulsive search for meaning. Hence, Klinger wrote,

The human brain cannot sustain purposeless living. It was not designed for that. Its systems are designed for purposive actions, and when blocked, they deteriorate, and the emotional feedback from idling those systems signals extreme discomfort and motivates the search for renewed purpose and hence meaning. (p.33)

More recent research suggested that the relationship between experiencing and searching for meaning is more complex, as there seems to be a moderating effect imposed by other subjective well-being variables (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). Even so, Frankl (1962) has enlightening us about a primal drive for meaning which stems from the concern for survival.

Meaning and the construction of reality

In Baumeister's (1991) comprehensive overview of the construct of meaning in psychology, *Meanings in Life*, he asserted that people receive their meaning from culture. In his understanding, resonating with Heidegger, people do not create new meaning, but rather choose from what is available as meaningful to create a coherent picture of personal meaning. Culture provides the larger context in which meaning can be found. An example of this is that religion can be seen as a shared cultural meaning system. "Meaning," as Baumeister defined it, "is a shared mental representation of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships ... meaning connects things" (p. 15).

According to Baumeister, the basic unit of meaning is a connection, whether real or symbolic. He equated the formation of the meaning of a word or concept with the meaning in life. In both language and life, meaning can be understood in terms of the principles of constructivism (Arceiero & Guidano, 2000). According to the constructivist paradigm, understanding of one's world is intimately linked to the relationship between the individual and her or his experiences in the world. Truth and knowledge are constructed in an ongoing process as the cognizant being encounters its environment. This process of construction also takes place during identity development, where the individual constantly affirms her or his identity by organizing events into a coherent story (Ganzevoort, 1993).

According to Baumeister (1991), meaning has two functions that are interrelated. The first is to discern patterns in the environment. The second is to control the internal world of the self. The process of ascribing meaning creates labels for things that go beyond the bio-evolutionary distinction of pain and pleasure. It expands this dichotomy into a world full of emotions, and helps to make and regulate sophisticated human life in the environment.

May's (1983) work entitled *Discovery of Being* provided a different glimpse into a possible understanding of survival through personal meaning. Echoing the existentialist voice, May wrote that each individual is constantly called to assert one's existence against

the anxiety of non-being. As Tillich (1980) spoke about the drive for self-affirmation, May (1983) too emphasized this self-affirmation process. Self-affirmation is the need to preserve one's own centeredness. Survival then, in part, is the ongoing process of affirming one's own existence, which is a function of personal meaning that is interwoven with the process of decision making (Maddi, 1998).

Decision making as self-affirming meaning

As meaning is seen as a part of self-affirmation, the moment-to-moment shifts in the experience of meaning are drawn into focus. Maddi (1998) wrote that, "personal meaning derives from the individual decisions people make every day" (p. 3). Decision-making may be influenced by cultural, social, and familial norms. This can lead to an externally informed style of decision-making, and thus to meaning that is based on external factors alone. Individuals may also make decisions in a transcendent manner, where a person's meaning expands or grows. Maddi spoke of this in terms of "choosing the past" or "choosing the future" (p. 6). When a person chooses in line with the past, there is a lived experience of things always being the same. They are making decisions based on stagnant frames of meaning. This leads to a feeling of *ontological guilt*, the guilt of never knowing what could have been.

Alternatively, choosing the future is a decision to experience a new understanding, or new action. The individual lives in a way that is constantly integrating new experiences into their meaning scheme, which may include transcending the scheme altogether. The result of choosing the future is a feeling of *ontological anxiety*, which Maddi defined as the feeling of jumping into the unknown.

Maddi theorized that the meaning-based construct of hardiness can proactively buffer the effects of *ontological anxiety*. The notion of hardiness is based on the idea that "personal meaning derives from the individual decisions people make every day" (Maddi, Brow, Khoshaba, & Vaitkus, 2006, p. 3). Hardiness is composed of the three acquired traits of commitment, control, and challenge. Commitment is sustained engagement in one's social sphere, despite any perceived dissonance between self and world. Control is the personal sense of an ability to accomplish various things in life. Challenge is the ability to see change as interesting and not chaotic. In healthy circumstances these qualities are acquired in one's youth. With hardiness in place one is able to sustain a sense of meaning without the terror of an unknown future.

Personal goals as criteria for meaning in life

There was a wave of meaning research that seemed to place purpose in life, or goal orientation, at its focus. Emmons (2003), for example, looked at meaning in people's lives in terms of the pursuit of personally significant goals. A person is engaged in a meaningful life when they are seeking to fulfill self-defined goals. He wrote, "Development of goals that allow for a greater sense of purpose in life is one of the cornerstones of well-being" (p. 106). Emmons stressed that meaning in life is associated with positive function, and a lack of meaning has shown to be associated with psychological distress and pathology.

Through three separate research studies, which span qualitative and quantitative methodologies, Emmons mapped out four areas in people's lives where meaning is

sought. These are: Work, Intimacy, Spirituality, and Transcendence. Transcendence is explained as generativity, or wanting to leave something behind for the future, and not as transcendence in the spiritual sense. He compared these life areas to the areas in which goals are usually created. In seeking goals people aim for intimacy, spirituality, generativity, and power. Of the four goal themes, goals for power are associated with higher levels of reported negative affect. In contrast to Baumeister (1991), who stated that relationship and connection are the units of meaning, Emmons (2003) suggested that personal goals are the units of a meaningful life. He also seemed to stress that it is not the attainment of goals that creates meaning, but rather the pursuit of them.

Emmons' (2003) work and more recent meaning literature (see for example Schulenberg & Melton, 2010) suggest that meaning-seeking can be reduced to the pursuit and fulfillment of goals. It is an assumption of this author that this is a limiting and dangerous perspective. Identifying and striving for goals is only one aspect of meaning (Baumeister, 1991), and there is more to meaning than just what one does (Frankl, 1984; Wong, 2008). As already made evident, there are alternative theories of meaning beyond relentless goal seeking and fulfillment.

The positive meaning perspective—Sense of Coherence

While Frankl's (1962) theory of meaning originally dominated the empirical approach to meaning, it is not the only theory available. Frankl's theory ultimately was about a new way of understanding pathology. According to Frankl, a lack of meaning led to a unique type of psychological distress. As a result, the measurement scale based on his theory, the Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), was developed to predict and diagnose meaning-based pathology, such as existential anxiety. Antonovsky (1979) introduced meaning in a new light: meaning that is at the core of health rather than pathology.

The sense of coherence (SOC) is a construct that came out of the world of medicine in the 1970's and 80's, as part of a challenge to the pathogenic approach to medicine, which focused on the origins of disease, and the healthy or sick person dichotomy (Antonovsky, 1979). An alternative salutogenic orientation was introduced that focused on the origin of health, and a healthy to unhealthy, or health-ease to dis-ease continuum. "The implications are that with pathogenesis, only a small number of people are examined at a given time, whereas with salutogenesis the total population becomes the subject of study" (Korotkov, 1998, p. 53). In the salutogenic continuum one never reaches the extreme of healthy or sick, but is pushed toward one end of the spectrum by a multitude of internal and external factors.

The SOC construct was separated into three sub-variables: (1) comprehensibility, (2) manageability, and (3) meaningfulness. Comprehensibility is the sense that the world is ordered and predictable, and that it makes cognitive sense. Manageability speaks to the idea that one has the needed resources to cope with the demands of life. Meaningfulness is the degree "to which the world makes emotional sense and ... the demands of life are perceived as being worthy of energy investment and commitment" (Kortokov, 1998, p. 55). The importance of meaningfulness is that it ensures long-lasting coping by motivating the other two factors.

Constructs such as the SOC (Antonovsky, 1979) and hardiness (Maddi, 1998) place meaning at the center of personality, instead of making it something that is created by personality. Meaning becomes a tool that is used to create an inner sense of harmony and core resilience. Whether meaning is bestowed upon us by a Higher Power or not is irrelevant. In a sense, one might think of personal meaning as being like language. We are born with the capacity for both and have the ability throughout life to access deeper levels of both for our benefit and the benefit of our societies (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987). Baumeister (1991) also helped to expand on the original conceptualization of meaning.

Baumeister's four needs of meaning and human dignity

Baumeister (1991) suggested four universal needs of meaning that seem to offer a stabilizing recipe for the individual. They are *purpose*, *value*, *efficacy*, and *self-worth*. He defined *purpose* as the need to interpret present actions as contributing to some future or possible state. It is composed of an extrinsic level of goal-direction and an intrinsic state of fulfillment. Baumeister suggested that fulfillment is a state of being happy about achieving a goal. *Value*, or justification, asserts that actions are right and good. This need is the basis for morality and social justice. *Efficacy* is having a sense of control over events, even if this control is illusory. It also is seen in the need to feel capable. Efficacy seems to be related to two ingredients of SOC, namely comprehensibility and manageability—the sense that the world is predictable and that one has the ability to cope (Korotkov, 1998).

The final need of meaning in Baumeister's (1991) conception is *self-worth*. It is a sense that an individual's life has a positive significance and a claim on self-respect and respect from others. Baumeister wrote that the need of self-worth is linked to the need for superiority, which must be constantly renegotiated (p. 45). He explored the lack of self-worth as seen in the history of slaves in America. Even the lowest members of society created a hierarchy of superiority—house slaves over field slaves, for example—in order to maintain a sense of self-worth.

Mascaro & Rosen (2008) divided existential meaning as referred to by Frankl (1962) into three parts. These are personal meaning, implicit meaning, and spiritual meaning. Personal meaning, defined as a sense of purpose and coherence, has been discussed above. Implicit meaning seems to provide entry into the exploration of meaning through narrative analysis and will be discussed in further detail in the next section. Spiritual meaning will be discussed below as well.

Implicit meaning—what gives us meaning?

Implicit meaning refers to a person engaging in the type of behaviors that others would find meaningful. It is the laypersons' understanding of what is meaningful, or the prototypical structure of meaning (Wong, 1998a; 1998b). Wong's exploration of implicit meaning led him towards the development of the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP).

The PMP is a 57-item, Likert-format self-report inventory that measures the extent to which individuals engage in seven specific areas as part of their meaning framework. Wong found that the PMP and its seven sub-scales significantly related to explicit measures of meaning (i.e., SOC and PIL) and measures of perceived and psychological well-being. The seven sub-scales are (1) achievement and goal-striving

(agency), (2) intimacy and family (love), (3) relationships (community), (4) self-transcendence (larger cause), (5) religion (spirituality), (6) self-acceptance (maturity), and (7) fair treatment (justice and morality). Measures of physical well-being correlated with achievement, fulfillment, and self-transcendence subscales. A strong negative relationship was found between depression measures and all the PMP subscales except for relationships and self-acceptance. Mascaro, Rosen, & Morey (2004) found that the PMP was positively associated with the Life Regard Index (Battista and Almond, 1973) and the Spiritual Meaning Scale (Mascaro, et al., 2004). (Both of these scales will be discussed below.)

Ali, Oatley, & Toner (2002) investigated life stress, self-silencing, and domains of meaning related to women's depression. From a pilot study they learned that participants' responses about primary domains of meaning were amenable to a data analysis through systematic content analysis. They arrived at seven categories, which they split into two larger themes. These themes were *relational* and *self-nurturing*. The relational theme included friendships, family, and intimate relationships categories. The theme of self-nurturing included career, exercise, creative expression, and spirituality categories. With empirical methodology, the authors revealed that stressors related to their primary source of meaning were associated with major depression. Baum & Stewart (1990) conducted a similar study looking at meaningful events over age. They found that there were no significant differences in what was seen as meaningful in different age groups.

Spiritual meaning

Mascaro et al. (2004) developed the Spiritual Meaning Scale (SMS) to supplement traditional scales that measure meaning frameworks and meaning activity. The SMS measures the extent to which a person believes that life or some force in life has a purpose, or will, in which individuals can participate. In a hierarchical regression analysis with an undergraduate population the authors found that the SMS along with other meaning measurements explained variance over and above the Big Five personality variables in hope, depression, anxiety, and antisocial features depression.

According to their article, Mascaro and his team created the SMS because they understood that measuring meaning strictly in terms of purpose and coherence limited our understanding of the construct. Their article stated that

A system of goals around which one maintains hope is indeed a substantial component of meaning's link to well-being (Feldman & Snyder, 2005), but for a personal framework to be truly meaningful, it must be more significant than just a chosen system of goals. Otherwise, one need not speak of meaning, but simply of hopeful goal-pursuit. Rather, Frankl found meaning by uncovering not ". . . what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us" (Frankl, 1992, p 85). By using such language, he moved into the realm of transpersonal or what we term spiritual meaning, which is not conceptualized as a mere construct of the individual but as a capital "M" Meaning around which one can form a small "m," personal meaning. (Mascaro et al., 2008, pp. 579–580)

In their study they used a longitudinal design and structural equation modeling with a sample of 574 undergraduate students in order to predict depression by the multidimensional existential meaning perspective, composed of personal, spiritual, and

implicit aspects of meaning, over a two-month period. Existential meaning was measured by the Spiritual Meaning Scale, the Life Regard Index Framework Subscale, and the Personal Meaning Profile. The authors expected to find that the combined measures of meaning would predict measures of depression and that they would find a significant reciprocal effect of depression on meaning. Three measures of depression were also used.

Results showed that higher levels of existential meaning were associated with lower levels of depression, and there were moderate to large correlations between the three measures of meaning, adding to their convergent validity. Even more so, the authors' model suggested that lower levels of existential meaning significantly predicted increases in depression over a two-month period, and that higher meaning predicted lower levels of depression. The authors found a small longitudinal effect of meaning as a predictor of depression. They concluded that there may be other variables that are part of their prediction model and that meaning is in part an input and in part an output variable.

Theories about meaning are broader than the whys and whats of meaning. Models have been created to understand how one goes about forming meaning in life and how one maintains a sense of meaning in their life. An exemplary model that has subsequently been used to explore the relationship between meaning and religion/spirituality is the Park & Folkman (1997) Model of Global and Situational Meaning.

Meaning formation

Park & Folkman (1997) developed their Model of Global and Situational Meaning in order to conceptualize how stress impacts a complex understanding of meaning. The authors noted that there are conflicting studies that show the presence of meaning as being both negatively (Clark, Henry, & Taylor, 1991; Frazier & Schauben, 1994) and positively (Silver, Boon, & Stones, 1983; Affleck, Tennen, & Gershman, 1985) associated with meaning-making. Their model aimed to understand these discrepancies in the research. Meaning is simply defined as referring to the perception of significance (Park & Folkman, 1997), and it is divided into two categories: *global* and *situational* meaning.

Global meaning refers to the individual's sustained understanding of the past and present, and expectations about the future. Two important components of global meaning are an individual's assumptions about order and a motivational element which includes goals and purpose. Assumptions about order include beliefs about the world, beliefs about the self, and beliefs about the self in the world. Global meaning is characterized by stability, optimism, and personal relevance.

The authors identified religion as a typical example of global meaning. Religion is often central to an individual's life meaning: it provides a context from which one makes sense of life events, it provides a variety of coping mechanisms for dealing with stressful situations, and religion may be modified when a person is faced with a traumatic experience. Though, under normal circumstances, people are more likely to keep their religious beliefs stable than to make a change.

Situational meaning refers to an interaction that occurs between the person's global meaning and an encounter with her or his environment. Park & Folkman wrote

about a person-environment transaction that must be appraised by the individual. According to their model, when a situation is initially appraised as stressful, it means that there is a conflict between global and situational meanings. A second appraisal step is then taken, whereby the person, informed by their global meaning, will identify relevant coping strategies. This begins the process known as *the search for meaning*.

Throughout life, as different experiences are had, a person is faced with situational meaning which can either support or challenge their global meaning. When a situational meaning conflicts with global meaning, a person may experience a crisis as they struggle to make sense of their current experience. This struggle may result in either changing the beliefs and goals that make up their global meaning or they may reappraise the situational meaning to reduce its incongruence with their global meaning. If neither of these occurs, a person may enter the stage of rumination. Rumination is often associated with poorer adjustment and depression.

As an example of applying their model in research, Plattner & Meiring (2006) used the model to organize their results in a study that looked at the meaning-making based coping process of 10 Namibian people infected with HIV. Their results showed that all the participants accepted their HIV status, and their acceptance played a role in their coping strategy. Most of the participants felt as if they were responsible for contracting HIV, and so felt as if they deserved the virus. This coping style gave them a sense of control over their lives. Their participants reported that religion became important in their lives when they became infected with HIV. Religion reportedly gave their HIV status more meaning, and infused their experience with a sense of purpose and hope that a good outcome was inevitable. The following section will organize the information of the above literature review by exploring two distinctions.

Emergent distinctions in meaning

Discovering or creating meaning

Frankl (1962) spoke of discovering meaning as opposed to creating meaning. The distinction between discovering and creating meaning was emphasized by a more contemporary theorist, Paul Wong (2008), who compared meaning-seeking with meaning-making. According to Wong, meaning-seeking is a primitive process whereby the mind transforms a tremendous amount of information and stimuli from the world into a controllable and manageable story. Meaning-seeking takes one beyond mere causal relationships between events, and aims to attribute a reason and purpose to the relationship. Meaning that is sought is based on time-tested values and is held accountable by a "Task Master, a Higher Power" (p.74). Meaning-making, in comparison, is a process of actively "construing, constructing, and creating meaning" (p.75). Meaning-making is accomplished through acculturation and language, the telling of stories, the pursuit and fulfillment of both long- and short-term goals, and the personal development of a worldview, philosophy of life, values and belief system. Wong's acknowledgment of meaning-seeking is unique in that meaning based on a Higher Power is generally criticized as failing to satisfy empirical rigor, which cannot assert absolute truths, and contradicts the postmodern constructivist movement, which

asserts a continued moment-to-moment construction of meaning (Yalom, 1980; Baumeister, 1991; Zeitchik, 2001).

In Frankl's (1962) view, meaning can be discovered through (1) *creating* work or doing a deed, (2) *experiencing* a situation or encountering a person, or (3) by one's *attitude* towards unavoidable suffering. Meaning is found when engaging with the world, a catalyst for transcending the self. One gets the sense that Frankl might be speaking of meaning as if it were a primordial pool that has always existed and perhaps is unchanging, in good times or bad. Frankl writes,

In accepting this challenge to suffer bravely, life has a meaning up to the last moment, and it retains this meaning literally to the end. In other words, life's meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential meaning of unavoidable suffering. (p. 137)

Even in this short quote, the complexity of talking about meaning is elucidated. Frankl spoke of a meaning that is a backdrop to life, and the meaning of unavoidable suffering that can be drawn from life's meaning. This might suggest a hierarchy of meaning, similar to the Global and Situational Meaning Model of Park & Folkman (1997). Frankl (1962) equated personal meaning with ideals and values that a person would choose to die for. He suggested that each person is asked the question, "What do you uniquely have to offer to life in this moment?" (p. 131). By contemplating this question a person can determine one's personal meaning. This is opposite from the inquiry, *what does life offer me at the moment*. Related to this is the construct of the search for meaning, which has been given focus in contemporary meaning literature.

Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz (2008) emphasized the search for meaning as an important psychological construct separate from meaning in life. They "define the search for meaning in life as the strength, intensity, and activity of people's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives" (p. 200). In the range of theories about meaning, searching for meaning is sometimes viewed as a positive or natural process, while others view searching for meaning as a sign of instability, motivated by disequilibrium. There are also opinions that treat the search for meaning as being potentially motivated by healthy and unhealthy circumstances (Reker, 2000).

The findings of Steger, et al. (2008) supported what they call the Presence to Search model. This model assumes that meaning is an important psychological quality that is sought when an individual feels a lack of meaning. It is not always the case, though, that a lack of meaning becomes a search for meaning. Maintaining a sense of meaning is only one thing that can restore well-being. There seems to be a moderating effect from other subjective well-being factors between presence and search for meaning. The authors give the example of a highly autonomous person who may not search for meaning when faced with a lack of meaning because their autonomy may buffer against any negative consequences of the loss. Their data also suggested that the search for and presence of meaning cannot always be conceptualized as existing on one continuum. This supported the statement made by Ebersole (1998) that though people have experienced meaninglessness in their lives, in the moment, many people will answer that they have meaning.

Meaning through doing and meaning through being

It has been discussed above how meaning theory posits that there is more to meaning than our sense of accomplishments in life (Frankl, 1962; Wong, 1998). In contrast to the focus on goal setting as a facet of meaning, Ebersole & Quiring (1991) wrote,

Many of people's meaning that we have studied have either a minor goal directed aspect or lack it entirely; for example, a majority of those who subscribe to relationships with other people as their most central meaning are referring to already established relationships. We suspect that such a statement could be difficult for individuals in our goal-oriented culture to accept. They might question whether there can be meaning divorced from a goal orientation. We side with the alternative argument ... that sometimes the meaning in life is not found in striving but just being. (p. 115)

The authors' idea of meaning as being is drawn from the work of Yalom (1980) who wrote about meaning that comes from the *Hedonistic Solution*. In this view, purpose in life is to "simply live fully, to retain one's sense of astonishment at the miracle of life, to plunge oneself into the natural rhythm of life, to search for pleasure in the deepest possible sense" (p. 437). Yalom holds the view that a person must invent their own meaning and then commit themselves to this self-created meaning. Perhaps because of this view he reduced the sentiment of simply being to the idea that pleasure seeking is the highest goal in life. Yalom's leap appeared to be somewhat contradictory—a goal of not wanting to strive for something is still a goal. Also, hedonistic pursuits may be a part of eudaimonic or meaningful pursuits (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008), and so perhaps a more sophisticated concept than Yalom (1980) supposed is warranted.

Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master Tich Nhat Hanh (1998) touched on a similar idea minus the reduction of meaning through being as pleasure pursuit. He wrote:

For those who have truly seen, there is no philosophy of action needed. There is no knowledge, attainment, or object of attainment. Life is lived just as the wind blows, clouds drift, and flowers bloom. When you know how to fly you do not need a street map. Your language is the language of clouds, wind, and flowers. If asked a philosophical question, you might answer with a poem ... or point to the mountain forest. (p. 105)

Here I get a similar idea of which Yalom (1980) spoke about, the meaning of simply being, though without the association of pure pleasure seeking. In the phrase, "There is no knowledge, attainment, or object of attainment," Tich Nhat Hanh (1998, p. 105) appears to be speaking about the realization of unity between the perceiver and the perceived. With this mindset, one cannot want to be what they already are, and meaning is never elusive. By revisiting Frankl as cited in Yalom (1980), this Buddhist view is expressed in Western terms.

Yalom (1980) alluded to three types of meaning system which were discussed previously: creative, experiential, and attitudinal meaning. In reference to experiential meaning, Yalom wrote:

Engagement in deep experience constitutes meaning: "If someone tapped your shoulder while listening to your favorite music, and asked you if life were meaningful, would you not," asks Frankl, "answer Yes? The same answer would be given by the nature lover on a mountain top, the religious person at a

memorable service, the intellectual at an inspiring lecture, the artist in front of a masterpiece.” (p. 446)

Meaning then is also perceived when in a state of being totally immersed with your surroundings, or with what you are engaged in. The experience of expanding beyond the boundary of self is perhaps a signal of a moment of achieved or discovered meaning. In order to get a sense of the concept of being that seems to be at the root of Frankl (1984), May (1983), and Wong (2008), I will review the work of Paul Tillich (1980).

The courage to affirm meaning.

For Tillich, being is discovered in the construct of courage. Tillich defined his compound construct, the *courage to be*, as “the ethical act in which man affirms his own being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with his essential self-affirmation” (p. 3). Tillich believed that the drive for self-affirmation is the central factor which defines the self-preserving being. The essence of the being is the striving of that being to maintain what it is in the world. This idea raised self-affirmation up beyond a reductionist view of biological survival drive to a person’s expression of one’s soul. For Tillich, “self-affirmation is participation in the divine self-affirmation (p. 22).”

There seems to be a contradiction here with the social constructivist perspective of the self as a subjective concept that might have no objective reality (Arceiero & Guidano, 2000). How then can one speak of affirming the self? This point is crucial in understanding the power of *meaning through being* and its connection with the concept of spirituality. Tillich, as taught by May (1983), wrote that when we talk about being we are speaking of a state that is prior to the subjective and objective split. Being transcends this distinction, as seen in the philosophy of the French Existentialist, Sartre (1956). Since being is in itself a transcendent concept, it easily can be related to the concept of spirituality, which at its core is transcendence (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Miller & Thoresen, 2006).

Because of the ever-present quality of being, Tillich (1980) seemed to caution how one talks about striving for being, since it ultimately is something that one always possesses. Tillich, as he understood Nietzsche, plunged into the paradoxical nature of an individual as both possessing and striving for being. The paradox is quelled by suggesting that life is a process of self-affirming an already obtained being. The result is the transcendence of life itself in order to merge with what is prior to the objective-subjective split.

Thus far, I have covered some of the major meaning theorists in the discipline of modern psychology. Meaning can be conceptualized as stemming from what one does *and* who one is. Meaning is a personal impression of how the individual sees and expresses oneself *in the world*. Personal meaning is diverse within and between people, and through the dynamics of meaning the static essential being of the individual is expressed. Taken together one gets a sense of the complexity of capturing meaning in one scale or one questionnaire. Following is a survey of the more popular measurements of meaning.

Measuring Personal Meaning

There have been several instruments that have been developed in order to measure meaning. The first scale was developed to capture Frankl's (1962) original understanding of meaning (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). As will be explored, this scale, while successful on certain accounts, failed to ultimately capture the fullness of meaning. Subsequently, other measures were developed that took a more narrowed focus on meaning. The common practice in recent studies is to use a variety of meaning measurements in order to capture the fullness of the construct (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Mascaro & Rosen, 2008).

Purpose in Life test

The Purpose in Life (PIL) test was developed by Crumbaugh & Maholick (1964) in order to measure the degree to which one experiences one's life as meaningful—the construct expounded by Frankl (1962), called the “will to meaning.” It is a 20-item scale with split-half reliabilities reported as high as .90 (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), and test-retest coefficients of .83 (Meier & Edwards, 1974). The test was created to quantify existentially-based anxiety in a person's life in a way that would uniquely be associated with pathology. The PIL was created as a way to prove that meaninglessness was a predictor of psychological dysfunction. Initial and subsequent results found a significant difference between normal and pathological groups (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Crumbaugh, 1968; Crumbaugh, 1972; Reker & Cousins, 1979; Zeitchik, 2001).

Zeitchick (2001) sought to provide clear proof for the PIL's validity by employing both convergent and divergent means. In his study, the PIL was administered to a sample of 107 people, over half being Orthodox Jews. In order to make a case for convergent validity, the Life Regard Index (LRI), Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB) were administered as well. The LRI measures the extent to which one has discovered a life framework and the extent to which one has fulfilled this framework. The LGS measures the extent to which one is committed to impacting one's environment and leaving something to be remembered by after death. The SWB looks at meaning through spiritual or religious means, and measures perceived spiritual or existential fulfillment. For divergent validity, a measure of self-esteem, satisfaction with life, and depressed mood scales were administered.

When controlling for demographics, results yielded strong positive correlations between the PIL and the positive fulfillment subscale of the LRI and LGS. There was no significant correlation found between SWB and PIL. The PIL correlated positively with the measures of self-esteem, $r = .70$, and life satisfaction, $r = .64$. The PIL had a significant negative correlation with depression, $r = -.71$. When controlling for self-esteem, depression, and life satisfaction, the relationship between the PIL with the positive fulfillment subscale of the LRI and LGS remained significant. A confirmatory Principle Components factor analysis was done to see if Frankl's three meaning components (creativity, experience, and attitude) were reflected in the data. The author found 3 significant factors. While two of the factors seemed to correspond to the experiential and attitudinal parts of meaning, the third factor seemed to be more about

control than creativity. The two factors that corresponded to experience and attitude had positive correlations with the subscale of the LRI and the LGS.

When looking at demographic difference, the author found that single participants had lower PIL scores than married participants. Lower income participants scored lower than higher income participants. Older participants scored higher than younger participants. On average, the more religious a participant, the higher their PIL score. According to Chamberlain and Zika (1988a), studies have demonstrated significant relationships between PIL scores and social attitudes, values, drug involvement, imprisonment, depression, weltanschauung (comprehensive worldview), and subjective well-being.

The PIL has shown significant positive correlates with psychological well-being and positive affect, and a significant negative correlation to psychological distress and negative affect (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). In one early study, Crumbaugh (1968) found that people with the diagnosis of schizophrenia scored well on the PIL and that the only correlated category of pathology on the MMPI with the PIL was depression.

There is disagreement in the literature as to how many factors are represented by the PIL. Yalom (1980) suggests that the 20 items of the scale relate to life meaning, life satisfaction, freedom, fear of death, suicide, and how worthwhile one perceives one's life to be. A subsequent confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by Marsh, Smith, Piek & Saunders (2003), which looked at PIL scores of alcohol drinkers not in treatment and those in treatment. For both populations a one-dimension solution was deemed the best fit, though leaving out the following three items: retirement, fear of death, and people's freedom to make choices. The authors concluded that the one factor represented a broad range of related facets of meaning, which included satisfaction with daily life, whether there are clear goals in life, sense of overall meaning in life, sense of personal responsibility, and sense of control. This was similar to the results obtained by Chamberlain & Zika (1988a) and by Harlowe, Newcomb, & Bentler (1988).

Schulenberg & Melton (2010) performed a confirmatory factor analysis, which supported a 2-Factor Model of Morgan & Farsides (2007). In this model the PIL is seen as representing two distinct factors: existing life and purposeful life. Further study showed that by taking the three purposeful life items, and adding to them a fourth item that asks specifically about overall meaning in life, which previously did not load on any factor, a reliable short form PIL is created. This decreases the 20-item scale to a 4-item scale that measures only purposeful living.

Life Regard Index

Battista and Almond (1973) developed the Life Regard Index (LRI) to overcome some difficulties they identified in the PIL. As the PIL was a scale to assess the broad range of meaning in life, the LRI is a 28-item measure which is designed to measure a sub-construct only, that of personal meaning (Mascaro et al, 2008). The LRI is divided into two sub-scales, framework (Fr) and fulfillment (Fu). Each sub-scale contains a total of fourteen items, seven positively worded and seven negatively worded items. The LRI-Fr sub-scale contains items which relate to having a framework, perspective, or life-goals from which meaning can be derived. The LRI-Fu sub-scale assesses the degree to which the framework or life-goals are being fulfilled (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988a).

The LRI framework has shown correlations within different populations that indicate its association with overall mental health, positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), anxiety and depression (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992; Debats, 1990; Debats et al., 1993), happiness (Debats, 1990; Debats et al., 1993; Debats, 1996; Scannell, Allen, & Burton, 2002), emotional dyscontrol and psychological well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992), elation (Debats, 1990), spiritual well-being (Harris & Standard, 2001; Scannell et al., 2002), hopelessness (Harris & Standard, 2001), and general psychological distress (Debats, 1996). In addition to this, the LRI framework subscale has shown incremental validity over the Five Factor Model of personality (Mascaro et al., 2004). Two longitudinal studies have been conducted in which results suggested that the LRI-Fr may predict levels of depression and hope (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005) and levels of happiness and general psychological distress (Debats, 1996).

Mascaro et al. (2008) stated that a criticism of the LRI is that its fulfillment scale is actually looking at life satisfaction. Therefore, the scale cannot be used to predict outcome variables that measure feeling good or bad, because in a sense that is what it does. It may be seen as a confounding factor when predicting affect variables.

Sense of Coherence Scale

The SOC scale is a 29-item scale. It was developed using samples from Israel, the United States, and Canada. Cronbach alpha reliability scores have been reported in the range of .82 to .95 (Antonovsky, 1979), with test-retest reliability reported as .63 (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988a). The scale is composed of three subscales to measure the three components of SOC. The comprehensibility subscale consists of 11 items that assess the extent to which an individual views one's world as orderly, predictable, and explicable. The manageability subscale consists of 10 items which look at the degree to which challenges encountered are perceived as able to be met. The final subscale, meaningfulness, is composed of eight items that measure the degree to which life is viewed as important and challenges as worthy of commitment. In a study conducted by Chamberlain & Zika (1988a) with a sample of mothers of young children, a Principle Components factor analysis was executed with the SOC. Their findings did not support a three factor model, but rather a seven factor model. The meaningful items split on two separate factors, where one was characterized by enthusiasm for life, and the second by purpose in life. The other five factors seemed to be mostly a mixture of items from the other two subscales. Contradictory to their results, Flannery Jr., Perry, Penk, & Flannery (1994) yielded results from a factor analysis that showed three clear factors, with the subscale meaningfulness accounting for 25% of explained variance, as compared to 14% explained by the other two subscales. Their sample consisted of mostly white middle class men and women, mean age of 27 years old, attending a night college. Antonovsky (1979) warned that since the scale was developed as a global measure it is not legitimate for researchers to calculate and rely on scores for the independent sub-constructs. Rather, researchers are urged to develop subscales for comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness that have relatively low intercorrelations.

The SOC has shown statistically positive associations with age, family closeness, and communication (Antonovsky, 2001). It has shown negative associations with trait

anxiety in an adolescent sample, measures of life stress in an adult sample, psychological distress, depression, locus of control, and social support. The SOC has yielded similar results despite cultural and economic social status differences (Bowman, 1996). Scores on the SOC showed no significant difference between a control population and a Pentecostal sample, suggesting the applicability of the scale to people with a religious orientation (Langius & Björvell, 2001). While all three subscales of the SOC have shown a significant negative correlation to affective symptoms of psychopathology, positive symptoms correlate with only two of the scales, comprehensibility and manageability, and negative symptoms with none of the scales. Bengtsson-Tops & Brunt (2005) suggested that clinicians proceed with caution when using the SOC to predict psychopathology.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler (2006) developed the MLQ to address the specific reflections on meaning in life that arise from a humanistic perspective. They wanted an improved scale that looked at meaning as a positive variable that promotes growth, rather than a construct that simply decreases symptoms. The authors summarized the criticisms of the widely used meaning scales (PIL, LRI, and SOC) and stated that they muddle the understanding of the construct of meaning. The PIL is associated with potentially confounding variables, such as suicidality, and has shown positive associations with negative affect. They claimed that SOC can be classified as a coping disposition measure. The developers of the MLQ define meaning as “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence. This definition represents an effort to encompass all of the major definitions of meaning and allows respondents to use their own criteria for meaning” (p. 81). The MLQ, according to the authors, has untangled the construct of meaning from the confounding factors of depression, anxiety, religion, and life satisfaction.

The MLQ is a 10-item scale that is composed of two relatively orthogonal, 5-item subscales, presence (MLQ-P) and search (MLQ-S). The presence subscale measures a subjective sense that one’s life is meaningful. The search subscale measures the drive and focus on finding meaning in one’s life. Internal consistency of both subscales have been evaluated with alphas equaling, .86–.88. The independence of the presence and search for meaning subscales leave open the possibility for people who already have meaning in life that continue to search for a higher meaning or for additional sources of meaning. In other words, the MLQ provided empirical evidence that a search for meaning is not always elicited by a lack of meaning (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Meaning in Life Depth (MILD)

Ebersole (1998), similar to Wong (1998a; 1998b), went beyond the question of, *is meaning present or not?* In his article he asked the question what are some of the prevalent sources of meaning in society. And then going one step further than Wong, he asked, *are these experiences of meaning profound or shallow?* Ebersole (1998) claimed that while research has shown that most people have experienced meaninglessness in their lives, the large majority answer affirmatively to the question of having personal meaning in the moment. In order to find out about the content of people’s meaning, Ebersole and

colleagues conducted a number of studies with various samples of different ages that asked participants to write about their central personal meaning and to give an example. (For example, see Devogler & Ebersole, 1981.) From these preliminary inquiries, the MILD was developed (Ebersole & Quiring, 1991). The following eight categories were identified as central to an individual's life meaning across age differences: (1) relationships, (2) service, (3) belief, (4) obtaining, (5) growth, (6) health, (7) life work, and (8) pleasure. In general, a ninth category, miscellaneous, accounted for 5% of responses.

When looking at depth of meaning, the authors acknowledged that the Purpose in Life (PIL) test (Crambaugh & Maholick, 1969) was developed for measuring the intensity of meaning in life. The PIL has received criticism as it is a self-report measure. The technique of Ebersole (1998) splits the responsibility of evaluation between the participant and an outside rater. Outside raters were given the writing sample of each participant and judged its depth on a 5-point scale (Ebersole & Quiring, 1991). A meaning was rated deeper when (1) the central meaning is discussed with more complexity and with a sense of individuality, and/or (2) the meaning and example are specific, concrete, and significant. A meaning was rated as more shallow if it was either new or been held for a while without signs of development. The outside raters were urged to judge for themselves and not to accept the rating of the participant. If the rater was confused or unsure, or if no example was given or seemed insignificant, a rating would not be higher than the middle category. The outside raters had the advantage of a frame of reference as they were reading the examples of all the people in the sample. This was a perspective that was lacking for the participants themselves. Ebersole addressed the limitations of this method in that high interrater reliability might have suggested that the outside raters had similar values. Also there were questions whether younger people can accurately assess older people's meanings for depth and vice-versa. Practically, Ebersole used his research to inspire the question of how do Americans go about learning how to construct deeper levels of meaning. He stated that it is a skill that must be learned so that, into old age, people can experience a significant and profound meaning to their life.

Shortcomings of the PIL and other empirical measures of meaning

Zeitchik (2001) pointed out two main problems that have plagued research on the relationship between mental health and personal meaning. These issues are insufficient discriminant validity and a lack of longitudinal analysis. Of the PIL, Mascaro et al. (2004) argued that while data supported a relationship with a number of outcome variables, these studies remain uninterpretable as there is a lack of clarity as to what the PIL is actually measuring. This is supported, the authors suggested, by a complex and inconsistent factor structure, a vague definition of existential meaning, and a lack of discriminant and convergent validity.

While there is a strong focus in meaning literature on goal directed behavior (Emmons, 2003), there are other facets to meaning that are associated more with the quality of spiritual transcendence (Firestone, Firestone, and Catlett, 2003). Given the connection with the spiritual, the PIL might be lacking in measuring an important dimension of meaning. There is currently no item in the PIL that asks about spirituality. Interestingly enough, the PIL seems to have found its way into the realm of spiritual

measurement even if that was not its original intent. (Robinson, Cranford, Webb & Brower, 2007).

The PIL measures a person's sense of feeling fulfilled in their life, and that they have invested interest in creativity. There seems to be a significant portion that is left out from Frankl's theory on meaning. There seems to be no acknowledgment of Frankl's connection between the spiritual and personal meaning within the scale items themselves. Perhaps this is because measuring spirituality was not thought of as empirically possible, though now with the development of the Spiritual Meaning Scale (Mascaro, Rosen, & Morey, 2004) and other instruments that integrate measurements of religiosity and spirituality, there seems to be a paradigm shift taking place.

Zeitchik (2001) concluded that only two of the four needs for meaning are represented in the PIL. In contemporary thought meaning is based on purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991). While the PIL seems to look at purpose and value, it seems to ignore efficacy and self-worth (Zeitchik, 2001). It is curious that Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) named the test Purpose in Life, seemingly representing only a sliver of the total meaning picture. Zeitchik (2001) made the point that although Frankl's "will to meaning" consisted of creative, experiential, and attitudinal components, the PIL seems to lump these all together and makes no distinctions between its components.

Ali, Oatley, & Toner (2002) explained the reason why they saw fit to use qualitative methodology in exploring meaning.

A second methodological refinement involves placing a primacy on a less reductionistic and more contextualized approach to the measurement of key constructs. This approach can enable us to uncover those aspects of the individual's life that are most meaningful from the participant's own perspective, rather than adopting an over-reliance on a priori quantification of variables. While the ease of administering traditional self-report measures is an advantage of the strictly quantitative approach, such scales are limited in their ability to take into account the participant's social context ... It can also counter the assumption that all participants in a given study must either fit exactly into a priori categories or be eliminated from key analyses. (p. 670)

As discussed above, Steger et al. (2006) have developed a scale that seems to address the issues of unstable factor structures and confounding factors. The MLQ has pulled apart presence of meaning and search for meaning, and has begun to tap into the wide range of how a search for meaning might be initiated and played out. Using qualitative methodology to explore meaning can address the shortcomings of purely quantitative models.

A narrative exploration of personal meaning

McAdams has argued that individuals are engaged from adolescence onward in an effort to fashion a meaningful life narrative that will infuse their lives with a sense of unity and purpose (Singer, 2001). Wong (2008) wrote, "only the creative process of storytelling is capable of revealing the whole, full-bodied person actively engaged in the dynamics of the business of living (p. 76)." The words of these researchers and theorists bring special

attention to the study of the personal narrative in order to add unique understanding to the construct of meaning. The shortcomings of traditional empirical measurements of meaning have already been discussed. We now turn to narrative analysis as a methodology which seems to address these weaknesses.

Use of narratives as data in meaning research

Sommer & Baumeister (1998) stated that searching for meaning in the everyday is similar to the attribution of meaning to life in general. The authors examined empirical studies that utilized narratives as data. The studies either compared different perspectives of a similar event, or similar stories that differ in some key element—for example, stories of the success or failure of a life change. Of these, the authors wrote that they reveal how people may skew the interpretation of the event to either protect or enhance their sense of meaning. By surveying several narrative studies, the authors brought to light a deeper understanding of the four meanings in life—purpose, efficacy, value, and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991).

From studies about purpose, the authors concluded that by linking negative events as a precursor to a positive outcome, victims of trauma cope with tragedy by maintaining a life direction. About efficacy, the authors concluded that people tend to place themselves in the center of the story when they are successful and tend to emphasize external elements when the result is failure (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994). People also will overestimate their control over an event in the face of a challenge to efficacy, and efficacy promotes healthy emotional adaptation. Studies about value indicate that people need to view their actions as right and just, and that people, especially those whose actions are morally questionable, will engage intensely in a process of justification. On the other hand, people in the role of victim often seem to be granted sympathy, and their narratives do not revolve around justifying their actions. For narratives about self-worth, the authors concluded that, when self-worth is being challenged, people tend to tell their stories emphasizing that the failure was in the past, or was due to external circumstances. People tend to cope with a threat to self-worth by comparing themselves to others in similar situations who may not be coping as well. Lastly, the authors speculated on the interplay between the different needs for meaning and they concluded that the need for control will at times jeopardize the need for self-worth, as in cases of rape victims holding on to self-blame to the detriment of their self-esteem. (Meyer & Taylor, 1986)

Bauer, McAdams, & Pals (2008) provided support for narrative analysis of meaning stories because meaning itself is intertwined with a person's subjective understanding of their story. The authors wrote that the good life is not just having meaning, but expanding to more complex levels of meaning. This goes beyond well-being as feeling good to how integrated a person feels with self and the world. One can look at whether someone is simply happy, focused on pleasure or hedonic pursuits, or mature, focused on meaningful eudaimonic pursuits (King, 2001). The authors concluded that eudaimonic stories that related to well-being are those that have a happy ending and acknowledge growth from suffering. Such stories express an integrated person, not simply a happy one (Bauer et al., 2006).

Bauer and Bonnano (2001) looked at self-evaluation statements in the narratives told by people who had experienced spousal loss. Narratives were collected 6, 14, and 25

months after the loss. In analyzing self-evaluation statements, the authors looked at level of context. A statement can have two levels of context, either a doing-based level of context, or a being-based level of context. For example, a doing-based level of context statement is, *I went to sleep*. An example of a being-based level of context statement is, *I was tired*. In the work of Janoff-Bullman (1992) on the growth of participants through trauma, the same distinction is made using the terms *behavioral* and *characterological*. The authors also looked at the tendency for people to use integrated doing and being-based statements. An example of an integrated statement is, *I was tired, so I went to sleep*. The authors looked to see whether one level of context used in speaking about loss would predict greater healing from the loss.

The results of the study showed that when people used either doing-based or being-based statements, the people who used mostly doing-based statements showed a higher level of well being as time went on. Additionally, it was found that people that used integrated statements showed a higher sense of well being than people who used mostly doing-based statements. From this the authors concluded that their study supported the idea that, “[t]he integration of valued behaviors and personal characteristics fosters the construction of personal meaning” (Bauer and Bonnano, 2001, p. 456).

The purely qualitative paradigm of narrative analysis

In 2005, Robertson, Venter, & Botha used narrative analysis in an exploration of depression. They interviewed 10 participants who self-identified as depressed. The authors noted that in the past narratives about depression have been drawn mostly from therapy sessions and have not been adequately analyzed. Narrative analysis was employed because the methodology allows for the authentic voice of the person to be heard as truth for the one who is experiencing the phenomena. The authors used the work of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998) as a guideline for data analysis.

The authors’ results emphasized the negative meaning that participants attached to life experiences in general and also to their futures. The authors noticed that participants used negative and limiting language to express their life events, and their narrative approach allowed for an exploration of the socio-political contexts in which the stories took place. Another interesting finding was the emergence of “unique outcomes” in the participants’ stories. These are events that occur outside of the person’s dominant life story that are contradictory to it, and thus are significant. The authors concluded that their results suggested that the use of the life narrative can be a therapeutic tool in the counseling relationship in the treatment of depression.

Similar approaches were used to study gender identity in Gay and Lesbian Orthodox Jews (Halbental & Koren, 2006), entertainment stories as part of identity-development (McLean & Thorne, 2006), and to examine the life story of a heroin addict (Singer, 2001). These studies used the narrative approach to explore meaning in a way that allows for the authentic experience of the construct to emerge. More recently, Bellin (2010) conducted a narrative analysis on personal meaning stories, exploring, in part, the distinctions mentioned above.

The perspective of narrative in mental health gerontology has led to a new vision for the general healthcare system (Bohlmeijer, Kenyon, & Randall, 2011). Research has shown that by engaging the elderly in continued exploration of narratives, personal

meaning continues to be relevant and enhanced throughout treatment (Randall, 2009). The focus on narratives helps clinicians go beyond the limited *what* of an issue and allows access to the deeper *how* of an experience (Randall & Kenyon, 2004). This is crucial when working with the elderly as it seems that as people age meaning becomes more distilled and more crucial to well-being (Randall, 2011). Singer & Messier (2011) have shown how using critical personal meaning moments, or “self-defining memories,” can improve relationships in elderly couples.

The field of “narrative gerontology” has also undertaken the exploration of seemingly hopeless situations. For example, Freeman (2011) looked at narrative foreclosure, which is a stage when a person believes that no new meaning can be found from their continued existence. Mark (2011) interviewed past Nazi supporters and examined the consequence to personal meaning when we leave critical life stories hidden and untold. These studies show that a narrative stance in meaning research can enhance explorations that were previously thought pointless or impossible.

Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, & Randall’s (2011) *Storying Later Life: Issues, Investigations, and Interventions in Narrative Gerontology* suggests a healthcare model that keeps people as people and helps people maintain their thread of personal meaning in the form of life coherence, integration, and dignity through time (Bohlmeijer, Kenyon, & Randall, 2011). In their opinion, the current Western medical model has reached its limits with an extreme reliance on empirical means of treatment. A meaning focused narrative-based approach to healthcare would assume the following foundational points:

1. Health is not just the alleviation of symptoms.
2. It is a myth that medicine will eventually abolish all forms of sickness and suffering.
3. Individual stories have an important place in healthcare, as healing goes beyond the physical body.
4. There is a need to integrate the social constructivist paradigm about truth (i.e. there is no objective truth) into the current medical model.

Through adopting these principles, the authors contend that people in treatment will maintain a sense of meaning and dignity along the spectrum of health and illness.

Conclusion

This literature review represents a looking back at the roots and the breadth of contemporary meaning literature. Researchers are continually sharpening their methods to learn more about meaning and to specify how the presence or absence of meaning impacts the life of an individual. The connection between spirituality and meaning was emphasized, and it seems that it is hard to talk about meaning in life without the topic of spirituality emerging in some form. Meaning may be too multi-faceted to be captured in one scale or survey. The use of qualitative methodology opens a door to better grasp the fullness of meaning in the life of an individual. “Narrative gerontology” has emerged as a model of a meaning-based approach to healthcare that enhances the well-being of its patients beyond the empirical approach to treatment.

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FAMILY AND MEANING: EXAMINING THE FOUR NEEDS FOR MEANING AS MEDIATORS

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ABSTRACT:

In a series of three studies we investigated the relationship between family and meaning and tested whether Baumeister's (1991) four needs for meaning (purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth) mediated this relationship. Study 1 (n=228) showed that participants assigned to think about their family reported more meaning in their lives than those assigned to think about a control topic. Using correlational data, Study 2 (n=220) found that the four needs for meaning, self-worth, values, efficacy, and purpose, mediated this relationship. Study 3 (n=128) provided experimental data to demonstrate that thinking about family results in higher meaning, efficacy, and purpose. Purpose mediated the relationship between family and meaning. Several avenues for future research are outlined.

Meaning is associated with health and general well-being (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Wong & Fry, 1998; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987, 1992). But what brings meaning to life? There are many potential sources from which people derive meaning, including religion, work and career, personal relationships, and political involvements. Among these many sources, however, one seems especially prominent in people's reports on what gives their lives meaning: family. In one recent study, 68% of participants cited family as the one thing that brought the most meaning to their lives, whereas the next most frequently cited source (friendship) was endorsed by merely 14% (Lambert et al., 2008). Moreover, most of the participants who did not list family as the single most important source listed it as second or third. Another investigation found that family was overwhelmingly cited as the most important source of meaning in life by respondents in each of seven different countries scattered across three continents (Africa, Australia, and

Europe) (Fave & Coppa, 2009). Although these findings provide compelling evidence that people report family is a major source of meaning in life, the designs of those investigations precluded conclusions about causality.

The present investigation sought to provide experimental evidence in order to establish whether thoughts of family have a causal influence on perceptions of life's meaningfulness. Furthermore, we sought to build on previous work by examining *how* family relationships provide meaning in life. An interdisciplinary literature review by Baumeister (1991) concluded that the quest for meaning in life takes the form of satisfying four separate needs for meaning. We used that framework of four needs to formulate and test hypotheses about possible mediators of the link between family connection and a meaningful life. Put another way, we sought to ascertain which of the four needs for meaning are satisfied by family.

Four Needs for Meaning: Theory

Most people cannot readily articulate the meanings of their lives. The colloquially popular phrase "the meaning of life" implies that there is one single meaning, whereas in fact most people find meaning in multiple places such as family, work, religion, tradition, and political participation. Acknowledging this multiplicity, Baumeister (1991) proposed that the questions rather than the answers were the unifying themes needed for social scientists to understand life's meaning. That is, rather than have a single source of meaning that would be correct and effective for everyone, he proposed there are four basic needs for meaning. To have a meaningful life, the person would have to have some combination of activities and involvements that would satisfy each of the four.

The four needs for meaning are as follows. First, a need for *purpose* relates current life activities to future (possible) outcomes and events from which the present draws meaning and which can organize and guide present decisions. Second, the need for *value and justification* entails having a basis for understanding what is right vs. wrong and being able to construe most of one's actions as right (as well as being able to choose how to act rightly). Third, *efficacy* means being able to have an effect on the world, without which purpose and justification are rather empty shells. Fourth, *self-worth* involves having some basis for regarding oneself as a valuable person, often as superior to others.

Family Relations May Satisfy All Four Needs for Meaning

In principle, family can help satisfy all four needs for meaning. That versatility could plausibly help explain why family should figure prominently in people's meanings of life. Family provides purpose, such as when people seek to form a family, to provide for children, or to live up to parental expectations. Family is a major source of value, insofar as doing things to benefit one's family is regarded as right and good, without needing further justification. The value aspect is also evident in that most people learn their first lessons about right and wrong from family members. Efficacy too can be gotten within the family, insofar as one can have a discernible impact on other family members in large and small ways, including feeding them, making them laugh or cry, helping them get started in life, and indeed in some cases bringing them to life in the first place. Last, family can confer a sense of self-worth in many ways, both individually (such as by

celebrating one's achievements) and collectively (pride from belonging to the family group).

A smattering of evidence has lent plausibility to the hypotheses that family relations help satisfy the specific needs. McCall and Simmons (1966) suggested that fulfilling one's role within the family helps people see themselves and their lives as part of a bigger picture, and in that sense it furnishes a sense of purpose and value. Franco and Levitt (1998) showed that family support contributed substantially to self-esteem among children.

Nevertheless, these findings are scattered across different fields and pertain only indirectly or partially to the question of how family relationships contribute to a meaningful life. The present studies sought to provide direct tests of the possible links between family relations, the four needs, and the perception of life as meaningful. Our initial hypothesis was that all four needs would mediate between family and meaningfulness. We had no a priori reason to think that any need would be more or less relevant than any other.

Study 1

As foundation to the main investigation, we first sought to establish a causal relationship between thinking about family and increased ratings of life as meaningful. As reviewed in the introduction, prior work has established that people cite family as a source of meaning in life, but has not tested this link experimentally nor tested direction of effects.

Specifically, people first were assigned to have thoughts about family, and then we had them rate the degree to which they found life meaningful. Obviously, to have people list ways that family enhanced the meaning of life would maximize any contribution to rating life as meaningful and possibly create demand characteristics, so we did not use that for a manipulation. Instead, we used a manipulation that involved two sets of contrary imaginings. Insofar as contradiction reduces meaning, we thought this might avoid the problem of triviality and demand characteristics. Specifically, participants were assigned first to imagine separation from their family and then to imagine reunion with them.

Separation and reunion could activate thoughts of loneliness, and past work has indicated that loneliness is associated with a reduction in sense of life as meaningful (Stillman et al., 2009). Therefore we controlled for loneliness. Also, separation and reunion also evoke emotion, and past work has linked emotional states with changes in perception of life as meaningful (Hicks & King, 2007), so we also measured and controlled for emotion. The hypothesis was that the thoughts about family would produce an increase in rating of life as meaningful, independent of loneliness and emotion.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 228 (182 female) undergraduate students who participated in exchange for extra credit in an introductory class on families across the lifespan. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 54 with a median age of 19.

Design and procedure

Participants agreed to participate in the study and received extra credit for their participation. They completed the UCLA loneliness scale (Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) and then were randomly assigned to a family prime condition or a neutral condition. Participants completed their assigned activity followed by a manipulation check, the state meaning scale, and the PANAS.

Family prime condition. After completing the loneliness measure, the 117 participants assigned to the family prime condition were given the following instructions: “Please take your hand off the mouse, close your eyes, and consciously disengage from unpleasant mental and emotional reactions by shifting attention to the heart. For a few minutes, focus on imagining a life in which your family was no longer able to be with you or communicate with you. In the space below, please describe your reaction and thoughts concerning life without contact with your family.”

Once participants had written a paragraph about their thoughts they were given the following follow-up question: “Now, imagine that you are reunited with your family. Describe your thoughts and feelings about that and why you are glad or sad to have them back.” Participants were then told to “Write one more paragraph describing what it is you value most about your family.” Participants then completed the manipulation check and meaningfulness measure.

Neutral condition. After completing the loneliness measure, the 111 participants assigned to the neutral condition were given the following instructions: “For a few minutes, focus on imagining a situation in which someone doesn't know how to fill up a tank of gas. You need to explain to this person every detailed step in how to fill up a tank of gas. In the space below, please describe, step-by-step, how to fill up a tank of gas.”

Once participants had completed that activity they were instructed to “Imagine that this person needs directions on how to get from this particular gas station near campus to your apartment. Please give detailed instructions below.” Participants then completed the manipulation check and meaningfulness measure.

Measures

Loneliness. Ongoing social exclusion was assessed with an 8-item UCLA Loneliness Scale short form ($\alpha=.86$; UCLA-8; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987). Sample items include “I feel left out” and “I feel isolated from others.”

State meaningfulness. State meaningfulness was assessed using a 3-item measure ($\alpha=.96$) that included the items “How much meaning do you feel in your life at this very moment?” “How much do you feel your life has purpose right now?” and “At this moment, how much do you think you have a good sense of what makes life meaningful?” Responses range from 1 to 15, with larger numbers corresponding to greater meaning.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale. Positive affect was measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS), which is a 20-item, widely-used measure of positive (e.g., “excited”) and negative affect (e.g., “upset”) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). We included both the positive ($\alpha=.95$) and negative affect ($\alpha=.92$) subscales in the analysis of the current study to verify that between-group differences were not due simply to altering participants' positive or negative affect.

Results

Loneliness

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were differences by condition in loneliness. Participants in the family prime condition reported higher loneliness scores ($M=15.03$, $SD=4.33$) than those in the neutral condition ($M=13.64$, $SD=4.34$), $F(1, 230)=5.91$, $p<.05$. Therefore, we controlled for this difference in subsequent analysis.

Manipulation check

To determine whether the manipulation was effective at priming family, a manipulation check was administered directly after the manipulation to see if thoughts of family had been activated. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: "At this very moment, my family is on my mind." A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences by condition. As predicted, participants in the family prime condition reported higher agreement ($M=6.17$, $SD=1.15$) than those in the neutral condition ($M=4.38$, $SD=1.91$), $F(1, 230)=75.52$, $p<.001$.

Family and meaningfulness

The main hypothesis was supported. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with loneliness as a covariate, revealed that participants in the family prime condition had higher meaningfulness scores ($M=36.74$ out of 45, $SD=7.22$) than those in the neutral condition ($M=35.45$, $SD=9.22$, $F(228)=7.05$, $p<.01$) $\eta^2_p=.03$.

Emotion as mediator?

Given that thoughts of family would be likely to elicit positive emotion, we wanted to rule out the alternative hypothesis that the mean differences we found were actually due to changes in positive or negative affect rather than thinking of family. To do so we conducted two one-way ANOVAs using scores on the positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) subscales of the PANAS as dependent variables. Results revealed no difference between participants in the family prime condition versus those in the neutral condition in terms of their PA, $F(1, 221) = 1.20$, $p=.28$ or NA, $F(1,224)=1.47$, $p=.24$. We also controlled for PA and NA in subsequent analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs). When PA and NA were statistically controlled, condition was still significantly related to meaningfulness, $F(1, 216)=3.95$; $p<.05$. These findings show that current difference in meaning was most likely not due to overall differences in positive affect or negative affect.

Discussion

Participants who imagined having lost contact with their families and then imagined being reunited with them rated their lives as more meaningful than participants who imagined explaining how to fill a gas tank and then giving directions. These results were not mediated by emotional reactions, even though one might intuitively expect that there would be emotional repercussions from imagining family separation followed by reunion. Thus, the results of Study 1 were consistent with our hypothesis that thinking about family relationships would enhance one's perception of life meaning. This fits the broader hypothesis that family has a causal effect of increasing the sense of life as meaningful.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to test the plausibility of the four needs for meaning as mediators of the relationship between family and meaning. We tested this using a cross-sectional design and a new method for analyzing multiple mediators—the Preacher and Hayes (in press) technique.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 220 (193 female) undergraduates, who took part in the study for partial course credit. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 55 with the median age being 20. After giving informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire online at a time of their choosing.

Independent, Dependent, and Mediating Variables

Family support. The independent variable was family support. Family support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Cauty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000). The MSPSS contains three 4-item subscales, one of which assesses perceived social support from family (e.g., “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family;” $\alpha=.92$).

Meaningfulness. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (meaning presence subscale) was again used to assess the extent to which participants viewed their lives as meaningful (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Example items included, “I understand my life’s meaning” and “I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.” Responses ranged from 1 to 7 corresponding with greater meaningfulness. Cronbach’s Alpha for the meaning presence was .93 in the present sample.

Purpose. Purpose was a 4-item measure formed by combining the two items from Krause’s (2004) purpose subscale (e.g., “In my life, I have goals and aims,”) as well as two relevant items from the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek, 1998) (e.g., “I have a specific action plan to help me reach my goals.”). Responses range from 1 to 7, corresponding to greater purpose. The alpha for this 5-item measure was .93 in the present sample, which indicates that the five items were quite coherent and presumably measured the same construct.

Values. We used Krause’s (2004) two-item values subscale that included the items “I have a system of values and beliefs that guide my daily activities,” and “I have a philosophy of life that helps me understand who I am.” The items correlated with each other $r=.76$ in the present sample.

Efficacy. We used the 8-item internality dimension of Levenson’s (1973) locus of control scale to measure efficacy. Example items include “Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability” and “My life is determined by my own actions.” Responses range from 1 to 7, corresponding to greater efficacy and the alpha for this measure was .76 in the present sample.

Self-worth. To measure self-worth, we used Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item global measure of self-esteem. Example items include “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.”

Responses range from 1 to 4, corresponding to greater self-esteem. Cronbach's Alpha for self-worth was .89 in the present sample.

Results and Discussion

To test whether the four needs for meaning functioned as mediators between family and meaningfulness, we used a method developed by Preacher and Hayes (in press) to test multiple mediator models. A confidence interval for the size of the indirect path is generated and if the values between the upper and lower confidence limit do not include zero this indicates a statistically significant mediation effect. In Table 1, we show the percentile confidence interval for each mediator and each contrast we tested to see whether indirect effects differed in magnitude. We also followed the procedures recommended by Preacher and Hayes to correct bias in the confidence intervals, in order to ascertain whether our findings would remain even when correcting for bias. All the intervals we present were bias-corrected intervals.

The indirect paths of purpose, self-worth, and values were statistically significant, as indicated by finding that the 95% Confidence Interval (bias corrected) for the indirect path through these mediators did not include zero. Specifically, the indirect path through purpose was .02 to .16. For self-worth it was .06 to .17, and for values it was .01 to .09. The confidence intervals for efficacy (-.01 to .07) did pass through zero, indicating that it was not a significant mediator. Thus, three of the four needs for meaning mediated between family and perceived meaningfulness (See Table 1).

All but one (efficacy versus self-worth) of the 95% confidence intervals for all contrasts between mediators passed through zero, indicating that the magnitude of no single mediator was significantly greater than any other besides the magnitude of self-worth over efficacy. Although these data provide data linking needs to life meaning, direction of effects is unclear owing to the correlational nature of the data. Moreover, it remains to establish that thoughts of family influence these needs.

Study 3

The objective of Study 3 was to provide an experimental test of the four needs for meaning as mediators of the relationship between family and perceived meaningfulness. We hypothesized that, consistent with the results of Study 2, thinking about family would enhance one's perceived meaning, purpose, values, and self-worth, as well as enhance a sense of belongingness. Furthermore, we predicted that these variables would mediate the relationship between thoughts about family and perceived life meaning.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 123 undergraduates (105 female) who completed all relevant measures at both time points. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 years and their median age was 21.

Procedure

After completing demographic information, participants were randomly assigned into one of two conditions: thoughts of family condition or a neutral condition.

Thoughts of family condition. The 61 participants assigned to this condition were given the following instructions: “Please take your hand off the mouse, close your eyes, and consciously disengage from unpleasant mental and emotional reactions by shifting attention to the heart. Please close your eyes and take a few minutes to think about each member in your immediate family.” They were then asked to write a full paragraph describing their relationship with each member of their immediate family. Once they had completed that activity they were asked to “Please write a paragraph about one of your favorite experiences you have had with your family” and then finally to “write one more paragraph describing what it is you value most about your family.”

Neutral condition. The 62 participants assigned to this condition were given the following instructions: “Please take your hand off the mouse, close your eyes, and consciously disengage from unpleasant mental and emotional reactions by shifting attention to the heart. Please close your eyes and focus on imagining a situation in which someone doesn’t know how to fill up a tank of gas. You need to explain to this person every detailed step in how to fill up a tank of gas.” They were then asked to write a full paragraph describing step-by-step how to fill up a tank of gas. Once they had completed that activity they were asked to describe how to get from the gas station to their apartment and finally to describe the place where they live. These tasks were designed to engage people in a similar activity (relaxing and thinking), without priming any emotions in particular.

Measures

State meaningfulness was assessed using a 3-item measure ($\alpha=.95$) that comprised the items “How much meaning do you feel in your life at this very moment?” “How much do you feel your life has purpose right now?” and “At this moment, how much do you think you have a good sense of what makes life meaningful?” Responses range from 1 to 15, with larger numbers corresponding to greater meaning. All the measures for the four needs for meaning were the same as those used in Study 2 (Purpose $\alpha=.88$; Values $r=.75$; Efficacy $\alpha=.77$, Self-worth $\alpha=.87$). *Positive affect* ($\alpha=.92$) was measured using the 10 item positive dimension of the Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS), which is a widely-used measure of positive affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). We included it in the current study to verify that between-group differences were not due simply to altering participants’ affective state.

Results

Effect of Family Prime

Meaningfulness. As hypothesized, and conceptually replicating Study 1, analysis of variance revealed that participants in the family prime condition had higher meaningfulness scores ($M=38.39$, $SD=7.00$, $F(123)=5.43$, $p<.05$) than those in the neutral condition ($M=35.61$, $SD=6.22$, out of 45), $\eta^2_p=.04$.

Four Needs. The family prime led to positive changes with respect to two out of the four needs for meaning. Specifically, thinking about family led to higher purpose and efficacy. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that participants in the family prime condition had higher purpose scores ($M=23.79$, $SD=3.56$) than those in the neutral

condition ($M=22.47$, $SD=3.37$), $F(121)=4.38$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2_p=.03$. Likewise, people in the family condition reported higher efficacy scores ($M=39.47$, $SD=6.52$), than those in the neutral condition ($M=36.56$, $SD=7.25$), $F(113)=5.10$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2_p=.04$. Priming with family also produced trends toward scoring higher on the other two categories of meaning, namely values and self-worth, but these trends fell short of significance.

Mediation Analysis

To test for mediation we again used the multiple mediator model developed by Preacher and Hayes (in press). In Table 2, we show the percentile confidence interval for each mediator and each contrast. We also present the bias-corrected intervals to demonstrate that our findings remained significant even when correcting for bias. All the intervals we present were bias corrected intervals.

We found that the indirect path involving purpose was statistically significant (95% bias corrected confidence interval was .06 to 2.38) indicating that purpose mediated the relationship between condition and meaning. Conversely, the confidence intervals for efficacy (-1.03 to .07) did pass through zero, indicating that it was not a significant mediator.

Ruling out an alternative hypothesis. Given that the manipulation may have differentially impacted affect, we sought to rule out the alternative hypothesis that emotion was driving our findings. To do so we conducted two one-way ANOVAs using scores on the positive affect (PA) subscale of the PANAS as dependent measures. Results revealed no difference between participants in the family condition versus those in the neutral condition in terms of their PA, $F(1, 113)=.28$, $p=.60$. We also controlled for this affect dimension in our analyses. Controlling for positive affect still yielded a significant main effect for the family prime condition on meaning scores, $F(1, 112)=3.83$, $p=.05$, purpose $F(1, 112)=3.85$, $p=.05$, and efficacy $F(1, 107)=5.51$, $p=.02$. These findings show that the findings were not due to overall differences in positive affect.

Discussion

In summary, participants who thought and wrote about their families, compared with those who thought about a neutral control topic, reported higher scores on meaning, purpose, and efficacy. Purpose mediated the relationship between experimental condition and meaning. Given the results of Study 2, we did not expect efficacy to mediate the relationship between family and meaning. Self-worth and values were not evaluated as mediators since the manipulation did not have a significant effect on these variables. One way to make sense of the null effect of family priming on values and self-worth are that these variables are more trait-like in nature and not prone to fluctuate during the brief duration of the experiment.

General discussion

Across three studies we found evidence for a relationship between family and meaning. Study 1 built on prior correlational research by showing that thinking about family caused people to rate their lives as more meaningful than people who had thought about a neutral topic. Having provided experimental evidence for a causal relationship between family relationships and meaning, we sought to identify mechanisms for this relationship

in Studies 2 and 3 and used Baumeister's (1991) four needs for meaning theory as our basis. We used a cross-sectional design in Study 2 and found that three of the four needs for meaning—purpose, values, and self-worth (but not efficacy)—mediated the relationship between family support and perceived meaningfulness. In Study 3 we tested these mediators with an experimental design to determine whether thinking about family is causally related to any of the four needs for meaning. As anticipated, participants who wrote about their family reported more meaning, purpose, and efficacy than those who thought about a neutral control topic. Moreover, purpose mediated the relationship between experimental condition and meaning.

Purpose was the only need for meaning that mediated the causal relationship between thoughts of one's family and a stronger sense of meaning. Thus, family increases the sense that one's life has direction and that one is building something for the future. This sense of purpose then translates into the perception that one's life has meaning.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current studies were limited in that all participants comprised undergraduate students, which is not a representative sample. The samples also reported exclusively on the meaning they derived from their family of origin. Future research should examine family and the four needs for meaning among an older sample that would report on their family of progeny. This would allow for a helpful comparison between the levels of meaning family provides an individual at different stages of the life course.

Baumeister suggested that in order to achieve a meaningful life, four simple needs must be met, and Study 2 provided data consistent with this hypothesis. A person must feel that he or she has purpose, values, efficacy, and self-worth to feel complete. As demonstrated in Study 3, families can be instrumental in satisfying some of these needs, thereby increasing meaning in life. Nonetheless, families often face challenging financial situations, marriage problems, and crises involving their children. Another direction for future research would be to examine whether and under what conditions a family undergoing significant strain can meet the four needs for meaning.

Conclusion

The current studies contribute to the literature by adding experimental evidence to existing findings (e.g., Fave & Coppa, 2009; Lambert, et al., 2009) that have previously demonstrated a relationship between family and meaning. In addition, the current studies provide evidence for a mechanism (or mechanisms) for this relationship—the four needs for meaning. We tested these mechanisms with both cross-sectional and experimental designs, and purpose seems to be the most robust mediator. The current studies also advance Baumeister's (1991) four needs of meaning theory as they provide an empirical test of the theory. We conclude that family relationships are an important source of meaning in life and that they accomplish this by helping to satisfy some of the needs for meaning, most notably a sense of purpose but perhaps also self-worth and value.

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Table 1

Mediation of the Family on Meaningfulness Through Purpose, Efficacy, Values and
Self-worth (n = 220)

Model	Product of Coefficients			Bootstrapping			
	<i>Point Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	Percentile 95% CI		BC 95% CI	
				<i>Lower</i>	<i>Higher</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Higher</i>
Indirect Effects							
Purpose	.07	.02	2.92	.01	.14	.02	.16
Efficacy	.03	.02	1.85	-.01	.06	-.01	.07
Values	.04	.02	2.30	.01	.08	.01	.09
Self-worth	.10	.03	3.87	.05	.17	.06	.17
TOTAL	.25	.05	5.42	.15	.35	.15	.35
Contrasts							
Purpose/Efficacy	.04	.03	1.36	-.03	.13	-.02	.14
Purpose/Values	.03	.03	1.03	-.04	.12	-.04	.12
Purpose/Self-worth	-.03	.04	-.95	-.13	.07	-.12	.07
Efficacy/Values	-.01	.02	-.47	-.06	.04	-.07	.03
Efficacy/Self-worth	-.08	.03	-2.45	-.14	-.01	-.14	-.01
Values/Self-worth	-.06	.03	-2.08	-.13	-.01	-.13	.01

Note: BC = bias corrected; 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 2

Mediation of the Family on Meaningfulness Through Purpose, Efficacy, (n = 114)

Model	Product of Coefficients			Bootstrapping			
	<i>Point Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	Percentile 95% CI		BC 95% CI	
				<i>Lower</i>	<i>Higher</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Higher</i>
Indirect Effects							
Purpose	.76	.47	1.63	-.08	2.01	.07	2.44
Efficacy	-.29	.24	-1.20	-.94	.13	-1.03	.07
Values	.08	.20	.40	-.35	.59	-.27	.70
Self Worth							
	.26	.51	.51	-.82	1.36	-.80	1.36
TOTAL	.81	.93	.87	-.09	-.04	-1.02	2.89
Contrasts							
Purpose/Efficacy	1.05	.58	1.81	.03	2.50	.152	2.79
Purpose/Values	.68	.42	1.62	-.20	1.89	-.05	2.29
Purpose/Self-worth	.50	.50	.10	-.68	1.66	-.65	1.73
Efficacy/Values	-.37	.34	-1.07	-1.28	.28	-1.31	.24
Efficacy/Self-worth	-.55	.59	-.93	-1.93	.61	-2.04	.55
Values/Self-worth	-.18	.47	-.39	-1.21	.85	-1.27	.78

Note: BC = bias corrected; 5,000 bootstrap samples.

FRANKLIAN METAPSYCHOLOGY REVISITED: IS THERE A FRANKLIAN EPISTEMOLOGY?

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates some of the core philosophical premises of Viktor Frankl's philosophy and model of psychotherapy (logotherapy) in order to explore the extent of an epistemological framework. While Viktor Frankl never developed a formal epistemology, it is argued that his thought is coherent and comprehensive enough to suggest the presence of a rudimentary epistemology that could be classified as a form of correspondence theory. There is a description of how—despite the historical, irreconcilable differences between logotherapy and psychoanalysis—these paradigms have epistemological similarities that have increased due to a waning of Freudian orthodoxy.

Much has been written on the subject of the epistemology (or lack thereof) of psychoanalysis, but comparatively little has been written on the subject of Franklian epistemology. This is not surprising considering that Viktor Frankl purposefully avoided developing a thoroughly operationalized formal philosophical system because he desired that logotherapy be widely accepted and applied clinically within the disciplines and functions of psychiatry. This was wise on his part in that any model of psychotherapy with an epistemology risks becoming overshadowed and defined by a system, resulting in abstract entanglements that distract from practical, clinical application. On the other hand, there is affirmative, implicit evidence of at least an embryonic level of epistemology in Viktor Frankl's statements on a wide range of subjects including ontology, empiricism, and phenomenology. By negation, he repeatedly described what logotherapy is *not* by drawing distinctions between logotherapy and several other contemporary philosophies and psychotherapies. Despite these clues that theoretically point us in an epistemological direction, contemporary academic and clinical practitioners of logotherapy have been presented with a number of apparent contradictions in attempting to determine whether a theory of knowledge underlies Viktor Frankl's system of thought at all. Themes of Franklian literature ostensibly include frequent use of opposites of which we could make a long list: objective/subjective; empirical/intuitive; rational/irrational/non-rational; freedom/instinct; physical/metaphysical, and so forth. Frankl was quite comfortable with paradox and the limits of human knowledge. A pattern is evident in his work wherein he repeatedly utilized various philosophical terms or theories while simultaneously contrasting them with aspects of their opposites, alternately pointing out the pros and cons of various concepts, without endorsement or refutation.

Enigmatically, Dr. Frankl's writings are replete with existential interpretations, categorical statements, referent heuristics, and normative assertions, often presented as factual, without suspension of doubt, *as if* he possessed an epistemology. His multifarious observations on the subjects of determinism, ontology, theology, phenomenology,

rational thought, and so forth are inclusive of but by far exceed the parameters of medical psychiatry or psychotherapy. Frankl's appeal is to the reader's rational understanding, and he seldom writes in a manner that could be characterized as hypothesizing or exploratory. He does not postulate, but asserts as fact his positions. As we find in many of his works, particularly *The Unconscious God*, Frankl relied on phenomenological¹ and psychological observations presented as more accurate than psychoanalytic theory for explaining human experience and the true nature of the human psyche. That he thoroughly rejected skepticism as well as absolute certainty implies a basis for knowledge within the limits of anthropological-cognitive attainability. He did not reject the importance of epistemology (unlike many existentialists); nor did he endorse any form of fideism (unlike many Christian existentialists). Moreover, unlike the post-modernists that followed his era, Frankl was not primarily a descriptive writer; rather, he boldly articulated his observations prescriptively and normatively *as if* there was a foundation of knowledge on which he relied. To minimize or set aside the literary archeological evidence for a Franklian epistemology may be an unfortunate case of taking the good doctor's reticence too literally.

It may be proposed that Frankl might have agreed with Foucault that, strictly speaking, psychology does not (or cannot) serve a particular epistemology (Foucault, 1957). Unlike the natural sciences and most medical disciplines, psychology aims to reveal the non-empirical through the empirical. The human mind as a malleable medical object is not (as yet) solely empirically comprehensible. But Frankl rejected the claim that empiricism is the only valid level of scientific analysis. Throughout his writings he sets limits upon empirical understanding and states that they become inadequate as we approach the depths of the human psyche, particularly within the spiritual² realm. There is evidence that Frankl was sympathetic to the idea that there are fixed limits to understanding the human psyche, but even taking this into consideration is not particularly problematic because the delimitations present in Franklian philosophy are superstructural when compared to the surfeit of positive, clear and distinct assertions made throughout his writings. Frankl was more a rationalist than an empiricist, though neither term adequately encapsulates his philosophy.³

Generally speaking, the existentialists rejected the idea that a formal epistemology was required to justify their philosophy. Beginning with Kierkegaard, several historically important continental philosophers have asserted in one manner or another that epistemology is either only relevant to scientific inquiry or merely a social construction and therefore is inherently antithetical to existentialism⁴ (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2009). Existence itself is the foundation of experience and the starting point for human identity and knowledge; consequently, there is no need for a prerequisite epistemology to fundamentally explain or justify existentialist discourse. Frankl, however, did not agree with such sentiments. A major difference between Frankl and the other existentialists is that he believed that truths about the world *and* the individual are sensibly interrelated and conjointly reference some form of objective truth that can be described philosophically and scientifically (Frankl, 1975). However, he did not advocate logical scrutiny of highly subjective truths, such as personal meaning, which can only be experienced by the individual. According to Frankl, while subjective reality cannot always

be justified by objective sources, such as science, it should never be expected to contradict objective reality.

Psychoanalysis and historical antecedents to logotherapy

It is worth noting that Frankl was cognizant of the historical precursors to twentieth century science that to the modern mind sometimes appear grandiose. The late nineteenth century was replete with assumptions of invincibility that were perhaps superficially empirically justifiable and based on a sense of scientific progress, but at its worst, there was a form of presumptuousness, as famously associated with the quote from Lord Kelvin, "There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement." Freud was a product of this intellectual culture and he understood that knowledge *is* power. Establishing academic and institutional fiefdoms were a way of preserving and disseminating a particular school of thought. In Viktor Frankl's early career, psychoanalysis was a predominant, institutional juggernaut with a rigid orthodoxy that did not tolerate ideological dissent. Even so, psychoanalysis to its credit was historically augmented by scientific observations from other medical disciplines that allowed practitioners to link specific psychopathologies to one or more etiologies extrinsic to the psychoanalytic model. This foundation was laid by Freud, who received a traditional physician's education in addition to a specialization in neurology.⁵ Later, his anthropomorphic interpretations of behavior, psychic phenomena, and clinical nosology were augmented into mainstream medicine. In ironic reciprocity, during the decades of the early and mid-twentieth century the disparate fields of neurology, theology, and philosophy, and in general all of the sciences and humanities were reciprocally influenced by psychoanalysis. It is important to note that this is somewhat paradoxical when we consider that the unique discourses intrinsic to various schools of thought were not structured in a manner that openly facilitated integration of external science. This is most striking from the literature of the 1940s and 1950s wherein one finds a certain awkwardness of language in relation to ideas inclusive of observations and information originating from outside the developed and emerging schools of psychology and psychiatry. A completely closed system would have led to academic extinction, but cautiousness was maintained when new ideas were potentially threatening to an established paradigm. Profound developments in the sciences could not be ignored without great risk, and thus attempts were made to integrate disparate concepts and methodologies within academic schools of thought. Viktor Frankl was completely aware of the need to keep logotherapy relevant and acceptable by not opposing modern scientific discourse and methodologies. He was by orientation open to any legitimate scientific inquiry or discovery. This is one explanation for his at times sweeping observations that either included criticism or praise of a new discovery, method, or theory. That he had a basis to do so again implies a depth to his ideas that extends beyond mere belief or opinion. These facts shaped his proto-epistemology.

Indications of epistemology by negation

Since Frankl was reluctant to explicitly affirm an epistemology, the simplest form of inquiry to begin with is the question, “what *is not* logotherapy?” In the early Franklian literature logotherapy is most prominently contrasted with psychoanalysis. While initially carefully complimentary toward psychoanalysis, over time Frankl used harsher language to object to (or even rebuke as insidious) the dehumanizing aspects of psychoanalysis. It is reductionistic, atomistic, and makes the subject the pawn of drives, instincts, psychic energy, and mechanisms wherein the subject becomes “the automaton of a psychic apparatus” (Frankl, 1978, p. 22). Psychoanalysis even emasculates the very purpose of life, as show in the following quote: “If meanings and values are really ‘nothing but’ defense mechanisms and reaction formations, as the psychodynamically oriented theories have it, is life really worth living?” (Frankl, 1978, p. 104). Frankl was also critical of scientific philosophies that were antecedents to psychoanalysis such as naturalism and associationism. Furthermore he implied that psychoanalysis commits the fallacy of over-psychologizing human experiences and degrading “the self to a mere epiphenomenon” (Frankl, 1980, p. 27). He repeats the above sentiments in many variations throughout the Franklian literature.

The aforementioned negations point us in an epistemological direction. Reductionism and drive theory have been rejected. In the literature, Frankl’s objections were usually introduced as purely normative before he proposed the alternative theory: whatever dehumanizes the subject is an error due to consequence—the harmful effect proves its inaccuracy. This is where the observation frequently rested without any empirical or theoretical elaboration. Initially he does not positively assert an alternative moral principle; rather, he is descriptive in his statements to the effect that a dehumanizing element is inherent in psychoanalysis, and thus a newer paradigm is required. Frankl proposes logotherapy as a better model of psychotherapy over psychoanalysis on grounds of clinical demonstration and reasoned arguments.

One subject that Viktor Frankl extensively wrote about that permeates and perhaps brings theoretical coherence to his criticisms of psychoanalysis is his discourse on *conscience* as described in his work, *The Unconscious God*, which was first published in German in 1947. His postscript from 1975 was elaborative, but contained no retractions or revisions. Along with *meaning*, the Franklian language of conscience contains the core essence of logotherapeutic thought, which consists of an explicit conceptual structure that remains epistemologically coherent, regardless of the absence of a formal system. While the purpose of the work *The Unconscious God* appears in no way to be an attempt to describe Franklian epistemology, it presents itself almost as such, de facto, by virtue of the depth of the analysis of conscience and thorough its interrelatedness and relevance to a number of philosophical concepts.

The Unconscious God begins with an especially harsh criticism of psychoanalysis. Its reductionism objectifies and impersonalizes the human subject—in effect, “the wholeness of the human person is in some sense destroyed” (p. 21) and the subject becomes “the automaton of a psychic apparatus,” (p. 22) in other words, drives. In psychoanalysis, human beings are made analogous to parts of a machine, with only the illusion of freedom and self-awareness. While Frankl acknowledges that the analyst does

attempt to build up what has been destroyed, the subject is nonetheless reduced to an interplay of psychic mechanisms that only the analyst understands. This is in contrast to Frankl's humanizing of the therapist and respect for the patient. When compared to psychoanalysis, Frankl's existential analysis is a completely alternative theory that posits a so-called spiritual faculty that is part of the core essence of human identity and experience. Anything that is unique to being human, in other words distinct from other animals, is definitively spiritual. This existential orientation allows for Frankl's famous reflecting of the human question, "What is the meaning of life?" back to the person. In other words, in reality the subject does not ask the question; rather, every person is asked this question as it is put upon the subject by the existential fact of self-conscious, sentient life. This could be misinterpreted as a cynosure or as some sort of fideism wherein God "comes to man," but Frankl never spoke of it in this sense. The question moves the subject away from the expectation of an external salvific solution toward meaning and provides a reorientation of an existential dilemma back toward the subjective.

Frankl's early opposition to various systems of thought was consistent with his model of psychotherapy. In a lecture given at Princeton in 1947, Frankl sweepingly criticized several philosophies on the basis of being fatalistic or deterministic, including nihilism, biologism, psychologism, and sociologism which he was "tempted" by as a youth (Frankl, 1967, 1980, 2000). In other lectures, behaviorism, scientism, and psychological egoism were condemned (Frankl, 1967), as well as utilitarianism and hedonism (Frankl, 1980). Even contemporary existentialists were criticized for over-emphasizing the self as the creative, intentional impetus for defining meaning, which he considered Faustian because it relied upon a non-referent, solipsistic subjectivity. That "Jean-Paul Sartre believes that man can choose and design himself by creating his own standards" (Frankl, 1978, p. 58) is a form of charlatanism in that it lacks the prerequisites of an objective point of reference and a teleological direction.

There were several historical and contemporary thinkers who Frankl alternately praised and criticized. He was sympathetic to Cartesian dualism and spoke favorably about Kant's philosophy of pleasure, categorical imperative, and postulate of reason, but he opposed Kant's reliance on reason as a necessary prerequisite to every proper action (Frankl, 1967, 1980). He occasionally made use of Schopenhauer's existential reflections while rejecting the concomitant pessimism and fatalism. But describing his multiple influences and subsequent opinions on various thinkers deserves independent treatment; suffice it to say that his writings and lectures have presented us with a litany of what *is not* logotherapy.

Ontology

Much has been written about Franklian multidimensional ontology. In traditional epistemology, the ontological inquiry begins at the Cartesian level of analysis (e.g., whether knowledge comes from subjective or objective sources), and is concerned with how to define *self*, and with finding a means of making distinctions between self and perception. Frankl was Cartesian in the sense that he viewed the self as the source of knowing and placed a higher value on intuition and interpretation of experience than on empirical data, even when the two were in conflict. He was not, however, skeptical of

empirical reality, although he believed that reason was higher than and required to interpret sensory experience. To Frankl, the world is a world of reason, which we knowingly participate in as subjects.

Like Freud, Frankl believed that existence is principally an unconscious process. No human being can be fully aware of his- or herself. While the border between the conscious and unconscious mind is *fluid* and *permeable*, with fluctuating transitions from one to the other (which he refers to as *ontological hiatus*), the spiritual and somatic dimensions are utterly distinct.⁶ Frankl perceived Freud's error as one of omission in that he accurately described the instinctual unconscious but entirely neglected the existence and importance of the spiritual unconscious.⁷ Whereas psychoanalysis treats mental disturbances based on assumptions about drives and instincts, the entire focus of logotherapy is upon the spiritual aspect of man.

In critically examining the spiritual unconscious we are essentially searching Frankl's epistemology in a most sensitive area. He considered the spiritual unconscious a border area between what can be known and what is beyond the level of human awareness.⁸ The spiritual unconscious is entirely distinct from *psychophysical facticity* (e.g., the external world and instincts) and is "an irreducible phenomenon that is inherent in the being as a deciding being" (Frankl, 1978, p. 33) and a *thing-in-itself*. It is the source of all that is human and can only be experienced phenomenologically as conscience. It is important to note that despite Frankl's descriptions of the disparate nature of the self, he insisted that the self was a unity, with each aspect of the mind, body, and spirit being part of the totality of the person. "Mind is contingent upon instinct, existence upon substance. But this contingency does not mean dependency" (Frankl, 1980, p. 75). According to Frankl, psychic introjections do not possess their own *being*; only the whole of the self is being. The core essence of the person flows from the spiritual unconscious, which acts as *executor* for Dasein. The spiritual unconscious plays a role in meta-consciousness in that it is the watcher who watches. It is metaphysically distinct from, but not fragmented from, our primitivisms and executive functioning.

According to Frankl there are different levels of human consciousness. There is the conscious mind, which is the faculty for self-awareness, choice, and responsibility. While the conscious mind is undeniably influenced by the appetitive and spiritual dimensions (and the tension between them), ultimately, human free will remains autonomously intact. The source of human influence upon the will (conscious/unconscious, instinctual/spiritual) is completely irrelevant to the free exercise of the will (however circumscribed), but the individual must learn to discern whether the influence is instinctual or not in order to live an authentic life. Human choice is a fact of bifurcated influences: we can choose to act as decent or indecent human beings. Moreover, it is not necessary to be completely self-aware on all levels of consciousness to make authentic choices. Indeed, existence "may be authentic even when it is unconscious; on the other hand, man only exists authentically when he is not driven, but responsible" (Frankl, 1978, p. 27). The psychoanalytic corollary of this is that man is driven, even when he is not aware. In *The Unconscious God*, Frankl put it succinctly:

Since human existence is spiritual existence, we now see that the distinction between conscious and unconscious becomes unimportant compared with another distinction: the real criterion of authentic human existence only derives from

discerning whether a given phenomenon is spiritual or instinctual—whereas it is relatively irrelevant whether it is conscious or unconscious. (p. 26)

Franklian philosophy appears to agree with the famous existentialist dictum that “existence precedes essence” in that existence is the irreducible basis for human reality and meaning. In essence, the subject is self-defining. There is no need, then, for an a priori metaphysical epistemology. The core essence of the individual consists of and emerges from the spiritual unconscious. The spiritual unconscious is transcendent and goes beyond the human capacity to comprehend itself and becomes an “unanalyzable, irreducible phenomenon” (Frankl, 1978, p. 31). This is why, according to Frankl, self-reflection and introspection are inadequate to solve most psychological problems. Human beings are by nature active and not reflective. The self is incapable of full self-knowledge. There is always a level of unawareness consisting of memories and repressions that cannot be fully known. Even the concept of self is transient. Who I was at the age of ten is not fully descriptive of who I am today. Even tomorrow, I will perhaps have different feelings and beliefs than those I am experiencing now. Frankl rejected, as did his contemporaries, the 19th century psychology of introspection as a means to psychological knowledge.

Ontologically, conscience originates from the spiritual unconscious, is pre-logical and even pre-moral, and cannot be fully rationally explained. Moral self-evaluations only take place after choice has been exercised. Like love, art, and joy, conscience operates in a non-rational, sometimes irrational way. It is part of intuition and is deontologically future-oriented in that it does not indicate what has been done, but what should be done. It is at this point that some have argued that Franklian philosophy contains elements of mysticism. Indeed, he was fond of Pascal’s words, “A heart has its reasons unknown to reason.” That which exists can be understood rationally; that which *should be* belongs to the realm of the non-rational. Conscience is about *what should be*, and thus is not rational in its function. It has to do with ethical possibilities. That which *should be* is anticipated through intuition, but is not actualized at the subjective level. In this manner, conscience is analogous to love and other states of mind which are vital, but not rational. This is why human beings consciously operate on an intuitive level.

According to Frankl, the spiritual unconscious is the core essence of what it means to be human, but this aspect cannot be completely understood and represents the limits of human knowledge. While the spiritual unconscious can be experientially known, it is not a satisfying area of study because it cannot be contemplated as an object. For example, “The self does not yield to total self-reflection” (Frankl, 1978, p. 30). But why is this so? Frankl explained that the self is by nature active and ceases to be its true self when it engages in passive introspection. The spirit is “blind precisely where it has its origin” (Frankl, 1978, p. 31).⁹ Frankl uses several analogies to help us understand why this limitation of knowledge occurs, including the Heisenberg principle and the blind spot of the retina that cannot see itself. In two other instances his analogies indicate that the spiritual unconscious represents a deeper level of the self that possesses a quasi-autonomous awareness, independent of the conscious mind (perhaps analogous to the Judeo-Christian concept of the soul). In one instance he compares it to the psychic mechanism which activates wakefulness from sleep without requiring any conscious activity. It is also compared to the resistance experienced by hypnotized patients who—

regardless of their response to induction—cannot be instructed or suggested to do things contrary to their free will and conscience.

Beyond anthropology

Frankl was a rationalist in that he believed that sound reasoning tells us facts about objective reality. Science and medicine, which rely on empirical facts, require proper interpretation. But he also believed that these domains tell us very little about the human existential condition. Discovering the personal meaning to one's life and grappling with existential despair and human suffering requires a deeper understanding of the human psyche than science provides.

On rare occasions Frankl implied that there is something higher than logic, science, and even subjectivity. He believed something exists as an ultimate reference point external to the self. The self "cannot be responsible merely to itself. The self cannot be its own lawgiver"; the self is "not autonomous" (Frankl, 1975, p. 57). Frankl states that there must be a real teleological direction human beings are moving toward and criticized modern existentialism for proposing that "man can choose and design himself by creating his own standards" (Frankl, 1975, p. 57). Frankl implied that the *transcendent Thou* is not a creation but may be the ultimate teleological object, mentioning in a footnote that "I have expressed my conviction that there is a dimensional barrier between the human world and the divine world" (p. 66). He goes even further and writes *as if* there is a God that humans know exists, regardless of whether or not this belief is conscious.

Another area beyond the capacity of human knowledge is that of supra, or cosmic, meaning.¹⁰ While the subject has meaning and purpose (whether consciously or unconsciously) we do not possess the ability to know "the purpose of the world as a whole" (Frankl, 1980, p. 31). Frankl explained that it is psychologically healthy to have faith that there is a cosmic meaning, even if it is beyond our grasp to logically conclude this, and acknowledges the role that religion and theism might play in grappling with this issue. At the very least, he advocates a type of optimistic agnosticism, suggesting that uncertainty about cosmic meaning does not justify fatalism or detract from subjective meaning. He implied, somewhat vaguely, that God may be the ultimate teleological object, but unelaboratively added, "there is a dimensional barrier between the human world and divine world" (Frankl, 1978, p. 66).

Comparative epistemologies: Frankl contra Freud

While logotherapy remains essentially foundationally unchanged since Frankl's time, psychoanalysis has moved closer to a Franklian epistemology in that it has become more phenomenological as exemplified in the inter-subjectivist and object-relations schools of thought. Despite a long history of psychoanalysis being inherently antithetical, if not anathema, to Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, a fascinating development has occurred over approximately the last three decades. Psychoanalysis, particularly among the non-continental schools of thought,¹¹ has moved in an epistemological direction that has unintentionally attenuated some of the historical, foundational differences between psychoanalysis and existential analysis. There are even indications that regardless of the

utterly disparate modalities of psychotherapy and clinical interpretation, aspects of *a single epistemology* may be of service to both schools of thought. Jonathan Shedler (2010), the current president of the American Psychoanalytic Association, states the following:

Repressed memories get a lot of attention in undergraduate textbooks and in media portrayals of psychoanalysis—and have virtually nothing to do with contemporary psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The goal of psychoanalytic treatment is *not* to uncover repressed memories, nor has it been since the early 1900s. It is to expand freedom and choice by helping people to become more mindful of their experience in the here and now.... I have encountered students who have rejected psychoanalytic approaches because they believed, mistakenly, that psychoanalysis rejects free will and views all behavior as determined by forces outside our control. Actually, the opposite may be closer to the truth. Psychoanalytic therapists believe that expanding our understanding of the meanings and causes of our behavior *creates* freedom, choice, and a freer will. (p. 13)

Similarly, Peter Fonagy, current Freud Memorial Professor of Psychoanalysis, states the following:

I'm particularly impressed with qualitative research methods. I think phenomenology has been totally overlooked by psychoanalysis.... We are so excited about the possibility of studying the unconscious, which actually is the least interesting bit to study, but studying phenomenology is really where it's at. (as cited in Jursit, 2010, p. 5)

Lastly, De Robertis (2001), in an editorial in the *International Forum on Psychoanalysis*, states that "The hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis renounces certain ideas of psychoanalytic theory such as Freudian meta-psychology with its mechanistic conception of driving forces, impulses, etc."

The above sentiments do not at all reflect the reductionist and deterministic views of psychoanalysis repeatedly criticized by Viktor Frankl. It would be easy to be dismissive of such sentiments if they were aberrant, but the more accurate understanding is that contemporary psychoanalysis is in many ways very different from traditional psychoanalysis and in some aspects has completely diverged from Freudian orthodoxy. These divergences are most obvious in the distinctions between traditional psychoanalysis and the object-relations schools (Oppenheim, 2010) and between the self-psychology and cognitive-social schools of analysis (Ogilvie, 1992). This has concerned many traditional Freudians, who have advocated a return to original sources for theoretical validation.¹²

Of the contemporary epistemologies which were not well-formulated during Frankl's most formidable years, *participatory epistemology* seems most congruent with the principles of logotherapy. This epistemology is also congruent with psychoanalysis; however, little has been written on this subject. Participatory epistemology was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by a number of thinkers from various schools of thought, notably in the fields of anthropology and transpersonal psychology. The basis of this epistemology is the thesis that conscious perceptions only have meaning insofar as the human mind interacts with the objective world (Tarnas, 1991). Reality, then, is an ontological correspondence between what Kant would have referred to as noumena and phenomena. Objective truth exists and can be partially known. Subjective truth is also

part of reality in that it is part of the dialectic of empirical information.¹³ This view is consistent with Viktor Frankl's insistence that forms of human knowledge accurately reflect objective reality while simultaneously being subjected to subjective interpretation. The problem remains that Frankl did not explicitly state by what criteria perception relates to knowledge.

Like Freud, Frankl did not describe any criteria for determining how experience, perception, intuition, or reasoning relates to knowledge; nor did he describe any specific procedures for differentiating between truth and error. Both thinkers used an a posteriori justification for their theories, based on case studies, clinical judgment, and treatment effect (Boczar et al., 2001; Graber, 2004), and were concerned with the content and analysis of every critical aspect of human existence as it related to psychological health. But how does Frankl determine the difference between theoretical construction and fact? Again, according to Frankl, it is an appeal to experience and observation that provides the best explanation for a phenomenon. Frankl used this line of reasoning in his criticism of the pleasure principle, which, though a sound theoretical construct, does not adequately explain human behavior (Frankl, 1980). According to Frankl, something is a so-called fact if it provides the best explanation for a phenomenon, by either eliminating contradictions or paradoxes or by intuition. Freud shared similar sentiments:

We have often heard it maintained that science should be built up on clear and sharply defined basic concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions. The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group, classify and correlate them. Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material in hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other but certainly not from the new observations alone. Such ideas—which will later become the basic concepts of the science—are still more indispensable as the material is further worked out. (Freud, 1915, p. 117)

At this point in history there are several considerations that justify revisiting the subject of Franklian-Freudian comparative epistemology. Throughout much of Frankl's and Freud's lifetimes there were furtive, largely unsuccessful attempts to define and classify their respective epistemologies, but both men did not attempt to develop, thoroughly define, or epistemologically formalize any theory of knowledge. In the mid 20th century, psychoanalysis and existentialism suffered from empirical critique and failed to meet Popper's falsification criterion (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2009; Zaphiropoulos, 2001). But presently, due to developments in constructivism and intersubjectivity, it is now possible to retrospectively and imputably epistemologically categorize models of psychotherapy in a manner that was only rudimentarily accessible in the mid 20th century. While arguably anachronistic, this observation serves to replace the assumption that the issue can never be settled—an assumption unfair to contemporary adherents. At the very least, as was pointed out by Kohn (1984), the Neo-Freudians have more affinity with existentialism because they place a greater emphasis upon “our capacity to grow and chose and make meaning” (para. 37). It is also essential to consider that regardless of the evolution of psychoanalysis, the reality of death, being, and human alienation are underlying themes throughout Freud's corpus *and* existentialism (Mills, 2003). Overall,

this is an area that requires further study, but considering the history of Frankl contra Freud, it suggests the possibility of fascinating future developments.

Conclusion

Viktor Frankl did not develop an epistemology and there is no evidence of a latent epistemology that he relied upon which could be discovered by archival analysis or historical-literary criticism. However, Frankl did provide us with ample observations and propositions that superficially seem to emerge from an epistemology and direct us either toward or away from specific philosophical positions. Aggregately, we can surmise that he rejected skepticism, empiricism, and reductionism. He appeared to accept the notion of a Cartesian ontological duality, but, unlike Descartes, he did not doubt the human capacity to accurately interpret objective reality or even think that subjectivity necessarily detracted “from one’s experience of objectiveness of reality itself” (Frankl, 1969, p. 59). Moreover, his belief in the existence of powerfully influential layers of the unconscious mind goes beyond any simple dualistic philosophy. Frankl was a rationalist insofar as he believed that human reason was above and could be relied upon to interpret human perceptions, but believed that knowledge of what constitutes the essence of what it means to be truly human is beyond the limits of human knowledge. Unlike the modernists and post-modernists, he did not reject traditional modes of thought nor succumb to relativism. He did not believe that science or reality is merely a construction or projection of biased or flawed human effort, nor did he embrace positivism. These facts place him outside of the currently dominant Western philosophies.¹⁴

Was Viktor Frankl really even an existentialist? *Yes* is a justifiable answer if by *existentialist* we mean that his philosophy and psychotherapy was primarily predicated upon the existential questions of human existence (life, death, meaning, despair, etc.) and emphasized the human capacity for authenticity and freedom. *No* is a justifiable answer if by existentialist we mean a thinker who shared with the continental philosophers an anti-rationalistic world view which viewed truth as arbitrary and postulated that personal meaning is not necessarily linked to objective rationality. While Frankl emphasized subjective choice as the basis for authenticity, he did not agree with the conventional existentialist position that subjectivity originates ontologically or is encapsulated within itself. Frankl’s positions on subjectivity, morality, and the existence of God were in some ways more Judeo-Christian than existentialist.¹⁵ He did not believe that personal meaning is solely generated and limited by subjectivity or even inter-subjectivity. Like Kant and Hegel, he believed that while the human experience only occurs via the world of objects, ultimately and beyond the level of conscious awareness there is something transcendent to human experience that is outside the limits of human knowledge. Moreover, he relied on certain assumptions that never obtained favor in mainstream existentialism. His conception of two levels of the unconscious mind (the spiritual and instinctual unconscious) is mostly foreign to existential analysis.¹⁶ The complete lack of acceptance of the death of God and an implicit belief in a cosmic order puts Franklian philosophy outside the mainstream of contemporary existential philosophy. In a manner almost reminiscent of scholasticism, Frankl believed in an objective reality that is knowable and simultaneously asserted the possibility of the *divine*, which is only indirectly and partially

knowable. He speculated that there might be an objective purpose to human life beyond individual personal meaning and endorsed a cosmic teleology (albeit vaguely and cautiously). But does this mean that Frankl should be grouped with religious existentialists? No. Frankl seldom wrote about religion or theology; when he did, it was as commentary on the works of others. Neither did he endorse fideism or any specific faith as a means of engaging truth or reality. While sympathetic to some of the views of Buber, Tillich, Marcel and others, he believed that theology was utterly distinct from the medical sciences (Frankl, 1969, 1980).

What, if any, form of epistemology can be carefully inferred from Frankl's writings? He appeared to work from a type of correspondence theory that could be described as something like "truth corresponds to that which is a fact; 'facts,' relating to the human condition are corroborated by the experience of personal meaning underlying psychological health." Thus his theories were viewed as more correct than psychoanalysis or other systems because they were superior in producing psychological health accompanied by a sense of subjective purpose in life, the ultimate proof of which was the ability of individuals to rise above experiences of human suffering (whether natural or imposed). Frankl observed that concentration camp prisoners who found no purpose to their suffering were more likely to die from illness and die more quickly (Frankl, 1963). Many logotherapists reference Frankl's personal experiences in the Nazi concentration camps as verification of his theories (Marshall, 2010; Pattakos, 2004) whereas others emphasize the empirical evidence for meaning-centered therapies (Batthyany & Guttman, 2006; Melton & Schulenberg, 2008). It is important to note that unlike many contemporary psychotherapies which developed in the aftermath of clinical experimentation (for example, cognitive-behavioral therapy) Frankl's basic premises were established prior to any clinical implementation; in fact, Frankl was 16 years old when he first conceptualized "meaning" as a critical psychological process (Frankl, 2000). Thus, despite Frankl's personal experiences and the empirical evidence that has accumulated in subsequent decades, epistemologically speaking, Frankl's philosophy is founded on a priori premises about human psychological processes historically described in distinction to psychoanalysis.

But the current emphasis among logotherapists upon empirical measures does not imply that Frankl was a pragmatist; rather, he believed that an affirmative moral intention on the part of the individual was necessary for authentic human experience and that results alone were insufficient to indicate existential health (Frankl, 1967). Somewhat echoing classical Western values, Frankl identified a moral life as part of psychological health in the sense that free will implies ethical responsibility (Frankl, 1967). The closest we can come to defining a Franklian epistemology is to say that where there is psychological healing, there is truth. When a logotherapeutic technique helped a patient resolve an existential dilemma (such as meaninglessness, despair, or fear of death) or affected a psychological cure (such as paradoxical intention for obsessive neurosis) Frankl considered it confirmation of his theories.

As with early psychoanalysis, Franklian epistemology is a correspondence between effect and treatment, with a posteriori confirmatory observation. In the absence of a formal system, the methodology is not primarily one of procedural reasoning as facts arise as a result of the object known. He understood meaning to be an ontological fact that

corresponded to human experience, even if it was latent (i.e., unconscious). Frankl was extremely skeptical of pure reasoning without clinical observation, but appeared to have confidence in the human capacity to provide reliable, self-referent a posteriori feedback.¹⁷ He therefore relied on behavioral and clinical observations for theoretical verification. On a more abstract level, his theories imply that there is an ontological correspondence between human thought and experience that is knowable and simultaneously reflective of subjective or objective reality; consequently, the human psyche is capable of providing accurate feedback about internal states that indicate levels of existential, psychological, or somatic health. While Frankl's core premises are perhaps vulnerable to strict empirical and falsifiability criticisms, Frankl never claimed otherwise and argued that empirical methods are inadequate to explain the human existential condition.

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¹ In the early 20th century the term “phenomenological” was equivalent to “empirical,” but Frankl consistently used the more contemporaneous meaning throughout his literary corpus.

² Frankl did not like the religious connotation of the word “spiritual,” which it does not have in German (*geistig*) and instead used the word “Noölogical” in English. For Frankl, the spiritual aspect of existence is Aristotelian (i.e., that which is “unique to man”).

³ The following quote from Frankl's autobiography is illuminative: “The theme [existential meaning] runs like a radiant thread through all my work and it concerns *the border area that lies between psychotherapy and philosophy, with special attention to the problems of meanings and values in psychology*” (Frankl, 2000, p. 59).

⁴ Of course Kierkegaard did not use the term “existentialist,” and limited his irrationalism to subjectivity.

⁵ As did Frankl.

⁶ In *The Unheard of Cry for Meaning* (p. 46) Frankl invoked Aquinas' term *unitas multiplex* to describe the

human condition as “unity *in spite* of diversity.”

⁷ Thus Frankl’s contention that while Freud viewed the human psyche as containing a “repressed demon,” it was more accurate to say that it contained a “repressed angel.”

⁸ Let us recall Hegel’s observation on Kant that to be aware of a border “is to transcend it.”

⁹ Frankl believed that obsessive neuroses develop in response to over-thinking and scrutinizing of the self.

¹⁰ Irvin Yalom explores this subject very well in his work *Existential Psychotherapy*.

¹¹ Specifically, the Anglophone schools.

¹² Led perhaps by Michael Horne, editor of the *Journal of Analytic Psychology* (see Horne, 2007).

¹³ Some readers may find aspects of participatory epistemology superficially reminiscent of Spinoza’s epistemology, minus the *participation mystique*.

¹⁴ The Japanese existentialist philosopher Yoshihiro Hayashi (2009) has expressed the opinion that while Frankl’s philosophy is outside the mainstream of contemporary philosophy, he was nonetheless a “constructive postmodernist” in that he worked to deconstruct elements of nihilism and replace it with *will to meaning*. I believe this is not only extremely anachronistic, but erroneous. Many elements of postmodernism are inherently antithetical to Frankl’s core philosophy.

¹⁵ For example, “But it is my contention that faith in the ultimate meaning is preceded by trust in an ultimate being, by trust in God” (Frankl, 1969, p. 145). In this and other passages in *The Will to Meaning* his language indicated a theism accompanied by a belief in a personal God.

¹⁶ With perhaps the exception of Ludwig Binswanger who independently argued that human existence consists of both instinct and an unconscious spirit that transcends instinct (Binswanger, 1963, p. 3).

¹⁷ For example, “Our task is to start with simple experimental facts and to evaluate them along the lines of traditional psychiatric methodology” (Frankl, 1975, p. 63).

LOGOTHERAPY: INFUSING COUNSELOR EDUCATION WITH A MEANINGFUL SPIRIT

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ABSTRACT

Our world is increasingly complex. Technological advances in modern weaponry, instant communication systems, and environmental, political, and theological instability have all resulted in vicarious suffering on a global scale. Suffering is no longer confined to the boundaries of the somatic and psychic dimensions of human existence. Instead, traumatic reverberations are shaking humans to the core of who they are as meaning-centered persons. Counselors of the future must be educated to address clients' issues related not only the soma and psyche, but the noös as well. Logotherapy is the only theoretical approach that places emphasis on all three dimensions. Thus, this paper serves as a call for meaningful change in counselor education and identifies key Logotherapy concepts on which to base counselor education programs.

Today's clients bring problems rarely confined to the mind and body. Rather, contemporary problems are global in nature and strike at the spirit of the person. These global and local issues have whittled away at our cognitions, dulled our emotions, and shaped our behaviors. The problems of today become "who we are" instead of "what we have created." The self-created, perceived, and perpetuated global and local problems are disrupting our perceptions of life as a meaningful adventure, our acceptance of freedom and responsibility, and our core as spiritual beings.

To meet the needs of the contemporary casualties of life, we need a paradigm shift in how we educate counselors to meet the needs of clients. We urgently need an approach to counseling, to counselor education, and to life that addresses the problems that are found today and those which could be conceived of in the future. I believe Logotherapy is such an approach.

Frankl (1992) captured the essence of human existence when he contended that life does not promise us happiness but rather the opportunity to find meaning. In fact, he argued that

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life... this meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning. (p. 105)

Examples of human suffering and the importance of finding meaning in life are found in the literature. Studies related to combat veterans suffering from post-traumatic

stress disorder (Southwick, Gilmartin, Mcdonough, & Morrissey, 2006), cancer patients/survivors (Greenstein & Breitbart, 2000), abstinent Alcoholics Anonymous members (Kairouz & Dube, 2000), and HIV patients (Vaughan & Kinnier, 1996) all have elucidated the importance of finding meaning and purpose in life during times of suffering.

Logotherapy: Key concepts for counselor education integration

Logotherapy offers counselors and counselor educators an approach that is especially relevant for the 21st century and beyond.

The three-dimensional man

Logotherapy is the only major theoretical approach that places primary emphasis on the unity of psychological (psychical), physical (somatic), and spiritual (noëtic) dimensions of man (Fabry, 1968; Frankl, 2000). Frankl referred to the psyche and soma as a “psychophysical unity.” These two dimensions represent “what we have,” but it is the noös that reflects “who we are.” The noös is uniquely human. It is our spirit. It is who we are with or without a “religious” affiliation or disposition.

While the problems confronting humanity in the 21st century have a psychophysical component which must be addressed, it is the noetic dimension that is being silently eroded and is in need of greatest attention. Conceptualizing and treatment planning with a client without considering his or her spiritual core is like planning a vacation in the family car without checking the oil. Perhaps you’ll arrive at your destination without incident, but it is simply a matter of time before the engine breaks down. Our thoughts and feelings serve as a lubricant to prevent the problems of life from sticking to who we are—a spiritual creation. The problems that stick to the three dimensions of man are converted into perceptions of suffering.

The Tragic Triad: pain, guilt, and death

Frankl noted that suffering results when people ask “why” questions. That is, why did this or that happen to me? Why is life so unfair? Why has God left me? Why do my kids hate me? Asking this type of question inevitably leads to suffering because the answer is unclear. Consequently, the argument could be made that humans create their own opportunities for suffering. Whether the suffering is somatic and the consequence of drinking polluted water, psychical suffering attributed to the anxieties of nuclear annihilation, or noetic suffering that occurs when contemplating the end of life, all are examples of suffering that is created from within the individual. Life simply asks the questions. We provide the response.

Humans are partial to avoiding the experience of suffering and frequently label suffering a “tragedy.” We speak of the tragedy of the Holocaust and the suffering endured by those who survived the experience. Having survived the concentration camps himself, Frankl was in a unique position to speak of human suffering. The experiences of pain, guilt, and death—each unavoidable manifestations of suffering—he termed the “Tragic Triad” (Frankl, 2000; 1988). Graber (2004) referred to the Tragic Triad as parts of the human experience. She noted that clients in therapy who are experiencing despondency

are likely in the Tragic Triad, feeling overwhelmed and victims of fate. Logotherapy provides suggestions for overcoming and rising above the inescapable sufferings that inevitably come with life and the Tragic Triad.

Love: the ultimate and highest goal

It is difficult to imagine a more hopeless situation than that experienced by Frankl and others in the concentration camps. The suffering endured by the psyche, soma, and noös on a moment-by-moment basis must have been exponential. In an environment in which pain, guilt, and death were always present, Frankl (1992) acknowledged that “love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which one can aspire” (p. 49). Frankl tenderly expanded on this concept while reflecting on his wife during captivity. Not knowing if she was alive or dead, he said:

Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understand how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. (p. 49)

Many have found Frankl’s words alone to be therapeutic and restorative. While the global challenges presented on a daily basis in our contemporary world are disturbing, most of us will never face the magnitude of suffering endured by Frankl and others in the concentration camps. Through his touching words we are vicariously given an opportunity to confront our own perceptions of suffering. We can silently superimpose our own perceptions of suffering over those of a person who in all likelihood endured greater hardships than we could ever imagine. With a clearer and more relative perspective than possessed prior to reflecting on Frankl’s words, we can better appreciate our own opportunities to see love as the ultimate and highest goal.

The will to meaning

Most counselor education programs will at some point discuss the theories of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. These two individuals are obviously among the giants in counseling and psychotherapy and their respective contributions to the field are indeed great. As a junior contemporary of Freud and Adler, Frankl (1988) fully acknowledged the contributions of the giants to his own work, but used the analogy of a little person standing on the shoulders of a giant who can see farther. That is, Freud’s “will to pleasure” is confined to the “basement” of human existence and Adler’s “will to power” resides in the psyche. It is the “will to meaning” that sets Frankl’s approach above the others and allowed him to see farther. But what did his vision allow us to see?

The will to meaning acts as a bridge that connects the soma and psyche to the noös. The bridge leads us up and over the situational problems of life in the direction of an ultimate, and absolutely unique, meaning that awaits our discovery. With each step, life is asking us questions and we sense its “demand quality” (Graber, 2004). It is a demand quality that lovingly pulls us forward from within... one step to the next. Each

question has only one right answer, and “there is only one meaning to each situation, and this is its true meaning” (Frankl, 1988, p. 61). Many of the questions are easy. The base-level questions are set intentionally low for all to experience the “thrill of victory” as we skip across the bridge. But life is the true high-stakes test. The questions become progressively more difficult and at times we struggle to find the correct answer. We know it is there, but the answer lies on the tip of our tongue, temporarily lost in the psychological fog bank and just beyond our reach. In this test, however, there are no shortcuts and no crib notes. The human spirit knows the correct response from each individual and patiently waits for the fog to clear. The unique meanings, the answers to life’s questions, are “discovered but not invented... found rather than given” (Frankl, 1988, pp. 60-61).

The question is how does one follow the bridge which leads to the discovery of ultimate meaning in life? Logotherapy teaches that the most fundamental way of discovering meaning in any present moment is through the awareness of values. These values may be experiential, creative, or attitudinal in nature. Each of the values serves as a key uniquely designed to unlock the mysteries of the meaning of the moment. Life is to be lived as an adventure!

Experiential Values

Experiential values are the pro bono gifts from life (God and others). They are given to us free of charge. In order to use experiences as a means of finding meaning, one simply needs to become aware and be grateful for the experience. Common gifts of an experiential nature include such things as the first ray of sunshine as it reflects off the still waters of a lake; the smell of rain during a long run; a Tiger Butterfly landing gently on a sunflower; a kiss on the forehead and a cup of soup when one is suffering from the flu. Each of these examples, and an infinite number of others that are individually unique, if simply brought to conscious awareness, can answer the question whether life has inherent meaning.

Creative Values

Creative values are our returns of favor to the universe. They are actions or activities that we generate in order to be a blessing to others. Stopping to change a flat tire for someone, cooking dinner for a loved one (especially if we don’t particularly enjoy cooking), taking extra time with a struggling student, taking the family dog on vacation when it is easier to kennel the animal—these are all examples of doing something for the universe that makes it better. Becoming aware that your actions make a meaningful difference in the life of another can lead to discovering your own meaning of the moment. A particularly good example of invoking creative values during times of suffering comes from Frankl himself. Frankl (1992) shares with his readers a final speech he gave to his fellow prisoners. He began by quoting Nietzsche ‘That which does not kill me makes me stronger.’ He continued:

I had no intention of losing hope and giving up. For no man knew what the future would bring, much less the next hour. I asked them to face up to the seriousness of our position. They must not lose hope but should keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and meaning. I said that someone looks down on each of us in difficult

hours—a friend, a wife, somebody alive or dead, or a God—and he would not expect us to disappoint him. He would hope to find us suffering proudly—not miserably—knowing how to die. (p. 90–91)

Frankl acknowledged that his speech was successful, and his words are memorable, but for me, his final comment on this speech was most powerful. He said, “But I have to confess here that only too rarely had I the inner strength to make contact with my companions in suffering and that I must have missed many opportunities for doing so” (p. 91). This is a golden key that must be remembered by each of life’s sojourners. When we are presented an opportunity to do something creative for another, we must recognize this as one of life’s challenging questions. That is, “what are you going to do when you become aware that another life sojourner needs assistance?” The response we provide, when we have the means to respond, will determine whether the question was answered correctly or incorrectly.

If we consider life’s questions in hierarchical order, we find the base-level question in our EXPERIENTIAL values. For example:

GOD/Life: “Did you notice that beautiful cloud just on the horizon?”

SELF: “Yes!”

GOD/Life: “Was it meaningful?”

SELF: “Absolutely!”

GOD/Life: “Well done. That is the correct response.”

Questions of a CREATIVE nature become somewhat more challenging and may be seen in the following dialogue between self and God/Life:

SELF: “I’m really in a hurry today.”

GOD/Life: “Did you see that person crying as you entered the building?”

SELF: “Yes, but I’m late to class! I don’t have time for social work!”

GOD/Life: “Is that your ‘final’ answer?”

SELF: “Hmmm... I think I’ll go see if I can be of assistance.”

GOD/Life: “Good answer.”

Attitudinal Values

The ceiling-level questions are ATTITUDINAL in nature and represent the toughest questions known to humanity. Attitudinal values are to man as long hair is to Samson and spinach is to Popeye. We only employ attitudinal values to find meaning in life when we are faced with an unalterable fate. We typically conceptualize “fate” as the negative events that happen in life. They are the villains and the Brutuses whose sole purpose is to kick sand in our face. They are the situations that “life happens” bumper stickers are made of. Those young men and women returning from the war, missing somatic pieces, with psyches blown, yet noetically intact, are facing a psychophysical reality that is unalterable. The “medicine chest” (Frankl, 1986) they require is in their spirit—the fully intact aspect of who we are that can never be damaged or destroyed. The change of attitude, from one of “why did this happen to me?” to “what is life asking of me given my present condition?” places the next footprint on the bridge that leads to a meaningful destiny. No longer is the wounded soldier a victim of the war... of fate. He or she is now a victor and in charge of her destiny. An example of the Socratic dialogue between God and a returned WARRIOR may resemble the following:

GOD/Life: “Wake-up.... Are you aware the war has taken your left leg and your right arm?”

WARRIOR: “I am aware that I am alive. I have my right leg and my left arm. I can see my future and climbing mountains is still a part of it. I am loved and I am lovable. The war did not kill my spirit... simply a couple pieces of what I had, but not who I am.”

GOD/Life: “You have correctly answered MY most challenging question. You have found love and meaning in spite of your inescapable suffering. I AM most pleased.”

Freedom, responsibility and ultimate meaning

Although life possesses a demand quality, and posed questions will always be present, there is no cosmic mandate that says we must answer the questions. We are given the right to live our lives as a spectator in the audience as the game of life is played out on the stage before us. We have the freedom to choose whether we want to watch the game, take a nap as a somnambulist, or walk away from the game completely. However, choosing to ignore life’s questions comes with a heavy responsibility. The responsibility is to shoulder the load of fate and one’s own incessant questions of why life is so unfair. “Why has this happened to me?” “Where is God when He is needed?” “What am I supposed to do NOW?” These questions posed to life, rather than responding to the questions posed by life, materialize a bridge that leads to the “existential vacuum” (Graber, 2004), the place where accomplishments produce only temporary happiness, love is debased to libido, and life itself becomes hollow and meaningless. Freely choosing, however, to engage and embrace life’s questions, from the most basic to the most profound, likewise materializes a bridge. Instead of leading to a living hell—courtesy of the existential vacuum—this bridge carries one to a “destiny” rather than a fate. This destiny leads to the front door steps of God Himself and the realization of ULTIMATE MEANING in one’s life.

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“THE QUIET REVOLUTIONARY”: A TIMELY REVISITING OF CARL ROGERS’ VISIONARY CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

Many aspects of life today are perceived as complex and perplexing, and in particular the many-faceted area of human relationships. This article argues that the ideas and visions of Carl Rogers offer a constructive and encouraging perspective which merits a re-examination and a consideration of its relevance in our contemporary world. Rogers’ work was primarily directed towards the development of his counselling and psychotherapeutic theories. However, his writings also convey a deep commitment to intimacy, genuineness and real communication in significant relationships in everyday life. Rogers’ vision of genuine relationship may be deemed idealistic and irrelevant to contemporary living; however, an examination of Rogers’ ‘core conditions’ for optimal human relating and his understanding of human flourishing reveals a courageous faith and hope in human nature. Perhaps, our present world, with its ever-expanding array of virtual connectivity and corresponding alienation, may be enriched by a careful consideration of Rogers’ insights and ideals.¹⁸

“We have to imagine more courageously if we are to greet
creation more fully” (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 140).

“Truth tends to reveal its highest wisdom in the guise of
simplicity” (Nietzsche, 1984, p. 253).

Carl Rogers is generally remembered as one of the founders of humanistic or person-centred psychotherapy. A recollection of his work evokes many of the key concepts underlying his philosophy—“congruence,” “acceptance,” “empathy,” and “self-actualization.” However, in my view, the significance of Rogers’ thought and its relevance outside the therapeutic setting has not been adequately explored in a contemporary context. The growing popularity of more ‘modern’ theories, such as cognitive therapy, behaviourism, mindfulness, and positive psychology among others, combined with a postmodern cynicism which distrusts what is deemed to be Rogers’ “simplicity” and idealism, his overly positive view of human nature, and his lack of concern for the establishment of technique-driven dogmas, results in a polite reverence for the “gentle” humanist and a reluctance to explore an application of his person-centered approach to interpersonal relations in all contexts.¹⁹

The meta-narratives of human history are concerned with momentous or general developments, events, or progress. A distrust of the representative validity of these meta-narratives is a distinguishing characteristic of our post-modern world. Without the support of research and documentation, there is a felt realization that individual and personal narratives, often overlooked in the ‘bigger’ stories, are concerned with issues

which sometimes impact on the individual in private and unarticulated ways. The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh (2005) explores the nature of this paradox in his satirically titled short poem, "Epic":

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided: who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims

...

That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was most important? (p. 184).

The story of the human being, and his/her concerns, cannot be categorized into any neat descriptions or definitions. However, certain experiences are almost universal in their occurrence, albeit in uniquely different forms and impacts. Experiences such as joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and hope and despair are integral aspects of human life, beyond any boundaries of time or space. The personal and unique nature of these experiences means that they are often unshared and silent. However, the status quo, and its accepted limitations and assumptions, is sometimes challenged through the emergence of a brave and creative thinker who articulates and echoes feelings and thoughts, perspectives and horizons, hitherto unexplored; poets, philosophers, dreamers, and visionaries break the boundaries of private experience, and, in so doing, enlarge our understanding and perspective. Of course, history also reminds us that those who dare to think outside the confines of convention and habitual assumption are often greeted with ridicule and dismissal. Others are passively tolerated as being gentle but ineffective dreamers, divorced from the fixed realities of life. The legacy of such thinkers is volatile and subject to the vicissitudes of public opinion; the hero of today may be the scoundrel of tomorrow, but the dreamer of yesterday may yet be the sage that we need today. One such thinker is Carl Rogers. In referring to Rogers as a visionary and a revolutionary thinker, I am asserting the radical nature of his thought and theories in the context of his time, his challenging of conventional approaches to human understanding and human well-being, and his promotion of the significance of individual freedom and subjective perception. I am not attempting to idealize either the man or his theories; of course, there are critical questions pertaining to some of Rogers' ideas; of course, hindsight and ongoing research may be applied critically to his work. However, I nevertheless claim that a revisiting of Rogers' vision is timely in view of the tragic manifestations of failure in interpersonal relations in our contemporary world. Globally and locally, socially and personally, we are confronted with challenges and conflicts wherein the continuation of traditional methods seems doomed to a repetition of the failures of the past. Therefore, in the words of Brian Thorne (2003), "it seems that we do well to hear again the voice of a man who passionately believed in the capacity of humankind to transcend itself" (p. iix).

A philosophy of life: a way of being

The philosophy of Rogers, exploring questions of human being, human becoming, personhood, potential, and fulfilment, is ultimately positive and optimistic in its understanding of human nature. Rogers was committed to a belief in the innate goodness

and potential creativity of the human person, and his work is concerned with providing his personal vision of genuine relationship and its healing and growth-enhancing capacity. Throughout his writings, Rogers acknowledges the difficulties pertaining to the creation and maintenance of authenticity in an inter-subjective relationship; he admits his own momentary failures in this regard and he consistently reminds his readers that his theories are based on his own personal experience. Echoing the sentiments of the poet and philosopher John O'Donohue, he accepts the necessity of a courageous and imaginative encounter with ourselves and our world: "This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life" (Rogers, 2004, p. 196).

The development of the "talking cure"

Many of the disturbing and challenging questions encountered by the individual arise out of, or are accompanied by, feelings of unease, distress, or self-doubt. Such questions may relate to one's purpose—"why am I here?"—one's self-worth—"am I worthwhile?"—and one's engagement with life—"how am I to create and live a meaningful and satisfactory life?" Answers to such questions are often ephemeral and volatile, but sometimes the perceived answers are predominantly negative and disarming. The individual may feel he/she has no purpose, has nothing to contribute, is not of value to self or to others and is unable to tolerate life as it presents itself. Mental distress and suffering is a widespread phenomenon and its extent and duration is diverse and unpredictable. Our vocabulary abounds with a variety of descriptions which attempt to define this uniquely subjective experience: depression, anxiety, stress, melancholia, hysteria, and madness—these are but some of the labels that have been associated with emotional and mental distress in the past century. The labels have been accompanied by diagnoses and prescriptions in attempts to understand and ameliorate the attendant suffering. Historically, this has been the almost exclusive domain of psychiatry and pharmacology. However, it is to the credit of the oft-maligned Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic theories that another approach has been made possible; the revolutionary idea that human distress could be addressed and alleviated through a relationship with an accepting, understanding, and attentive listener. Psychotherapy, "the talking cure," became a possibility.

The work of Freud was followed by many different developments in psychotherapeutic theories and techniques. People like Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Aaron Beck, Victor Frankl, and Abraham Maslow established different schools of psychotherapy framed by their own proclaimed understanding of human personality and development. From their ideas, we now have psychodynamic, existential, cognitive, and behavioural schools of therapy, each with their own set of techniques and approaches, while many independent psychotherapists draw freely and selectively from these diverse ideas and practice an integrative approach based on the unique needs and personality of the particular individual. This focus on the individual person, as distinct from universally applied techniques and theories, is the cornerstone of a "person-centred" approach developed by Rogers, both in his psychotherapeutic work and in his humanistic outlook.

The courage to be: genuine relationship

In his description of an effective therapeutic experience, Rogers put forward two concepts which have a relevance and an application outside the counselling setting. Indeed, Rogers increasingly argued for the relevance of his theories to non-therapeutic settings and claimed that they were applicable in the general experience of the individual in his/her world. Rogers considered that the main source of healing, change and growth ensued from the experience of genuine relationship between two people in any particular setting. This sentiment echoes the assertion of a philosopher who opposed many of Rogers' views; Martin Buber (1999), in his outline of the 'I-Thou' relationship and the dialogical nature of human relationships, claims that 'Everything is changed in real meeting' (p. 242). The necessary qualities of such a relationship, according to Rogers (2004), were realness, acceptance, and empathy in the person who assumed the caring or helping role: "The relationship which I have found helpful is characterized by a sort of transparency on my part, in which my real feelings are evident; by an acceptance of this other person as a separate person with value in his own right; and by a deep empathic understanding which enables me to see his private world through his eyes" (p. 34). The qualities of genuine relationship, as outlined by Rogers, are expressed and experienced through a courageous spontaneity and openness to the present moment, in contrast to a preoccupation with protective defences and fixed expectations. This understanding of vulnerable presence is essential to the experience of genuine relationship, or, in terms adopted by Buber (2004), the 'I-Thou' relationship: "In spite of all similarities every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction which cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you" (p. 135). In his outline of human relationships, Buber contrasts two different approaches and attitudes in the subject's encounter with existence. He contrasts the 'I-Thou' relationship of openness, mutuality, and presence with the more common mode of experience whereby the other is encountered as an object—'It'—without the intention of genuine connection. The former is the approach of genuine relation, dialogue, and love, and the pervasiveness of the latter is a serious obstacle to this experience. Buber accepts that the 'I-Thou' relationship, involving an unprejudiced openness to the encounter with other, was relatively rare in human relationships; instead, the general mode of relating tended to follow the 'I-It' formula, whereby the other is approached as an object, a source of utility on some level. However, Buber (2004a) insists on the absolute necessity of the 'I-Thou' relationship in the healthy development of the human being.²⁰ He insists that one cannot become a person by oneself, that life is essentially relational, and that "I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting" (p. 17). In many ways, these sentiments concur with Rogers' thoughts on the helpful and genuine relationship. Yet, how many of our encounters reflect this openness to the concrete experience of meeting the other? How often is a "meeting" choreographed by preconceived convictions regarding the self and the other, by habitual expectations and an impatient determination to convey our well-worn responses and asides? Commonly, we are deafened by our own monological musings and defensive performances, and, thus, we are not really present in the encounter. Perhaps this is one of the attractions of the ever-

growing popularity of “virtual” relationships and technology-mediated communication, which provide the space and distance to avoid spontaneity, vulnerability, and realness.²¹

Realness, congruence

The willingness to be real, to be “transparent,” to risk exposing oneself in all one’s vulnerabilities and strengths, is often in conflict with our perceived need to protect our public or even private image of ourselves, and thus we don an array of masks and disguises with a view to presenting a selective and limited version of ourselves. Often, it seems, we do not consider our real self to be quite good enough. It appears to be part of the phenomenon of human relationships that the behaviour of one individual tends to evoke a corresponding behaviour in the other partner of the encounter. It is as if we have an in-built mechanism which carefully measures how far we may advance, in openness and honesty, with another human being; indeed, we often experience greater freedom in self-expression when we address the safe and silent reception of the animal kingdom! Talking to the dog is usually characterized by an absence of inhibitions and fears. By contrast, many of our encounters with fellow human beings are diminished by our fears of being misunderstood, of being rejected and especially of being criticized or ridiculed. Hence, we often come away from an otherwise joyful and pleasant encounter with an uneasy and sometimes repressed feeling that there was something missing from the experience. There may be a felt sense that we can now relax, shed the armour, and be again ourselves without effort or performance; but there is also a vague sense of loneliness and disappointment, which we try to shrug off. Realness involves the courage and risk of being open to all aspects of the self, dispensing with the habitual armour with which we often attempt to mask our vulnerability. This is “the art of being,” according to O’Donohue (2003): “To learn that art of being is to become free of the burden of strategy, purpose and self-consciousness” (p. 229). Very often, the experience of realness and vulnerability in one individual creates a hitherto suppressed freedom of genuine expression and being in another. O’Donohue, suggests that the risk involved in such authenticity unlocks a similar potential in others: “Those who are willing to stand out and take the risk of following their gift place a mirror to our unawakened gifts” (p. 247). When I am real in a relationship, the other person is encouraged to be, even tentatively, open and authentic in response. The experience of real connection and communication alleviates the loneliness that we all share. In this experience, we come to realize that what separates and makes us different is less intrinsic than what we share. Rogers believes that our relationships, and our lives, are enriched through our willingness to risk exposing our imperfect selves, our faults as well as our virtues, our failures as well as our successes, and our confusion and sadness as well as our confidence and joy. To be human is to be imperfect, and, in some ways, it is our imperfections that contribute most significantly to our uniqueness and to the core of our potential contribution to the joy and well-being of others. As Leonard Cohen (1993) reminds us, “There is a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in” (p. 373). Perfection and human is a contradiction, and our imperfections are an intrinsic part of who we are. Yet, an ideology of perfection appears to permeate so many aspects of our lives today: images of the perfect body, the perfect parent, the perfect school, and the perfect child are often portrayed against the backdrop

of the perfect beach, the perfect home, the perfect car, and the perfect life. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (2003), in his typically aphoristic style, claims that “the wickedest in man is necessary for the best in him” (p. 235). Rogers (2004), who had a very positive view of human nature, seeing all human beings as potentially striving for self-actualization, suggests that we are good enough without being perfect: “What I am is good enough if I would only be it openly” (p. 67). The acknowledgement that we are “good enough” lies at the heart of self-acceptance and acts as counter-voice to critical reprimands and demands for improvement emanating internally or externally from diverse sources of perceived authority and expertise. It is also, in my view, an acknowledgement of the imperfection and ambiguity characteristic of the human condition, an acknowledgement which does not dispel the possibility of optimism and confidence in human nature. The poet Mary Oliver (2005) echoes Roger’s words:

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves...
The world offers itself to your imagination. (p. 110)

Unconditional Acceptance

The willingness to accept both self and other exactly as one is at a particular moment is the second characteristic of a genuine relationship according to Rogers (2004). Acceptance entails an appreciation of the person as he/she is without the need or desire to change or improve: “In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?” (p. 32). Genuine relationship is not concerned with changing or fixing the other according to some perceived image of how the other might be. It is accepting of the reality of other and of the self without the application of conditions of worth: “The more I am open to the realities in me and in the other person, the less do I find myself rushing in to ‘fix things’” (p. 21). The desire to “fix” things or people implies a degree of dismissal or non-acceptance of some essential aspects of our relational experience. In some sense, the other is not considered “good enough.” How many adults struggle with feelings of worthlessness and confusion because of mixed-messages received from well-meaning care-givers, advisers or educators? Such messages are often interpreted as an assessment of failure on some level; a failure to fulfil the conditions dictated by “expert opinion” or a failure to measure up to the expectations and requirements of some perceived authority. Full acceptance and appreciation of an individual is free of this need to control or re-make. (This applies to counselling and psychotherapy too!) Rogers (1996) suggests it is akin to an attitude of awe which we often experience when confronted with the majesty and beauty of nature: “One of the most satisfying experiences I know is fully to appreciate an individual in the same way I appreciate a sunset. When I look at a sunset... I don't find myself saying, 'Soften the orange a little more on the right hand corner, and put a bit more purple along the base, and use a little more pink in the cloud colour...' I don't try to control a sunset. I watch it with awe as it unfolds” (p. 22). When this attitude is

experienced in a genuine relationship, it prompts a greater degree of openness and realness. Rogers (2003) claims that “The more fully the individual is understood and accepted, the more he tends to drop the false fronts with which he has been meeting life” (p. 28). This experience of being unconditionally accepted by another is often echoed by an ability to accept oneself. Self-acceptance is the key to change, according to Rogers: “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” (p. 19). Hence, unconditional acceptance facilitates the emergence and the strengthening of the real self and a gradual diminishment of the need for façade or mask. The ideal source of unconditional acceptance is of course in the milieu of one’s earliest years; however, fears of “spoiling,” “over-indulging,” and not being the “perfect parent” often translate into a heavy “hands-on” approach to parenting wherein an attempt is made to “mould” the child into a “successful” citizen. The tragedy of this approach is often poignantly understood by grandparents, who, with the blessing of hindsight and the grace of long experience, sense the folly of such thinking and attempt to redress such conditionality with their grand-children.

Emphatic listening

The third characteristic of genuine relationship, in Rogerian terms, is the capacity to listen emphatically to the other person. In many conversations, “speaking” is the dominant mode; “the listener” is often preoccupied with “listening” to his/her own reactions or with the preparation of a well-received response. The willingness and ability to listen to another, to what is articulated verbally and to what is being conveyed beyond the words, is a rare and difficult phenomenon. Yet it is a major human need often expressed indirectly through a range of behaviours; the toddler’s tantrum, the adolescent rebellion, binge drinking, and self-harm are so often the disguised cravings for attentive listening. Listening requires a concentrated attention to the world of the other. Rogers (1996) explains that it involves hearing not only the thoughts and feelings which are being expressed but also the personal meanings and the complex inner world of the individual:

I hear the words, the thoughts, the feeling tones, the personal meaning, even the meaning that is below the conscious intent of the speaker. Sometimes too, in a message which superficially is not very important, I hear a deep human cry that lies buried and unknown far below the surface of the person. So I have learned to ask myself, can I hear the sounds and sense the shape of this other person's inner world? Can I resonate to what he is saying so deeply that I sense the meanings he is afraid of, yet would like to communicate, as well as those he knows?” (p. 8).

Do we hear “a deep human cry” buried below the surface of cliché and repetition? “I am fine,” “life is great,” “no worries” are often the expected responses to vague expressions of interest and concern. Do we take the time to hear what is not being said? Embedded in this description of emphatic listening is the core concept of care or solicitude for the other person; such a caring attitude implies the patience, the humility, and the openness required to listen attentively to another and to convey that the other’s experience, both verbally expressed and silently communicated, has been heard and understood. This is an

essential characteristic of “true friendship” according to O’Donohue (1999): “One of the tasks of true friendship is to listen compassionately and creatively to the hidden silences” (p. 145). It is also an intrinsic expression of respect for the other’s point of view, the possibility of different horizons and the welcome embrace of difference, which is often so blatantly absent in our reception of those whom we consider “strangers” or “foreigners.”

Songs, poems, and films often express the universal need to be heard and understood. In early childhood, we enter into the world of language in order to communicate our needs and reactions. We crave a response which signals that we have been listened to. This kind of attention is essential to our development as human beings. Rogers (1998) claims that an experience of attentive listening enables an enhancement of one’s perspective on oneself and on one’s world, and this enlarged perspective opens new possibilities and new understanding: “When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard. I have deeply appreciated the times that I have experienced this sensitive, empathic, concentrated listening” (p. 13). Our desire, our need, to be listened to in this attentive manner is often thwarted by the inevitable distractions which characterize our personal encounters; the contemporary obsession with the cell-phone is but one example of the intrusions which punctuate our conversations and relationships. Of course, we rarely admit our annoyance when our companion prioritizes the ring-tone of the phone over what is being communicated in person! On a more serious level, the need to listen and the need to be heard lie at the root of many tragedies and problems in our contemporary world. Behind many of the manifest causes of marital disharmony and breakdown is the often unarticulated craving to be listened to and understood; the ever-growing spectre of suicide suggests that we are not hearing the cries of anguish and despair of our fellow human beings; and the historical failure to create and maintain world peace, justice, and equality is a direct result of our failure to listen emphatically to the perspective of the other.

Self-actualization

According to Rogers (2003), when these three conditions of genuine relationship are present in an encounter with an individual, the result is a spontaneous surge towards growth and healing. With the right conditions, the individual, like all living organisms, flourishes and moves towards self-actualization: “The individual has within himself/herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behaviour” (p. 135). Rogers points to the analogy of the acorn, which, under the right conditions, grows naturally towards the actualization of an oak tree.²² This portrays a very positive view of the human being wherein the potential for growth, maturity, and actualization is inherent in the individual; the flourishing of this potential is dependent on the quality of relational experience in the person’s life.²³ Relationships involving varying degrees of judgement, criticism, rejection, or abuse hinder or diminish the possibility of growth. Similarly, relationships based on unconditional acceptance, regard, and empathy have the power to unleash the hidden or

repressed thrust towards development and maturity. As relational or social beings, we are vulnerable to the effects of damaging relationships, but we are also responsive to the healing effects of genuine connection.

The Fully Functioning Person

Rogers (2003) describes the individual who has experienced the congruence, acceptance and understanding present in a genuine relationship as a “fully functioning person”²⁴ (p. 250). The concept of a “fully functioning person” may have associations with “perfect” maturity, “perfect” living and “perfect” functioning; therefore, perhaps a more acceptable description might be “the contented person.” According to Rogers, this individual is not “perfect” or complete; living is synonymous with growth and change: it is a never-ending process. Accepting this reality, the “fully functioning person” has “unconditional self-worth and self-regard.” Self-worth, self-regard, and self-esteem are not dependent on transient or volatile external sources such as personal or vocational success, popularity, or favour, but are based on an acknowledgement of one’s incontestable worthiness as a human being. This is accompanied by an increasing development of self-trust and self-direction whereby one has the confidence and courage to choose one’s own values and actions. Authentic choices are made based on an openness to the full spectrum of one’s feelings, doing what “feels right” (p. 414). One’s life is created in a positive response to the question: “Am I living in a way which is deeply satisfying to me, and which truly expresses me?” (Rogers, 2004, p. 119). Rogers considers this “the only question which matters”. On this point, Rogers’ theory has been criticized for its extreme individualism and corresponding self-indulgence. The counter-argument is that this subjective freedom to choose how to live one’s life is inevitably accompanied by a corresponding appreciation of the freedom of others to choose their own ways and an acceptance of what Rogers (2003) maintains is “a basic fact of all human life that we live in separate realities” (p. 428). Reciprocal tolerance and respect result in harmony at personal, social, and political levels and Rogers suggests that this attitude may be a viable and urgent alternative to conventional responses to conflict and difference. This could apply in personal, political and economic realms of experience.

Criticisms

Roger’s theories of personality and development have been criticized for what is perceived as their overly-optimistic understanding of human behaviour. It is argued that Rogers does not sufficiently take into account the reality of evil in our world. Noted humanistic and existentialist philosophers and psychologists such as Buber and May have argued that Rogers’ view of human nature is naïve, utopian, and one-sided; where Rogers sees the human being as “basically good” these thinkers assert that we are both good and bad and that it is never certain that human development, even within Rogers’ ideal conditions, will result in positive and life-enhancing growth. Perhaps we can interpret Rogers’ phrase “basically good” as an acceptance by Rogers of the ambiguity and the complexity of the human condition. Perhaps, also, we tend to find in human nature that which we believe it to be. Rogers has also been criticized for his promotion of individualism and self-love

leading to the possibility of dangerous narcissism. His emphasis on individual experience and perception and the avoidance of external evaluation is deemed relativistic and even nihilistic with regard to morality, truth and goodness. It is certainly opposed to any conception of “expert” knowledge or any version of dogmatic authority.²⁵ Surely, this is a good thing?

Conclusion

Perhaps Roger’s vision is idealistic and difficult to actuate in practice; it is one thing to “know” what his theories are, and another to put them into practice. However, the difficulty of the task perhaps mirrors the enormity of its significance. Unless we try, we cannot succeed. Perhaps Rogers’ vision is based on an unconventionally compassionate view of human nature. However, we cannot live without dreams and ideals, we cannot move forward without a glimpse of what might be, and we cannot afford to dismiss the ideals of “the quiet revolutionary” without at least considering the possibility that in the imperfect striving towards their realization may lie a better way forward in all aspects of human relationships. As O’Donohue (2003) reminds us, a commitment to ideals is compatible with an acknowledgement of imperfection and brokenness: “The beauty of the true ideal is its hospitality towards woundedness, weakness, failure and fall-back” (O’Donohue, p. 191). We are all wounded and weak in some respects, and, therefore, we are all in need of better, more genuine and more enriching relationships with our fellow human beings. Perhaps it is time to revisit the ideals of “the quiet revolutionary”! As Thorne (2003) warns, “Rogers is even more a man for our times whose prophetic insight we ignore at our peril” (p. ix).

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¹⁸ I am grateful for the helpful comments and recommendations of Eddy Elmer in his review of this article in its original draft. This present, revised, version owes much to Eddy's insights.

¹⁹ In 1993, the journal *Humanistic Education and Development* published an interesting debate on the decline of client-centered counselling, particularly in the United States. Two of the contributors, C. H. Patterson and David J. Cain, offered differing opinions regarding the source of this decline; Patterson argued for a resistance to ad-hoc changes to the basic tenets of Rogers' approach while Cain suggested that this attitude of "unquestioning faith" had been hostile to evolution and development within the theory and practice of client-centered psychotherapy. Patterson asserted his personal commitment to Rogers' approach; Cain (1993) outlined what he perceived as some of the failings in Rogers' theory: "Rogers' theory of personality and psychotherapy is an elegant but rudimentary theory that barely addressed the issue of how personality develops. It provided very little help in understanding the wide varieties of disturbing and pathological behaviours ... that render people dysfunctional in varying degrees" (p. 134). However, this debate was confined to an assessment of Rogers's theories within the counselling setting and did not address the value of these theories in the wider, non-psychotherapeutic world.

²⁰ Buber (2004a) argues that when we allow the "I-It" way of viewing the world to dominate our thinking and actions, we are spiritually emaciated and pauperized, and our lives are a narrow reflection of what they could be. The potential of the human being, and his/her potential relationship with his/her world, is thus restricted and distorted: "The fulfilment of this nature and disposition is thwarted by the man who has come to terms with the world of *It* that it is to be experienced and used. For now instead of freeing that which is bound up in that world he suppresses it, instead of looking at it he observes it, instead of accepting it as it is, he turns it to his own account" (p. 37).

²¹ The contemporary theorist and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek (2001), offers an ironic commentary on the lack of "realness" in our contemporary lives: "in a digitalised universe that is artificially constructed ... we seem to live more and more with the thing deprived of its substance" (etext). Žižek (1999) refers to the myriad forms of interpassivity whereby even emotions are experienced indirectly, as in canned laughter, mock horror, and the many adult variations on the Japanese toy, *tamagochi*, where feelings of love and care are delegated to inanimate objects: "*tamagochi* is a machine which allows you to satisfy your need to love your neighbour ... without bothering your actual neighbours with your intrusive compassion" (p. 109). Thus, Žižek (2006) believes that "in our 'society of the spectacle', in which what we experience as everyday reality more and more takes the form of the lie made real, Freud's insights show their true value" (etext).

²² The analogy between human and plant organisms is rejected by many of Rogers' critics who claim that

even if the analogy applies to physiological potential and maturation it has no validity in relation to emotional, mental, or psychological growth.

²³ Rogers' optimistic and positive view of human nature has been criticized for its failure to take into account the reality of evil and its myriad manifestations throughout history. This issue was the subject of an open correspondence between Rogers and Rollo May, published in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Volume 22, Issue 3, pp. 8–21.

²⁴ The existentialist corollary of the concept of “fully-functioning” may be the concept of “authenticity.” However, some existentialist philosophers differentiate between their conception of the human being and personality development and that of the humanistic approach. One such philosopher is Emmy van Deurzen (2002), who, echoing Rogers' stance, outlines the difference thus: “Humanistic approaches perceive human beings as basically positive creatures who develop constructively, given the right conditions. The existential position is that people may evolve in any direction, good or bad, and that any reflection on what constitutes good or bad makes it possible to exercise one's choice in the matter” (pp. 50–51).

²⁵ The question of morality, and its external and subjective origins, continues to be a subject of philosophical debate. In what is considered his most controversial work, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche (2003) provides a critique of morality, values, and philosophy. In calling for a re-valuation of all morals, Nietzsche brings into question common assumptions regarding accepted values and moral virtues which have been extolled and encouraged as being inherent to human nature. He rejects the assumption that these virtues are inherent to human nature or that they are natural to humankind, and he disputes any absolutist conception of morality. Rather, Nietzsche (1984) argues that “values” and codes of morality are “in a continual state of fluctuation” (p. 53), and he (Nietzsche, 2003) seeks to expose the cultural and historical relativity of our values, crucially our moral values, and “the utility which dominates moral value-judgements” (p. 122).

For an interesting and contemporary discussion of the question of morality, see the debate ongoing in the magazine *Philosophy Now*, Issues 81 and 82.

SELF-SOULSTICE MODEL OF AFFIRMATION

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ABSTRACT

Self-affirmation is based on the consistency of how adaptively and morally one sees oneself, and the authenticity and consistency of how one presents oneself to others. The ability to affirm self is rooted in one's self-concept, which is deeply connected to self-image and self-integrity. Oftentimes, individuals have difficulty affirming themselves as a result of a wounded self-concept, impeding their ability to affirm others and difference in general. The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation outlines four stages that clarify the evolutionary process that ties the manifestation of affirming others to self-affirmation and living authentically. This model contends that the soul (i.e., the intrinsic self) is the core of the self, where affirmation begins. This process, which places the self at the center of all stages, demonstrates that there can be no true affirming of others without affirmation of self.

Existential psychology in its simplest terms is about human existence and the human drama of survival and flourishing (Wong, 2009). Seeking to make sense of how one comes to terms with the basic facets of life (e.g., beliefs and values, choices, relationships, etc.) in the face of setbacks and anxieties is an existential axiom (Koole, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2006; Wong, 2009). Such understanding can be found at the center of one's identity. A clear sense of personal identity can also clarify how one navigates through life and how authentically one presents in diverse experiences.

Most people would agree that we are relational beings, in the sense that our connections with others contribute to the formation of what and how we perceive, believe, value, and choose (Craig, 2008). As humans, we desire connectedness and to be in relationship with others. According to Corey (1996), we desire to have a meaningful role in one another's world and want to feel that the presence of others is significant in our world. Wong (2010) asserts that meaning is constructed not only socially, but also individually. While we may always be extrinsically in relation to others, we also are intrinsically in relation with ourselves—our own interests, goals, and choices that facilitate a sense of self-worth and stable sense of self (Schimel, Arndt, Banko, & Cook, 2004). This core entity, according to Landau and colleagues (2011), stands for one's "essence" or true self, rather than the self that is publicly presented yet not always consistent with the true self.

Consistency and certainty of who one is and how one fits into the world, particularly when faced with conflicts between different aspects of self, unclear boundaries between self and non-self, or limited self-insight is an existential dilemma (Koole et al., 2006) and concerns how one navigates connectedness, intrinsically as well as extrinsically. The self is both the center and the container of individual consciousness (Berke & Schneider, 2006). This container is the receptacle for one's awareness of how one exists in relation to the world, and it includes feelings, thoughts, memories, actions, experiences, and all the elements that comprise a person's uniqueness and sense of identity. In addition, from an existential perspective, the self is involved in the creation of meaning for one's life.

At the center of the self is the soul. While the word *soul* is often connected with religion and spirituality, many scholars committed to the "question of being" have shown that the use of the word denotes what appears to be consistent with the intrinsic self—or what Landau and colleagues (2011) call "the true, core self or who people think they truly are" (p. 79). Berke and Schneider (2006) define the soul as the "central, invigorating core of one's existence" (p. 338). Freud observed the soul as a purely psychological feature essential to one's human existence, while Heidegger viewed it as "one's own being-in-oneself and for-one-self" (Craig, 2008). Linnquist (2004) views the soul as one's "center of sentience" and "perceivability." Existentially, the meaning of soul has been connected with one's own situated gatherings of lived experiences (Craig, 2008). For the purposes of this paper, the soul is defined as the intrinsic self—one's own interests, core values, goals, and choices that are less connected to the demands of others. It is the true center of one's existence and, according to Lippai (2008), the real self, which must be benefited and cared for.

Relevant to self is self-acceptance. Self-acceptance constitutes a core dimension of personal meaning and psychological well-being, according to researchers (MacInnes, 2006; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Wong, 1998). Self-acceptance implies affirmation of one's worth in spite of one's limitations and weakness (Wong, 1998). Self-acceptance, or self-affirmation, for most, is contingent on the integrity of self-image and self-worth.

Mead (Morris, 1934) asserts that self-image is often formed and managed by one's perception of external views. In other words, perception of self is formed and influenced by one's interactions with others. These external interactions facilitate development of one's extrinsic self. Differentiating one's own inner self from external influences, however, is a critical aspect of identity construction (Koole et al., 2006) and development of self-worth. The intrinsic self comprises one's own interests, goals, and choices for action that are comparatively less connected to the demands of others (Schimel et al., 2004). Affirming one's intrinsic value is essential to developing one's sense of self-worth and acceptance (Wong, 2011).

In 2004, Schimel, Arndt, Banko, and Cook assessed the impact that focusing on intrinsic aspects of self-worth had on self-affirmation. Results indicated that affirming the intrinsic self rather than the extrinsic one reduced defensiveness in social situations and improved cognitive and social functioning when feeling threatened. Spencer, Fein, and Lomore (2001) found similar results when examining how individuals maintain their self-images when interpersonal aspects of self are threatened. When self-affirmed by thinking about an important core value, individuals seemed less likely to resort to self-

protective efforts to restore their self-image. In a more recent study, Wakslak and Trope (2011), too, found that when individuals were able to draw on their most important self value, they adopted a high-level of self-construal, influencing a positive perception of self and objects external to self. Research has demonstrated that people often resist information that conflicts with their personal views and may even see those who oppose them as misguided (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004). According to self-affirmation theory, as described by Aronson and colleagues (1999), “thought and action are guided by a strong motivation to maintain an overall self-image of moral and adaptive adequacy” (p. 128). Although how one truthfully sees oneself may be affected by cultures, groups, and situations (Sherman et al., 2009), self-affirmation is most plausible when a person considers him- or herself good and appropriate. In the face of a specific challenge, reflecting on important self values reminds people of their broader identity (e.g., who they are and what is important to them), thereby reducing the pressure to defend a particular aspect of the self (Jaremka, Bunyun, Collins, & Sherman, 2011). Hurley (1993) linked self-acceptance with high regard for others. Thus, it appears that the better one is able to accept and affirm oneself, the more capable and, likely, more willing one will be to accept and affirm others.

This paper asserts several points. First, learning to affirm self is more difficult than learning to affirm others because affirming self usually involves the difficult task of spending time alone, nurturing the intrinsic self—the soul. Learning to affirm self is an internal process that starts at the soul, which expands one’s perceptions, allowing one to be receptive of the world without possessing it (Berghash & Jillson, 1998). Further, this work with the soul integrates inner reality with larger realities (Berke & Schneider, 2006). This internal process involves an examination of one’s strengths and challenges, as well as threats to one’s self-image. For the purposes of this paper, the impact of such threats will be referred to as “wounds” or “woundedness.” This paper asserts that it is through this examination that we can begin the healing of woundedness, a healing that opens the door for affirmation of self and, later, affirmation of others. Finally, this paper asserts that the process of examining, healing, and affirming self and others is systemic and epigenetic in nature in that all the stages are related to and contingent on the others (Erikson, 1997).

A key existential postulate is the experience of aloneness. Learning to “stand alone,” that is, developing a sense of our own separateness and an intrinsic relationship with ourselves, is critical to developing healthy, affirming relationships with self and others. Being alone and taking deliberate pause to connect with the intrinsic self (the soul) is therefore foundational to this entire process, defining the SOULstice in the four stages of the Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation.

Stage one: self-examination

The first stage of the Self-SOULstice is Self-Examination. Self-examination involves exploration of the soul and all that one’s own sense of identity contains. Self-examination enables discovery and understanding of the essence of one’s individuality (Fein & Spencer, 1997). In other words, through exploration of self a person can become conscious of his or her self-concept.

For most, self-concept is deeply connected to self-image and self-integrity, that is, how one sees oneself and the authenticity (i.e. genuineness) and consistency with which one presents oneself to others. Self-integrity relates in particular to the presentation of one's feelings about self, others, self in relation to others, ideas, difference, and sameness. According to Berghash and Jillson (1998), authenticity and integrity are associated with the soul. Goldman and Kernis (2002) further assert that an authentic self is the unobstructed operation of the core (self). A major undertaking for most is to sustain authenticity and consistency of self, especially when faced with the inevitable setbacks and disappointments of daily life (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). One's perception of these setbacks and disappointments is influenced by both external messages and internal beliefs about what should be. According to Fey (1954), an individual's expressed attitudes may not be his "real" or determining attitudes. The conflict between self-image and self-integrity may cause a person to respond to situations insincerely, overly cautiously, dismissively, prejudicially, or defensively in an effort to protect his or her overall self-concept. For instance, by justifying and acting on prejudices, one may be able to reclaim a feeling of mastery and self-worth, saving oneself from having to confront the real sources of self-concept threat (Fein & Spencer, 1997). These efforts to protect self-concept are problematic, however, because they compromise the integrity of one's relationship with others (Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

Self-examination is a time to reflect upon one's relationship with self, the true source of these threats. Spencer, Josephs, and Steele (1993) maintain that nobody is good at everything and so each person has good points and bad points. Learning to affirm self requires that we honestly recognize and confront our limitations and the dark side of the human condition (Wong, 2009). Thus, self-examination toward self-affirmation involves not only acknowledging positive self-traits, but also those traits that challenge and limit us, represent our woundedness, and threaten our self-concept. The individual must come to terms with these facets of self, and decide to either affirm or change them. Spencer and colleagues assert that self-examination resources should be committed to memory so that one can connect with one's core self without external distractions. This sober self-examination, wherein one determines the positive and damaged aspects of one's self concept, is the first and most important move toward establishing an authentic relationship with one's self, a relationship that will affect relationship with others. Without self-examination, healing is not possible.

Stage two: self-healing

The soul has the potential to repair, restore, and renew itself (Berghash & Jillson, 1998). The Self-Healing stage of the SOULstice continues and builds on the process of exposing vulnerabilities and less than favorable self-truths, acknowledging that one has been affected by woundedness (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Acknowledging the challenges, limitations or wounded components during self-examination allows one to reconcile such components with who the person has become, not necessarily who they are authentically, and restore the self's damaged core. For many, past negative events, hurts, and weaknesses have consumed and damaged the core of their being. Many times, these events, hurts, and weaknesses are kept covered to protect us from further damage by

others or ourselves. This covering can be conscious or unconscious and is driven by what researchers (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman et al., 2009) call the “self-system.” The overall goal of this system is to protect an image of its self-integrity so that it can restore self-worth when threatened (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This covering often manifests as lack of acceptance and bias towards others. Seeing oneself as a “healthy person” contributes to biased assessments of others (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This lack of acceptance or affirmation of others, however, is likely rooted in the inability to affirm and authenticate self because damage to the soul weakens self-image, self-worth, and self-concept. This internal damage interferes with one’s ability to cope effectively with the perceived threat of inconsistencies to this self-system. According to Steele (1988), rather than coping with the inconsistencies, individuals tend to cope with the meanings conveyed by the inconsistencies. One way of coping with such meanings is by engaging in behavior that is unaffirming and discriminatory, thus allowing the individual to feel better about him- or herself, but not necessarily affirming self or alleviating the self-system threat (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

This unaffirming, inauthentic behavior toward self and others covers woundedness and becomes familiar. Self-healing involves changing what is familiar to what is healthy. An elementary condition for change is assuming responsibility for the way one thinks about self, and the way one responds to the internal and external messages that perpetuate unfavorable, and sometimes false, self-truths, or “mis-truths.” Long-held beliefs are often tied to important identities and may be given up with great reluctance (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This part of self-healing requires a great deal of patience.

Further, self-healing involves not only reconciling wounded components of the intrinsic self, but also reconciling its positive attributes acknowledged during self-examination and developing new, restorative attributes for the intrinsic self. This stage also requires a healthy, strong support system that can facilitate change. This support system also provides education and guidance during change, assistance through mistakes made during change, and acceptance/affirmation of the individual during change. One may need to revise one’s idea of a healthy, stable support system and understand that support can come in many different forms. Being attuned to what components of self need healing is essential to getting appropriate, reliable support.

Stage three: self-affirmation

The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation asserts that one must learn to accept and affirm self before being able to authentically affirm others. During self-healing, the soul is restored from woundedness as one learns to view oneself more authentically and develop healthier responses to messages that threaten the self-concept. Moreover, the person learns to take responsibility for making the most of his or her strengths, developing weaknesses or challenges, and making decisions about one’s own existence, based on perceived needs. During self-affirmation, one comes to accept where one is as a “true self,” facilitating not only a healthy view of self, but also unconditional self-acceptance. This unconditional acceptance allows full, genuine, and unreserved affirmation of self, regardless of the approval of others (MacInnes, 2006).

More than self-respect, self-affirmation also includes a sense of being independent and responsible for one's own actions (Rigby, 2001). So, while one may possess both positive and imperfect traits, the affirmed self can not only make amends for woundedness (of others) caused by one's imperfections but also acknowledge that such imperfections may require further examination of self. The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation maintains that one's identity as good and appropriate lies in this willingness to amend and examine.

Self-affirmation leads one to accept oneself as human and fallible, someone who sometimes makes mistakes (MacInnes, 2006) and sometimes needs help. With the continued assistance of a support system, the self-affirmed person learns to be this healthy, authentic person in various settings with various others. According to Wong (2009), authenticity has been a recurrent theme in existential literature. He asserts, "Authentic people assume responsibility to live in a way that is consistent with their true nature and core values" (p. 3). As an affirmed person, individuals can maintain self-integrity (Sherman & Cohen, 2006) and authenticity even when their self-image is perceived threatened, having mastered enhancement of their self-worth and no longer needing to protect it.

Self-affirmation is the most succinct, seemingly laconic stage of the Self-SOULstice model, as the true essence of self-affirmation lies in the process of self-examination and self-healing and cannot occur without these stages. According to Fey (1954), self-acceptance firmly and positively relates to acceptance of others. Thus, self-affirmation is the determinant for authentically affirming others.

Stage four: self-externalization

Self-Externalization, the final stage of the SOULstice, is an extension of Self-Affirmation. According to Craig (2008), affirming the self in a way that focuses people on their intrinsic value might allow them to more freely and successfully engage in tasks that may potentially threaten their self-worth. When individuals emerge from the sequence outlined above, after self-examination, restoration, and acceptance, they are more able and likely more willing to affirm others where they are. In a 2001 study, Rigby found a significant positive correlation between variables assessing self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

Self-affirmation has the potential to stop chronic self-doubts from spiraling into self-protective and defensive relationship behaviors (Jaremka, Bunyan, Collins, & Sherman, 2011). Sherman and Cohen (2006) found that individuals who were self-affirmed seemed to display more balanced cognitive and affective responses to difference than their non-affirmed peers. When self-affirmed, one is able to maintain oneself as true and valid, while asserting oneself positively. Additionally, such people are able to objectively process and evaluate information that might threaten their self-concept and be more open to ideas that would otherwise be difficult to accept (Cohen, Sherman, Bastardi, Hsu, & McGoey, 2007; Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2004; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Thus the affirmed individual may extend outward to affirm and support others in their current self-concepts. The affirmed person need not adopt for herself what is true for the other person, but rather accept and validate that which the other person considers

true of his self-concept. In this regard, the affirmed individual is better able to evaluate others positively, yet independently, in a non-defensive, open manner (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In essence, the affirmed individual is better able to facilitate a more positive experience of relatedness.

Summary

Researchers (MacInnes, 2006; Rigby, 2001; Sherman & Cohen, 2006) agree that self-affirmation is significant in overall psychological well-being and, along with affirming others, is a complementary aspect of positive mental health. The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation clarifies an evolutionary process that ties the manifestation of affirming others to self-affirmation and living authentically. This process demonstrates that there can be no true affirming of others without affirming self.

The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation occurs in four stages that are related to and contingent upon each other. Further, the model demonstrates the innate nature of self-affirmation and places “self” at the center of all stages. The soul, which is the core of the self, requires nurturing in order to evolve authentically. Thus, self-affirmation must be innate and not manipulated in order for an authentic, true self to emerge (Sherman et al., 2009). Therefore, the first stage of the Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation is self-examination. During this time, one explores one’s intrinsic self and own sense of individuality to develop consciousness of one’s self-concept. The most important stage of the SOULstice, self-examination requires that the individual stand alone with self, free of external distractions, to reflect upon his relationship with self and others and acknowledge those traits that compose his self-concept. Upon acknowledgement of such traits, the individual is then able to progress to self-healing, at which stage the intrinsic self is restored from the woundedness acknowledged during self-examination. The person also develops a more genuine self-view and healthier responses to the internal and external messages that threaten the intrinsic self, shifting focus from self-worth protection to self-worth enhancement while asserting oneself positively. During the final stage of the Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation, the individual is better able and more willing to evaluate others positively, yet independently of how they evaluate self. Self-externalization calls for the individual to extend outward his or her affirmed self to affirm and support others in their present self-concept.

The goal of self-affirmation, according to Steele (1988), is to maintain one’s global self-image as adaptively or morally adequate. Self-affirmation, then, is based on the consistency of how adaptively and morally adequate one sees oneself and how authentically one presents to others. The Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation extends the goal and process of self-affirmation to include the affirmation of others. Often people affirm themselves in social judgments based on their own self-evaluative needs rather than on the target of the judgment (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Thus, it would appear that if one does not authentically view oneself as appropriate and positive, one’s judgments of others will reflect similarly. Woundedness of the soul prevents consistency, harmony, and congruity of self’s perceptiveness (Berghash & Jillson, 1998), impeding affirmation of self as well as others. One can love others only to the extent that one loves oneself (Fey, 1954).

Though empirical data supporting the Self-SOULstice Model of Affirmation is warranted, this model is more than speculative as it connects various existential postulates and has merit within the conceptual framework of existential therapy. Therapists who practice existential approaches can assist clients in taking seriously their own subjective experience of the world. Therapists can also help clients understand the role and importance of self-awareness, as it pertains to the impact that their intrinsic relationship with self has on their experience of relatedness externally. Finally, in the process of helping clients become more conscious of this impact, therapists can encourage and challenge clients to take responsibility for any change the client feels is necessary to facilitate fewer measures to protect self-concept and change to living a more authentic, affirmed life—internally and externally.

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THE JOURNEY OF SHAKESPEARE'S *PERICLES*: YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER PERSONAL MEANING THROUGH THE THEME OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION

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ABSTRACT

The *Looking for Shakespeare* program has evolved over a period of eight years at New York University and at Goldsmiths University in London. Its non-traditional rehearsal processes are designed to support young people by challenging them to deepen their understanding of one another, and their engagement with Shakespeare. Since issues of identity are of paramount importance for young people, we explore the relationship between identity and character. We seek to challenge and extend the identities of adolescents, so that the Shakespeare characters they create will be extensions of themselves. In our *Pericles* rehearsal process, the theme of death and resurrection became a focus and catalyst of forging new identities from disruptive personal experiences. Our company of young people was challenged to examine the implications of Shakespeare's narrative in their own lives: the play's events, especially the resurrection of Thaisa from the dead, stimulated their awareness of their own death and resurrection experiences and helped them to work together as a team.

The *Looking for Shakespeare* program has evolved over a period of eight years at New York University and the University of London. Its non-traditional rehearsal process is designed to support young people by challenging them to deepen their understanding of one another and their engagement with Shakespeare. In engaging the young people in the process of "looking for Shakespeare," we have recreated some of the conditions that mirror Shakespeare's creative process, such as the emphasis on collaborative improvisation, and creating a play within the play.

The study of Shakespeare is generally regarded as an essential element of young people's education. Teachers work to ensure that young people's knowledge of Shakespeare will help them to get good results in SATs exams; in *Looking for Shakespeare* we have the additional aim of making his work more accessible to them so that Shakespeare's plays can inform their understanding of contemporary life, in order to assist them in their personal and career development. Since identity-building is of paramount importance for adolescents, in *Looking for Shakespeare* we explore the relationship between identity and character. We seek to challenge and extend the identities of adolescents, so that the Shakespeare characters they create will be authentic extensions of themselves.

We found that metaphor, which transfers meaning from one thing to another, worked very effectively in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, and that exploring the literal and metaphoric aspects of death and resurrection in the play had a profound effect on the teenage participants. Musing on the power of metaphor in theatre, Dan Lerner (2004) observes:

Dramatic fictions are particularly vivid in this respect, because they embody the imaginative reality they construct. By physicalizing a play in the theatre we set before ourselves in the baldest manner the fact that the elements of the dramatic fiction—the characters, the plot, the setting, and the action that they express—are only emblems. They stand for something else. And the more vividly they appear to be themselves, the more strongly they stand for something else, and ask us to “understand” that. (p. 71)

We used a contemporary metaphor to frame our play, since constructing a play within a play sets up a reflexive relationship between the actor and the character, so that the participants are encouraged to see themselves as actors playing a character, rather than just performing in a theatre event. This sets up a metacognitive relationship within the ensemble that positively transforms their adolescent identities in different ways.

The metaphoric setting we used for the *Looking for Shakespeare* production of *Pericles* was a contemporary river festival (loosely based on the Thames River Festival in London). Participants were members of an acting company that performed *Pericles* in honour of the goddess Diana, who also appears as a character in the play. The company of twenty young people explored Shakespeare’s late romance and their own identities through improvisation, visual art, creative writing and performance. They created Me Projects or self-images, wrote about their personal immigration journeys to London from Africa and the Caribbean, and created their River Festival and Shakespeare characters over a four-week rehearsal period, culminating in two performances for parents and friends.

Shakespeare’s play begins with Gower the medieval poet telling us about the incestuous relationship between King Antiochus and his daughter. Pericles is wise enough not to speak the truth he learns when he solves the riddle, unlike previous suitors whose severed heads are silent witnesses to their failure. The shock that Pericles experiences on solving the riddle not only makes him realise his love for Antiochus’ daughter will be short-lived, but he knows he is in danger of losing his life, since his secret would cost Antiochus his honour. He barely escapes back to Tyre, pursued by Antiochus’ assassin. This adventure marks the beginning of Pericles’ hero journey (Campbell 1949, p. 30). Pericles sets sail for Tharsus, arriving just in time to save the city from starvation and despair. Leaving Tharsus very much a hero, Pericles is shipwrecked in a storm at sea. Three fishermen discover Pericles washed ashore at Pentapolis, humbled by his near drowning and the loss of his ship and crew.

For Pericles, identity transformation occurs initially as a result of having lost his ship and crew, yet deciding to woo Princess Thaisa without the status of a rich prince. He is the underdog; yet in risking derision he discovers that he is worthy as the man he is, not just because he is a prince. Soon after marrying Thaisa, Pericles sets sail with his new bride to return to Tyre and take up his rightful place on the throne. Sadly, Thaisa dies in childbirth in another storm at sea; she is sealed in a coffin and thrown overboard. Baby Marina survives and is left with her nurse to grow up in Tharsus. Thaisa undergoes a literal resurrection when her coffin is recovered at Ephesus, and she is awoken from the dead by Cerimon. She thereupon decides to devote her life to serving there as a priestess in the Temple of Diana. But literal death and resurrection is only part of Shakespeare’s story.

Metaphoric death and resurrection occur when Princess Marina, having been raised from infancy and schooled in the arts by her nurse, is captured by pirates and sold into sexual slavery in a brothel in Mitalene. There she suffers a loss of identity that can only be described as metaphoric death. In the brothel she meets Lysimachus, the governor of Mitalene, who is intent on having his way with her. Instead of accepting her role as a prostitute in the brothel, Marina shames Lysimachus into giving her money with which to purchase her freedom and to establish a school of the arts. She is resurrected metaphorically as the governor's wife.

The scene between Lysimachus and Marina has often been noted as an example of a strong female role model for young people. It is remarkable not only because Marina resists Lysimachus' attempts to categorise her as a bawd, but because she refuses to succumb to his objective gaze. As he presses her, asking how long she has been a prostitute, she shocks him by saying that she has been of that profession "Ere since I can remember" (Act IV, Sc. 5, 68–71):

Lys: Did you go to't so young, were you a gamester at five or at seven?

Mar: Earlier too, sir, if I now be one.

Audiences today may be shocked at the reference to child prostitution in Shakespeare's plays, but *Pericles* mixes high and low genres of writing and characterization in a way that commentators have described as shockingly experimental:

Pericles is... a play of extremities, of foul and fair closely joined. The most lubricious and bawdy prose is placed beside some of Shakespeare's most plangent verse, so that all seems to cohere as if by miracle. The great dirge to the sea deeps gives way to an image of prostitutes that 'with continual action, are even as good as rotten.' (Ackroyd 2006, p. 432)

The loss of intersubjectivity in young people can be caused by a shock in the course of the child's development, whether caused by loss or separation from parents, by war, or by the betrayal of trust. In the scene between Lysimachus and Marina, Marina shocks Lysimachus into recognising that he was seeing her as the object of his sexual desires and not as a person:

I did not think
Thou could'st have spoke so well,
Ne'er dreamed thou could's't.
Had I brought hither a corrupted mind,
Thy speech had altered it. (Act IV, Sc. 5, 94–97)

Marina possesses, through her education in the arts at the hands of her nurse Lychorida, an unassailable intersubjectivity that withstood the loss of her father, her stepmother's attempt on her life, and her kidnapping by pirates. It must be noted that her absolute faith in the goddess Diana helps Marina to be resolute in the face of adversity:

If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep,
United I still my virgin knot will keep.
Diana aid my purpose. (Act IV, Sc. 2, 119–21)

Throughout our lives, we die many metaphorical deaths and shed our old selves, in order to be resurrected in a new and wiser self. But we do not lose the earlier versions of the self; they are discontinuous, and always available to us, so that we can spiral downwards in life as well as upwards.

Young people especially need spiritual stories to guide them, especially in this material world, in which corporate messages compete to imprint their narrow commercial messages on young people's minds. In contrast, Shakespeare's *Pericles*, possibly influenced by the medieval Digby saint's play *St Mary Magdalene*, suggests that death is merely an illusion: resurrection follows death as certainly as day follows night:

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. (Romans 6:5)

As Marina must survive a series of metaphoric deaths before maturity, so young people experience the challenges in their lives as literal and metaphoric deaths to make them stronger before reaching maturity. The metaphoric deaths in childhood, and the literal deaths of grandparents and parents, prepare young people to cope with adult crises. Paradoxically, when well-meaning parents try to protect their children from these inner rites of passage they can prevent them from developing into strong, independent adults. *Looking for Shakespeare* encouraged participants to reflect on their metaphoric deaths by developing an inner dialogue and reflecting on the struggles they had already faced in their lives.

In the first week of the *Looking for Shakespeare* rehearsal process, participants began by drawing their full body silhouettes, trusting a relative stranger to trace their body's outline in chalk. They then wrote descriptive text on their own virtual skins. They filled their body outlines with hidden inner qualities, dreams and desires. They explored water metaphors, and added more layers inside and out, which described their Shakespeare characters and their contemporary characters, actors performing *Pericles* at a river festival. This process helped them to create a dialogue that they could extend to better understand the inner lives of their characters in the play.

At the beginning of the third week of the *Looking for Shakespeare* process, each participant shared their Me Project with the ensemble, while they listened. No one was allowed to comment during the five minute sharing, though anyone could ask a question of the presenter at the end. We observed the physical comfort participants had with one another as they sat in a circle around the Me Project being shared. This level of trust was built over the first two weeks through drama games and improvisations around Shakespeare's text.

During the first two weeks, each young person was asked to write the story of how he or she came to live in London. This journey writing functioned as a bridge from the adolescents' personal lives to the character journeys they encountered in *Pericles*. We edited the journey stories and incorporated them in the final performances as stories of how the participant's contemporary character came to be part of the acting ensemble at the River Festival. In performance, as they shifted back and forth from their Shakespeare characters to their River Festival characters, their personal journey stories stood shoulder to shoulder with Shakespeare's story of *Pericles*' journey.

According to Paul Ricoeur, a person's identity narrative can tell us about the connections that unify the various key events in their lives and their assessments of the significance of those events. "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character" (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 147–48).

Ricoeur also points to the importance of community for a person in creating their own identity:

Because my personal identity is a narrative identity, I can make sense of myself only in and through my involvement with others. (Ricoeur 1992)

This helps to explain why the ensemble approach in *Looking for Shakespeare* supported the young people to explore their narrative identities. While the adolescent's first loyalty may be to himself or herself, they developed a belief in supporting one another to tell Pericles' story by helping one another to learn lines, change the set, listen to personal stories, and to improvise when lines are forgotten during performance. For many adolescents, pulling together during the four-week intensive theatre experience is one of the most demanding and rewarding experiences of their lives.

We will now examine five of the participants in turn, to understand how the dynamics of the *Looking for Shakespeare* process enabled their personal transformations. For each, we will offer an example of a participant's Me Project and reflect on how the young person extended their inner and outer selves in order to create their Shakespeare character. We will also reflect on connections between their Shakespeare character and their personal narrative. Each character undergoes a change during the play, which the young actors need to make clear to the audience. In addition, since the larger roles in Shakespeare are divided among several young actors, each actor can choose to play their shared character differently. Each young person also plays a contemporary character that is a member of the River Festival Ensemble that is performing Shakespeare's play, *Pericles*. Thinking, reflecting and talking about all their character changes provides the vocabulary for reflecting about their own personal changes, which is recorded in the Me Projects.

In *Passages*, Gail Sheehy described the series of crises that attend adult life. Similarly, Shakespeare's *Pericles* describes the crises that befall the Prince of Tyre and what he learns from them. When the young people in *Looking for Shakespeare* learn about Pericles' story, and accept the challenge of telling the story to an audience, it becomes their story. This fictional narrative of Pericles' journey is juxtaposed with their own journey narratives and they can create their own personal meaning at the locus where the fictional and personal narratives meet. This is how their adolescent identities are transformed. When John Gower appears on the stage of the Globe Theatre, the Elizabethan audience must have been astonished to see a famous medieval poet come back from the dead to tell the story of Pericles. They would have known that Gower's tomb was in St Mary Overie's Church nearby. So when Gower appears to narrate Pericles' story—

To sing a song that old was sung,
From ashes, ancient Gower is come,
Assuming man's infirmities,
To glad your ear and please your eyes
Act I, 1–4.

—the audience would have experienced the shock of Gower's resurrection from the dead.

Jacob, who played Gower in our play, is similarly shocked to recognize the death and resurrection theme in his own life:

This is a journey where no one else can follow even if they tried. One day when I was struggling on what to write for a short story, my memories kicked in and I found myself not at home writing a short story... nor am I seventeen... I am six hundred years old..., a medieval poet named John Gower.

Jacob's identity becomes fluid in reflection, as he reaches back into his early memories to connect to a time in childhood when the world appeared mysterious:

One of my first memories is set in my father's garden. I am three years old. There is a small pond that is now large compared to me. The pond was peaceful but bleakly mysterious due to the dark water. We only knew what was in there by word. I can't see anything though. This is a pond I usually avoid, but now it calls to me....

The pond is a metaphor that is symbolic of the unknown, the mysterious. As Lerner (2004) observes:

In this way metaphor becomes embroiled in mystery, the large primal mystery of identity. What is the world, my life, nature, death? Who am I, who are you, and what is our fate? And who or what is God? Each of these requires a transfer of meaning from one thing to another, one set of ideas or conceptions to another, to "mean" anything at all (Lerner, 2004, pp. 70–71).

In his Me Project, Jacob incorporates the water imagery into his personal narrative and Shakespeare character. His adolescent loss of physical control helps him to identify with Gower's coming back from then dead and "assuming man's infirmities" to tell the story of the play:

If I was a body of water I would be a river because I can be calm and tense,
provoking and settling.

I am at the mercy of a rising sea as Pericles is.

The sea can make you small.

The sea and wind can abandon you.

This 'Pericles' is Gower's creation.

The body can float on water.

Water is powerful like Gower is over the play.

In each activity of *Looking for Shakespeare*, taking acceptable risks was an essential phrase in our vocabulary. Whether it was taking a risk playing a game, using your voice, connecting with the audience, sharing your Me Project, or creating your characters, participants were always encouraged to be risk-takers. It was understood that the quality of the risk you took was always your own decision, and the risk was different for each participant.

When, encouraged by the recovery of a piece of his armour and the news that King Simonides' daughter, Thaisa, is to choose her favourite from among the knights, Pericles presents himself to the court. Instead of a painted shield, he is able to offer Thaisa only a pitiful branch. Yet his brash courage soon sets him apart from the other knights, and he becomes Thaisa's favourite. In our performance, after the knight's dance, which has the rhythm of a Maori warrior *baka*, Pericles dances with Thaisa to a rock song, *Premonition*. As the drummer drums the techno beat, the two metre cube that is our set moves, and the timelessness of the play calls to us from the past, metaphorically, to illuminate our future. After Thaisa and Pericles' wedding, the first Pericles passes his

armour to the second Pericles to take his place. The final scene in the first half of the play, in which Thaisa dies in a storm giving birth to Marina aboard Pericles' ship, is truly moving. The company sang *Motherless Child* to the baby Marina as Thaisa was sealed in her coffin and thrown overboard. In her personal narrative, Danni, who played Thaisa, revealed that she had lost her mother at an early age:

What journey did I undertake I hear you cry,
the journey of the average life?

From young girl to young woman I have come without the helping hand of my
mum,

And proud without her I stand wondering
if she'll ever really get to know who I am.

Similarly, her character Thaisa must have wondered whether her lost husband Pericles would ever get to know her. In her Me Project she observes,

Like the ocean I appear to be free. [I] am constantly restricted by islands but like the
ocean I will soon react and form a tsunami.

One day during the rehearsal process, Danni's handbag went missing. Although she did not at first want to join in the Me Project session, we encouraged her to put her strong feelings of anger onto her silhouette. She was able to transfer some of her feelings to her self-image, writing the words "violent," "passionate," "feisty," "angry." When exploring the water metaphor, she expressed that she felt the power of a tsunami within. During her reflexive exploration of identity, she observed: "I find myself and myself doesn't like me." This is an excellent example of the opportunity and risk involved for adolescents in reflexive identity building. Instead of turning her anger on the other participants, Danni was able to channel her anger into an exploration of her own identity.

Two conceptions of time, external temporal order and zones of personal time (Giddens, 1994), co-existed in *Looking for Shakespeare*. While there was a tight schedule for the four weeks, the planning for the next day took place at the end of each day, based on what the young people had accomplished. We planned time for playing games, improvisation, visual art, music, movement, writing journey stories, learning lines, rehearsal and field trips. The last half-hour of each day incorporated the "check-out", during which each participant had an opportunity to say what was working for her or him, or was not working. No one could comment on what each person said. During some check-outs, the young people could only ask questions about the play or the process, which were recorded for reflection. So, while tightly structured, each day's schedule provided personal time for play and socialisation, as well as for rehearsal. We thought of the different conceptions of time as integrative, like the strands of a rope woven together, rather than additive. This view of time allowed for the countdown to opening night, while simultaneously encouraging the young people to take responsibility for their own character development and costume design. In short, we encouraged them to take ownership of their character development and helped them to establish zones of personal time to do so. In these zones of personal time, participants could explore how their life memories could connect to their characters.

Emma, who played both Cerimon, the Lord who raises Thaisa from the dead after her coffin washes up on the shore in Ephesus, and Bawd, who ran the brothel in Mitalene, was skilled at shifting from one character to the other. In her personal

narrative, she demonstrates a remarkable ability to imaginatively establish several characters in the distanced time of World War II. She demonstrates her ability to shift character fluidly, playing all the roles in her story from her grandmother as a child to her great grandmother:

My grandmother told me she was evacuated to Wales in World War II. Hundreds of children squashed aboard, hundreds of mothers dying inside, but still appearing as strong and powerful as ever. The whistle blew, two tears fell from my grandmother's eyes, yet still she smiled. Mothers reached out from the platform, children from the train, hands met, but just as soon as their fingertips had met, they were torn apart.

"When are we going home?" It was the simplest question, yet the hardest I have ever had to answer. I told her that when all the bad people have gone and the war had stopped, we would be able to go home, but until then it wasn't safe. The look in her eyes was that of confusion and hurt. As the tears started to roll from her hazel eyes, it was as if time itself had stopped.

Before we were sent away, I'd been wondering who I really was, trying to find the real me, what was my purpose in life? I thought I was weak, and only now did I see the true strength in me. Only now did I *truly* understand the meaning of home.

Similarly, in her Me Project, she demonstrates the same role flexibility, representing herself as a waterfall:

I can be high or low. I can be the calm pool at the bottom or the rapids before the fall. Or I can be the free flowing water, which is fun, crazy and free!

Emma's career plan is to pursue an acting career, which would allow her to continue to explore this fluidity of self through role. She is prepared to accept the metaphorical death represented by the loss of job opportunities at auditions, as long as she is resurrected metaphorically with each new role:

I need to get proper singing lessons, continue acting and dancing, lose weight and get fit. And I need to get ready for a lot of knockbacks and rejections from jobs.

From the beginning in *Looking for Shakespeare*, we engaged the adolescents physically in games, Me Projects, and improvisations. We showed them how to breathe using their diaphragms so they could develop more powerful voices. In the Me Projects, the adolescents engaged in active reflection with their own body images. The purpose of these activities was in anticipation of a performance of the play in which each participant would play several characters, physicalizing each expressively.

After Thaisa is resurrected from the dead by Cerimon in Ephesus, she becomes a priestess in the temple of Diana. The scene then shifts to Mitalene in Act IV, where the teenage princess Marina is sold by pirates into sexual slavery. Boult, a pimp in the brothel in Mitalene, was ordered to advertise the new arrival for the brothel's clients. Rachel undertook her character's task with physical commitment and vocal power:

I warrant you mistress, thunder shall not so awake the beds of eels, as my giving out her beauty stirs up the lewdly inclined.

(Act IV, Sc. 2)

In Rachel's Me Project, we can see she has drawn pink, white, and blue butterfly wings, and the word "flying" on her arm next to them. The metamorphosis of the

butterfly from seeming death in the cocoon to new identity parallels the change in her character, Boulton. At the beginning of Act IV, Scene 5, Boulton wants to have his way with Marina, inducting her into the life of the prostitute. However, by the end of the scene he agrees to help her win her freedom so she can open a school for the arts. As she writes on her Me Project:

I am spontaneous.

I go with the flow of my internal river.

Rachel imagines her River Festival character dancing, celebrating, reflecting her identity as “happy, energetic, giggling, pretty.” Yet she is also aware of her darker side, describing herself as “annoying, cunning, manipulative, freaky and loud,” qualities she enjoyed exploring when playing her character, Boulton.

For all the participants, Pericles’ journey in the play became a metaphor for the trajectory of the self, assisting them to connect their past with their anticipated future. When they wrote stories of their own individual journeys to London from Europe or Africa or the Americas, they could reflect on their own self-trajectories and think about how sharing their personal journey stories as part of their performance in the play would become a moment in their anticipated future. We also discussed their anticipated real-life career choices with them, and these dreams were often incorporated into their Me Projects.

After suffering many losses, Pericles is finally reunited with his wife Thaisa and his daughter Marina at the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. Now they can begin a new life, Marina and Lysimachus as the Queen and King of Tyre, and Pericles and Thaisa as rulers in Pentapolis. Angela, who played Pericles in Act V, went through her own metaphoric death and resurrection when she was a young child, as she relates in her personal narrative:

Throughout my life I’ve felt that I am one of the luckiest children alive, because during my life I have been subjected to dreadful and horrific things that a child should not experience. It was not long ago when a civil war took place in Sierra Leone. The rich and the poor were separated because of greed for land and power; innocent people were tortured because of political conventions. Two months into the war we were not allowed to go outside, we were forced to stay inside with very little food. At that time I was about five years old...

Both my parents and little sister were in London. However, the war was still raging in Sierra Leone. I was taken to the airport in the dead of night so we were not captured nor seen. I got on the plane safely and set off to see my family. I was full of excitement and curious to meet my family, even though a part of me was scared because I had never left my homeland before...

Seeing my parents brought tears upon my eyes, even theirs, because we were reunited again after many years. I was really shocked by the love and warmth I received.

As we examine her Me Project, she appears to have learned a life lesson from the death and resurrection theme in her personal narrative:

I have learnt [that] to get
what I want I have to
work hard believe in

myself and nothing is
impossible.

Angela physicalized this determination in her strong portrayal of Pericles in Act V.

So far this year in London, more than thirty young people have been stabbed to death in the recent wave of knife crime that has afflicted the UK capital. How are we to make sense of this fact when overall statistics for violent crime in our cities are down? As comforting as it might be to suggest that we should get tough on teens that carry knives and put them in jail, there is no simple answer to this problem. I have argued that the twin themes of death and resurrection are as essential for today's teenagers as they were for Elizabethans in Shakespeare's day.

Pericles lived at the boundary between self and nothingness. He lost his identity as Prince of Tyre, his marriage to Princess Thaisa, and their child Marina. In his life he experienced these events as deaths. Yet, though he fell into despair, God, represented by the goddess Diana in the play, had not abandoned him. Eventually, through a vision he saw after a self-imposed regime of fasting and silence, he was reunited with his daughter Marina and his wife Thaisa. He evokes the death and resurrection theme at Ephesus when he greets his long-lost wife with the words, "O come, be buried a second time within these arms" (Act V, Sc. 3). Ayo, one young person who played Pericles, also understands both the literal and metaphoric aspects of death and resurrection. In her personal narrative she observes:

I think journeys are mental as well as physical.... Leaving people behind can make you dwell on the past. However, I don't think dwelling on the past is such a negative thing as long as you don't let your past become your future.

Young people need the narratives provided by theatre and the arts to learn how to distance themselves from and to reflect on their own lives. Armed with the language of others instead of knives, they are inspired to write their own personal narratives, the sharing of which empowers them to generate community and reciprocity. The *Looking for Shakespeare* rehearsal process of *Pericles* enabled its teenage participants to grapple with both the literal and metaphoric aspects of death and resurrection in their own lives. They experienced the identity-changing dynamics of distancing and reflection, the construction of zones of personal time, engagement with their minds and bodies, and living in community with their peers. Increased government funding for the arts would allow more young people to experience death and resurrection and other life themes metaphorically, so they are less tempted to despair at the literal deaths they witness on a daily basis in the media and in their streets.

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MORAL DISTRESS IN HEALTHCARE: THE VALUE OF DYING WITH DIGNITY

CORRY ROACH R.N., CPNLP, was a student of the late Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the late Gregg Furth, and employs their work in her private therapy practice today. Her first book was *By Grace of Mourning*.

Recently I watched my only sister lose her battle with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, after complications from severe post-graft-versus-host syndrome infection. It was five months from diagnosis to her death at 46 years of age. As she was a brittle diabetic since birth, I became more of a mother to her than a sister over her lifetime, as nearly a decade separated us in age. It was almost like losing another child for me.

In 1983, as a bereaved young mother to my infant daughter, I sat in on a lecture by the late Dr Viktor Frankl, which dealt with ethics around the care of ill and premature babies, and the value of dying with dignity in those situations.

I took issue with the fact that, despite our insight and technological progress in healthcare, we were losing sight of holistic care of the human person, physically and emotionally as well as intellectually and spiritually. It appeared to me that the further we progressed technologically, the more we regressed in our compassionate care for dying people and their families.

There is no doubt that I spoke at the time from the place of a broken-hearted mother. Perhaps I was too young, naïve, or afraid back then to speak my truth about how we deal with dying in our western culture. Now, a few years past a half-century in age and well into menopause, that part of me has changed considerably!

Despite this fact, however, I don't feel that my concerns had any less merit. This same concern arose again with the death of my sister.

It is my hope that I am able to convey both my respect and concern as I share my impressions with you here. I sincerely and humbly encourage you to internalize what I am about to share with you, both with your intellect and with your heart, as both are necessary in this approach of holism.

I am aghast that, 25 years after my baby died, there appears to be little change towards the question regarding the value, meaning, and humanity in being allowed to die with dignity, if I respond with painful honesty to what happened with my sister last month.

I wanted to secretly take photographs of her dying body, bleeding, blistered and burnt beyond recognition, since my fear was that no one of consequence would believe me.

I recall feeling the same way when I asked Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross to look at the only two photographs I have of my beloved baby, who physically looked very similar as a result of a severe megableeding disorder. Elisabeth's initial response was to dismiss them as well.

That was before she caught a glimpse of the images, and then she gently took them from my hand. Asking if she could pass them around to everyone in the room, she

said, "Especially health care professionals need to see this, to ensure that other little babies will not suffer as your baby did. This must not be allowed to happen again."

Well, it has happened again, and in my family. Ever one to find deeper meaning, I see this as an opportunity to become an advocate for patients who need to die when their suffering becomes obscene, and they somehow are not able to make their request known or respected.

There can be reasons for this due to extenuating circumstances, as was so with my sister. I believe the fact of her being diabetic complicated sending her to palliative care when she was on insulin via PIC line. Although she got analgesia through this line as well, the continuous infusion prolonged her inevitable dying process. I understand how these issues make things more challenging to give optimum care.

On one of my last visits with her, she looked like a taller version of herself as a newborn, except that she was horribly blistered, burned and in terrible pain from the caustic treatments. They were making her desperately ill, with half-hour cycles of retching, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, and bloody diarrhea along with fever and chills. Flaps of skin from open blisters hung from her torso, neck, arms, and hands. Tears, staining white against her ruddy burned cheeks, coursed into the corners of her mouth. In her pain, they would spurt from her eyes, but I could not wipe them, as her skin would invariably come with it to create more bleeding. The mucous membranes of her mouth, eyelids, and intestinal tract were so scorched they too came away, leaving her raw and bleeding, inside and out.

As I crouched beside her after another bout of dealing with the brutal side effects, I commented to her about her quiet, pensive expression. After a long moment of silence, she said softly, "I don't know what else I can do to help myself..."

It was the perfect opening into our discussion about her desire to die. The dialogue around the unspeakable began to mould and take shape from that one sentence, empowering her to listen to her own heart's desire.

I am enraged and sickened as a person, and stunned and mortified as a nurse, that this kind of thing can continue to occur. We are ever expanding our knowledge with regard to science and technology, but we spend less time being human in giving compassionate care to the dying and their families.

Time spent on computers is time spent away from the pain-riddled, desperate, and often fearful patients who cannot articulate their needs swiftly enough for the busy medical and nursing staff. They, in turn, don't have time to internalize what needs to be done to meet the patient's personal/psychological/spiritual needs instead of the technological demands of the machinery attached to the physical patient.

Although I spent nine hours with my sister while she was ravaged by the effects of the treatments, I could not embrace her to bring her comfort; it was too painful for her to be touched. Blinking her eyes caused her severe pain. We could not clean anything to attempt to rid her of the cancer smell. Maintaining an airway had to be done without suction, again due to bleeding. Her head was wrapped with J cloths to stop the serous fluid oozing from her scalp, leaving a copious stain on her pillow every few hours. Sometimes she physically shook as her teeth chattered with pain.

My daughter, who is a post graduate nursing student, and I resorted gratefully to our practise of alternative therapies of Therapeutic Touch and Reflexology, and our

gentle intervention calmed my sister so she could deal with her pain more effectively... so we could have that discussion.

I somehow already knew it to be the reason behind our visit. Call it intuition, my spirit knew. My love knew.

My sister wanted to die. In my work, I have had many of these quiet, calm discussions, and I try to listen with every cell of my body and spirit. I want to be sure that they are sure.

She was sure.

In expressing this fact to the nursing staff a few days later, they were unaware of this choice, despite her obscene physical state and the fact that treatment had now been stopped. Although our continued discussion verified the accuracy of my sister's condition, I was surprised that there had been no pastoral care intervention with regard to this. I was grateful for our attendance.

A few days passed. She was left to thrash about in semi-consciousness on bed rest now, until someone realized what the thrashing really meant, since she could no longer communicate verbally. She was prescribed Fentanyl breakthroughs every six minutes for pain, but had no way to push the button as her hands were contracted and she was no longer lucid. Delirious, she was now bleeding from her nose, mouth and eyes. We could not begin to clean anything, as she almost spontaneously bled.

Watching this, I was beyond speech. There are no words...

If she had been a dog, some compassionate person would have euthanized her by then to put the dear woman out of her misery.

I was so immersed in my compassion and attention to my sister's constant needs, I had no room at all for mine. I held off, strong and caring, without my own pain getting in the way... until the next day at home, when I could wail, cry, and rant on my own. And let go, again and again. I was aware I needed to clear my emotions in preparation for the next visit, as they had no place when I was with her. I didn't separate my roles as mother, sister, or nurse in this situation; I just knew I was of greater value utilizing my professional skills along with my love. This, after all, was long ago not about me anymore.

As an RN who has worked in the field of death and dying for the last 25 years, I observe how we deal with death in our western culture. We regard it as a bitter enemy to be feared, fought, and avoided at all cost; yet my personal and professional experiences tell me that death is not the enemy at all.

It is not the greatest tragedy that my baby and my sister died; I can accept their death. The issue I struggle with is how they died—heroic obscene struggles of suffering that made the alternative of death a gift of peace. How sad when we somehow regard it as a failure when all interventions are ineffective and death prevails.

I feared my sister's body would be in the early stages of rot and decay, just as my baby's was by the time she finally died. Why? How is it possible that this happens in 2008?

As caregivers, we sometimes lose focus on the person who has the disease, and work in isolation on curing, killing, or healing a disease with which the patient is afflicted. We forget the package deal—the two come together! The more we advance in computer technology, the fewer meaningful interventions of contact or personal care our

patients seem to experience. We become so focused on analysis of implications and indicators of pathology that we forget about the person as a whole.

In those nine hours of caring for my sister that one day, I never sat down once in attending her constant needs. Nurses came into the room only to deal with the intravenous solutions and medications. No one touched her, of course; only one person spoke to her directly.

As a nurse, I can understand this; we need to assure medications and their administration are done efficiently and on time. My sister had eight lines running at the time. Again, it's an observation, along with some deep concerns about what it means to be a nurse these days.

I've been around a long time, and remember giving back rubs to patients... That was another era indeed!

However, I am left helpless and bereft, as a human being and as a nurse. This is accentuated by the fact that I remember there is a better way; it has been lost along with that personal bedside care that has been swallowed up in technology. There is nothing that can replace the calm, soothing presence of a caregiver at the bedside of a dying patient.

In our CARNA nursing library, there are four books on the topic of death, dying, and bereavement. Four. I am stunned at why we are so inept in caring for the dying in our culture. We need to take lessons from those ancestors and cultures that live so close to the earth, those who recognize grace, humility, and acceptance when the right to exist has passed and the right to die has begun. Death is not the enemy—ignorance is!

In our approach to the spiritual question around care, we are remiss in our presence of listening to the patients' concerns or conclusions, particularly if they do not match our own. It is my firm belief that we not only can but must learn to stand steady with the patient's journey of belief, and not get caught up in the differences. It is not the destination, but the manner in which we as caregivers support the journey that is of credible import here.

I believe we are all on a spiritual quest of meaning in this life. I believe we often confuse spirituality, whose purpose I feel it is to embrace the oneness of our humanity, indeed all things living.

Religions, in how they are practised for the most part in the world, are much more divisive in nature, in my experience of them. It is my humble observation that we can only assist this confusion into clarity if we, one person at a time, come to know the Truth of these matters in our own personhood first, both in heart and in mind.

In integration of beliefs and personhood, I then have that also to offer my fellow man, regardless of their race, creed, color, education, gender, or beliefs. This takes much less energy in maintenance than the divisiveness that my ego brings to the interaction, in my experience. I can accept and respect others with greater ease, because I know myself and how my spiritual nature sustains me, so I can sustain others...

In non-judgmental attendance, we are given the opportunity to expand our own experiences and references of realm. It is my personal faith that we are all remarkably the same, despite our differences in belief systems. Peace comes to all who celebrate this Truth.

It is here that the study of holism and spirituality becomes of dire import in how we deliver healthcare to the dying in our culture. I am of the personal view that it does not matter what path of spiritual or religious unfolding, introspection, or evolution occurs, but that we must, as health care providers, be comfortable in acknowledging its import in the discussion of end of life care. Cultural and spiritual belief systems play a significant role in these issues, and I mean no disrespect when I share my thoughts.

Unfortunately, I believe that, despite our technologically advanced skills, we have much to catch up on where our skills in embracing the needs of those who care for the dying (as well as their patients) are concerned.

It is my belief that all roads lead Home. If we fear death as caregivers or see it as failure, those judgments color our care and compassion for the patient in their dying process as well as the loved ones who attend them. We cannot serve them as fully or give of ourselves as freely if we have unfinished business around these issues.

We need teaching and guidance in this regard as caregivers, on a personal level, so that we might integrate them on a professional one. This will allow us to be present and integrative in our care of the dying patient. We will then be able to recognize death with the same joy and celebration as we do when we are born from our mother's womb.

It is my heartfelt impression without contempt that we in healthcare are just beginning to gather our wits and energies in taking the first step towards embracing the need for compassionate, interactive care of the dying and their families.

Countless times in my life, I have stood on fearless, compassionate ground, knowing beyond doubt that the loved one (patient) is beyond all we can offer to heal and cure. I have also watched family members and medical/nursing staff clearly stand in the way of what is inevitably beyond our reach in the human life cycle.

It has been my observation that our own unfinished business about our mortality interferes with this unrelenting dying process of those in our lives and care.

I am certain that there are indeed things so much worse than dying. Scientists go into analysis paralysis frenzy trying to research/discover how to beat the Grim Reaper at his game, without realizing the consequence that their behaviour is at risk of becoming an obscenity for the patient who is dying.

Dying, and how we walk that road, has sometimes only become a greater trail of suffering in our attempts to find that elusive cure. When we, as caregivers, are given the opportunity by necessity to examine our personal belief systems around death, the process of dying will become more humane in our endeavours to comfort in end of life care. We must recognize that cure is sometimes possible, and healing is always possible, if we acknowledge that death can be the greatest healing of all.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross also taught me something else that helped me, as well as assisted the process for family members of those in my care who were dying. She spoke of how important it is to understand the remarkable power of influence we have in needlessly extending the agony of the dying process for the patient.

Simply by foregoing acceptance of the inevitable, and 'holding on' to the dying patient to satisfy our own denial or inability to accept the truth of the events, we can adversely prolong the patient's lifetime.

Patients, too, wish to resolve their issues with loved ones, and when it is not forthcoming, they wait for loved ones to make peace or forgiveness with their dying. On

many occasions I have watched these remarkable phenomena, and know it to be indeed so. These are simple and profound lessons to be learned from this rich and sacred time, both as loving family members and as health care providers.

If we can open our hearts to our own vulnerabilities, our patients can become profound teachers to our own search for meaning in this life as we watch theirs end. There is so much we can learn from the art of dying with grace and dignity. We need to evaluate our moral distress in a culture where death is regarded primarily as a failure by the health care team.

Technological advances and spiritual and religious questions have unfortunately not led us closer to dealing more graciously with the question of end of life care. Sadly, much of the research and technology has moved us away from the humanism and holism of how we need to approach the dying patient.

In 36 years of nursing practise, I've been privileged to care for countless dying patients. My infant daughter's gift of allowing me to hold her while she died made me an advocate for something I believe strongly is not only possible but necessary: a good death.

Most years, I have gone about my work quietly, and must now beseech with a clarion call to change not only how we approach the dying, but to address the necessity of the subject of spirituality in the instruction and training of our country's doctors, nurses and other health care professions. It is, in my view, about understanding that spirituality is about regard for our oneness as a human family, without discussion about the divisiveness that often comes about when the topic of religion is introduced. They are not the same subject, although there is obviously a relationship. I believe the apparent confusion about the two has led to reticence in discussion of this in scholarly healthcare institutions in the past. This needs to be rectified if we are to succeed and serve more effectively as caregivers.

In a clear discussion regarding spirituality, there is no right or wrong, no beliefs to challenge. Comfortable acknowledgement of patients' need to discuss these matters needs to find comfort in our own psyche as caregivers as well.

We must join together and accept the inevitability of our own mortality. At the expense of the innocent, we have worn blinders long enough! My greatest distress is that needless suffering continues to be a part of our healthcare intervention, when the illness is simply ignorance.

We need to refocus from technology and research, and instead roll up our sleeves and dare to embrace the intimacy and holy ground in recognition of what the dying can teach us. We can learn what it means to love enough to surrender our patients to something we ultimately cannot know scientifically or otherwise in this life, and it will not be regarded as failure. Instead, it will be... as it should be.

We must carry this mystery with greater dignity, grace and humility, as something not to be feared but instead respected and expected when all reasonable attempts to sustain life have been surpassed.

My sister's greatest desire was to leave a legacy that would teach healers about the need and value in dying with dignity, humour, and grace. It is my hope to bring this message to all who care for patients in the home, hospice, palliative care, ICU, long term care or active treatment facilities.

In my first book, *By Grace of Mourning*, I describe the life and death of my infant daughter in the NICU after a month of treatment and heroic interventions. I also describe my healing journey of grief and mourning back from that event, due in part to gifted mentorship by the late Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who was world-renowned for her work in the field of death and dying. She taught me how to embrace my grief and grow through it, finding meaning in the madness of mourning. With time, I came to truly appreciate the authenticity and meaning of grace in mourning.

The late Elisabeth Kübler-Ross called this “working through our unfinished business.” When we resolve our fears about death, only then can we fully embrace life.

In a world where we have so much opportunity to care for others, let us offer ourselves the opportunity to examine our personal feelings about our own mortality. Let it be a loving sign of permission to grow if you feel confusion, fear, or reticence around those who are dying. They need you as a present, compassionate caregiver.

Please ask yourself, as my sister did, if you have done all you can to help yourself. We, too, need to listen to our own soul... where the Answer is...

A MEANINGFUL DEATH AS A FUNCTION OF A MEANINGFUL LIFE: AN INTEGRITY MODEL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Life is a process and journey whose end point is death. Without our personal values, we are undefined, fearful, and stressed. This theoretical and clinically-based paper provides an Integrity model perspective of living well and dying well. The Integrity model (Lander & Nahon, 1992, 2005; Mowrer, 1953, 1964) examines the values structures within the multiple facets of our lives, and whether or not they provide a sense of a life of meaning or a profound sense of meaninglessness for individuals in despair, including those grappling with end of life issues—either through suicide or through natural causes.

Life is a process and journey whose end point is death. Without our personal values, we are undefined, fearful, and stressed. Life is about choices, and about whether or not they are able to provide one with a sense of meaningfulness. Our choices reflect the struggle to define ourselves in a manner that often conflicts with those contextual and societal structures that threaten to define us. Life requires courage to know the self and to gain an awareness of those artefacts that confine us. The choice is Hamlet's "to be or not to be"—to be alive and living well, or be amongst the living dead. It is our sense of Integrity that provides the relevancy and meaning to our lives, and to our ability to have compassion for others.

This paper provides an Integrity model perspective of living well and dying well by offering an understanding and appreciation of the self and of becoming an "I" rather than an "It" (Buber, 1970; Lander & Nahon, 2005). The Integrity model (Lander & Nahon, 1992, 1995a, 2000a, 2005, 2008a), based on the psychologist O. H. Mowrer's Integrity (Therapy) group approach (Mowrer, 1953, 1964; Mowrer & Vattano, 1976) examines the values structures within the multiple facets of our lives, and whether or not these values provide a sense of a life of meaning or a profound sense of meaninglessness.

As clinicians in the trenches, we will offer a theoretical and clinically-based model that has stood the test of time (over 40 years) in helping individuals with the spectrum of symptomatology resulting from the angst and anguish of feeling that their lives are meaningless to the point where many are considering end of life issues by their own hand instead of waiting for the hand of G-d.

The Integrity model: philosophical underpinnings

The Integrity model of psychotherapy is an existential, value-based perspective which forms the basis of our philosophy of wellness underlying our work in clinical care, and our health care education initiatives at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Medicine. This model was spearheaded by the psychologist O. H. Mowrer's Integrity (Therapy) Group approach, developed by him from the mid-1940's until the mid-1980's. An eminent psychologist, Mowrer served as president of the American Psychological Association from 1953 to 1954, and director of the University of Illinois's Lilly Fellowship program examining the phenomenon of guilt from an integrated psychological and religious perspective. He began his work by delving into the psychotherapeutic arena, engaging in 700 hours of psychoanalysis as part of his training (Lander & Nahon, 2005). However, Mowrer felt that this approach did not satisfy him in understanding the human struggle in day-do-day existence and began, in the words of Corsini (2001), a "Copernican revolution" (p. 332; in Lander & Nahon, 2005, p. 181) in understanding human nature and the plight of being human. He became a prolific early behaviourist and learning theorist, evolving the two-factor theory of learning, and collaborating with Dollard and Miller in developing social learning theory. A summer study program with Harry Stack Sullivan in 1945 led Mowrer to conclude that

the cause of neuroses and other psychiatric disorders lay primarily not in intrapsychic conflicts, but rather in interpersonal attitudes and behaviours (Lander & Nahon, 2000a)... Rather than delving into the unconscious, he began to examine the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships [Hunt, 1984]... Mowrer is considered "one of the major figures in the self-help movement" [Hunt, 1984, p. 913]... [He] played a pioneering role in the conceptualization and development of the key therapeutic concepts of therapist self-disclosure, therapist authenticity, and the role of morality in psychotherapy—his work preceding that of both Allport and Erikson [Hunt, 1984].

Mowrer (1964b) acknowledged that his work had been inspired by Sullivan's emphasis on interpersonal relationships, and as such was developed in parallel with other frameworks, including Frankl's "will to meaning" (Frankl, 1955). These as well as Adler's (1964) concept of social interest and Jung's (1933) emphasis on the "importance of 'human decency' and the pathogenic dangers inherent in deception" (p. 32) were all based on a breakaway from the traditional Freudian view, embracing instead the importance of interpersonal relationships and the positive aspects of morality (Mowrer, 1976).

Mowrer spoke of the connection between psychology and religion/spirituality: religion's root word is the Latin word *religare*, which is also at the root of ligament and ligature. Mowrer suggested that religion (*re-ligion*)

means literally a reunion, rebinding, reintegration and re-connection (Mowrer, 1961a, 1969)... For Mowrer, therapy called for a return to community through improved communication with “significant others” (Mowrer, 1958; Sullivan, 1953). (Lander & Nahon, 2005, pp. 4–6)

The Integrity model is the first model of psychotherapy that is (a) value-based, and (b) wellness- rather than just pathology-based, offering a philosophical umbrella for dealing with issues of daily living from a positive, pro-active, and health promotion perspective. The basic tenets of the Integrity model are as follows:

Mental health arises from honouring one’s values and living with integrity, operationally defined as comprising the three-pronged paradigm of honesty, responsibility and emotional closure. Difficulties with life and living result from interpersonal rather than intrapsychic conflicts (Lander & Nahon, 1995, 2008b; Mowrer, 1964). The Integrity model postulates that individuals enter into emotional difficulties

because they are not living up to their own values; in other words, because they are violating the contracts and commitments that they themselves have made. Stress and anxiety arise not from the dread of hypothetical events, but from the well-justified fear of the consequences of past behaviours.... What psychotherapy calls for is not new or different values, but rather for an increased fidelity to one’s present values. (Lander & Nahon, 2005, p. 32)

From the Integrity model perspective, guilt is viewed as a healthy expression of a failure to live up to one’s value system. Self-esteem is earned for and by the self by living with Integrity. The Integrity model emphasizes equality between the therapist and the individual in therapy. Integrity is operationally defined as comprising three necessary elements: honesty, responsibility, and emotional closure, which are defined as follows:

Honesty means “being open and truthful about one’s feelings, attitudes and actions—past, present and future. It involves acknowledging past or present wrongdoings that may have caused problems in one’s life or another’s life” (Lander & Nahon, 2000a, p. 32).

Responsibility means being willing to own 100 percent of one’s “50 percent” in contributing to a dysfunctional interaction with another as the first step in resolving conflict, and being willing to make amends. Responsibility, coupled with “the honest accountability for one’s transgressions, goes a long way toward ensuring that the others in a conflictual situation will be willing to listen” (Lander & Nahon, 2000a, p. 134).

Mowrer (1953, 1964) referred to the third component of Integrity as *community*. Lander and Nahon (2000b) refer to the third component as closure of the psychological space with self and other, often shortened to *emotional closure*, which is perhaps the most unique component of the Integrity Model because it is so rarely a natural ingredient of most human interactions. Emotional involvement requires that the ultimate intent of a

conflict resolution or, for that matter, of any other meaningful interpersonal interaction be one of “closing the psychological space” between two or more individuals—in other words, increasing one’s sense of community with the others. (Nahon & Lander, 2008. pp. 220–221)

The Integrity model and finding meaning in life and death

Integrity and the journey to be an “I”

The Integrity model focusses on human existence in seemingly meaningless situations where one chooses to be true to one’s value system, often daring to transcend contextual artefacts. Integrity is about daring to have the courage, or *grit*—which “as one insightful person we were working with pointed out, [is] a component of the word Integrity” (Lander & Nahon, 2005, p. 184)—to choose the price tags for one’s values; consequently, suffering has meaning rather than being meaningless. It is one’s sense of Integrity that provides relevancy and the ability to have compassion for others. The journey to become an “I” seems at times to comprise a life and death journey to be and to become. The Integrity model focusses on the choice of how to perceive the story-line of living, or, as Neimeyer and his colleagues (Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Stewart & Neimeyer, 2007) refer to it, *the narrative*, without either the denial of death or the blind pursuit of happiness with its tendency to deny the affirmation of sorrow and despair.

The meaning of life and death are unique to each human being. From the Integrity model perspective, meaning is a function of one’s fidelity to one’s values. Crises in life reflect a clash of values with caregivers, family, friends, society, the media, celebrities, etc. For us, the concept of crises or motivation to seek relief from one’s woes in life reflects an Integrity crisis (Lander & Nahon, 2005), which we reframe as such for individuals in therapy.

These integrity crises reflect a clash of values—internal or external. For example, an internal clash of values arises when two major values in one’s life have been given equal value. The strain and the struggle is to rank one value over the other based on one’s context at a given time. An external clash occurs when one’s values are not ranked the same as someone else’s values.

Amazingly, individuals in the most severe of crises, even to the point of contemplating taking their own lives, find that this way of understanding the intensity of life’s conundrums makes much sense. It is an awareness and appreciation that one’s ranking of a given value is valid for oneself and with it the appreciation that the same may not hold true for others. The next step, to quote Mowrer, becomes “*what are you going to do about it?*” (Lander & Nahon, 2005, p. 42). Resolutions to crises necessitate the reclaiming of one’s Integrity, one’s “I” if you will, via fidelity to one’s own personal values. Integrity asks that knowledge and awareness lead to action/behaviour arising from the ownership of one’s fifty percent of the responsibility in addressing the conflict or impasse.

From the Integrity perspective, anxiety is a symptom, or more accurately, one of those inner voices reflecting the inner awareness of an Integrity and/or value boundary violation. We view anxiety as reflecting an avoidance of a professed personal value. Consequently, we view the concept of death anxiety as reflecting an avoidance of the existential challenge of fully living. The manner in which one organizes each twenty-four

hours of one's life should basically reflect one's value hierarchy. We understand depression, anxiety, fears, ruminations, and the entire Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994)—soon to be DSM-V—lexicon of symptoms and their classifications as resistances and defenses against the risks and price tags of one's unique pursuit of a meaningful life. The only manner in which this pursuit can be achieved—simply yet often with difficulty and challenges—is by living in accordance with one's personal value hierarchy—in other words, with Integrity.

Meanings and meaningfulness are unique to each individual and reflect a life journey of often repeated visits in and out of the crucible of the existential abyss (Lander & Nahon, 2005), whereby the self re-forms and re-molds itself, ever-strengthening one's identity and the meaningfulness of one's existence. As existential therapists, we find it professionally humbling to be allowed by the other into this sacred arena of fear, angst, terror, and the absolute knowing of what the self must do in order to live and live well. The Integrity model gives the power and the responsibility to the other for the choice of how to affirm the self. The therapist's role, rather than coach or guide, is more one of a consultant as to whether one's choices are meeting the definitional requirements of Integrity, in other words (a) the need for honesty, responsibility, community, and closure of the psychological space with both self and others and (b) the ownership of one's fifty percent and fidelity to one's value hierarchies that often require a re-evaluation and a re-ranking of values based on time and circumstances.

Despite the odds of environmental constructs, societal artefacts, and one's historical journeys, the self always knows what needs to be done. From the Integrity model perspective, the DSM-IV clusters of defensive patterns reflect ways of hiding from the self and its wisdom (du Plock, Lander & Nahon, 2008) as to what is personally right and efficacious in order to live well, meaningfully, and even with a sense of joy of being true to the self despite circumstances that most others may view as a meaningless and untenable existence. Consequently, only by living a meaningful life can one find a sense of meaningfulness in approaching or contemplating a meaningful death (Nahon & Lander, 2008c). Even at the last minute, one can find meaning in one's life.

Myths regarding death and dying

The individuals we have worked with resist and do not fit the mould often encouraged by previous health care professionals, including therapists, with regards to death and dying. For example, Kübler-Ross' (1969) patterns of detachment as a prelude to death reflect a strong, value-laden underpinning to a theory which has profoundly influenced how we both conceptualize and intervene with the final stages of life. Jenna comes to mind as a case in point.

Case example: Jenna

Jenna had been diagnosed with cancer of the tongue, a very quick-growing cancer, when she was in her mid-thirties. A mother of two, Jenna was a warm, caring, intelligent, and creative individual, as well as a rebel. I—Nedra—worked with Jenna from an Integrity model perspective. This included talking about integrity, values, and meaningfulness as well as the use of visual imagery in an autogenic training context in order to support her

immune system and her value of fighting and of not “dying like a good little girl” as doctors and staff had encouraged her to do in what they told her would be the little time left.

Jenna did not want to die within the month to six weeks allotted to her. She fought and defeated the medical profession, fulfilling her hope to live and live well until her second daughter (then a few months old) had reached the age of three or more years if possible, when Jenna felt that there would then be sufficient memory traces left of her for her daughter. Her husband fought for her right to work with me despite a psychiatric label that more or less supported others’ view that it would be a waste of time, of a bed, and of medical and pharmaceutical interventions when there were so many in better shape with seemingly better odds for survival. I always back a fighter as I feel that the work is already half done and the rage is a phenomenal source of creative energy; all that is needed is to direct it with Integrity.

Jenna and I joined forces in an amazing journey. Jenna’s number one value became that of defying the books and the doctors who adhered to their dictates. Jenna’s will to fight for her daughter to have memory traces of her translated into an amazing mobilization of her immune system that, despite some brief visits to the hospital, allowed for a resilience so astounding that it baffled her doctors, her family, and her friends—but never the two of us. Needless to say, a bond was forged between us, and when Jenna was no longer able to come to the hospital on an outpatient basis, I made home visits. Thankfully, the psychiatrist in charge—not the initial one—quietly sanctioned this. At times, I would change Jenna’s tracheal insert, and we would do our talking and visual imagery. Jenna would speak or write to me depending on her strength. Afterwards, I would go downstairs and have tea with Jenna’s parents, brother, friends, or husband—whoever was “on” for doing what each one felt was meaningful to do during this time. They would take the lead, and we would chat. It was not long until they would talk about the amazing and, remarkably, the joyful experience that it was for them to be there for Jenna, agreeing that it was a community-building for Jenna and for them.

Periodically, I would go on holidays or conferences, and this was not really a problem for Jenna. Jenna would continue to make a journal for each daughter and to read to them out loud, or someone would read while everyone hunkered down on the bed. With an impish grin, Jenna would inflate a surgical glove and tape down all but the middle finger when I would warn her of an intended vacation. Once, after she had had a “major bleed” and recovered, I went on a two-week family holiday and, of course, I got the “glove.” Her family doctor was called in and noted that Jenna was not eating as well as she used to; the family was told that Jenna was disengaging in order to die. I returned and was informed of this, and of the fact that, due to this, her “nose hose” had been removed. I had such a “hissy fit” that even I was surprised! I explained to her doctor that it was July, the family did not have air conditioning, and I would bet that this was why Jenna’s food consumption was going down; I asked for the nose hose to be reinstated as soon as possible.

That evening, it was reinstated, and Jenna was as lively and feisty as ever. She lived another nine months, more active with life and happy to be honouring her value of memory-building for both her daughters and others. One day in the hospital after another major bleed from her carotid artery, we did “our thing.” Later Jenna’s parents

related to me that there had been another major bleed, and that Jenna had told them that she was now ready to die and did not want resuscitation. They had wanted to try to catch me at the elevator (which was well known to be aggravatingly slow) and ask me to return, but Jenna had asked them not to, adding that her contract with me was to fight to live, and that dying was not part of this. Jenna then had another bleed and quietly slipped away. I was, of course, very upset, but was comforted by her family and friends, who valued the relational contract that we had. I continued to have tea with them for several more weeks and found that there was only joy and appreciation on their part for the gift of time with Jenna, and the strong awareness of the fact that Jenna's fight and their daily participation had made the loss a meaningful gift for them.

Another myth—glorified by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—with regards to death and dying is the common view that if we really love someone and the relationship ends—either by separation or death—we must prove the depth of our attachment through the depth of despair or our sense of brokenness and grief and our inability to live without them (Lander & Nahon, 1995a). From the Integrity model perspective, if a relationship is healthy and we behave with Integrity within that relationship and it ends, we will not be overwhelmed and fall apart from the grief; rather, we will experience a deep, aching sense of loss, be able to value the other's gifts to us, mourn our sorrow, and be able to move on, having dared to love. This has proven very helpful not only for those facing the demise of a relationship or a loss of a loved one, but also in encouraging others to risk being involved in relationships and daring to love again, enhancing their potential and courage in choosing to live a life well-lived.

A number of individuals we work with have referred to the concept of a “bucket list” from the movie with the same name. In this movie, two old men come together, and draft the list of things they had always wanted to do before they died. This presents a form of *carpe diem* which challenges individuals with the fine line that exists between self-indulgence and responsibility. In addressing this dilemma, Mowrer's brilliance comes to the rescue through the concept of the self as a being of Integrity, pursuing an “integritously” (our word) meaningful life guided by one's personal value hierarchy. The requirement for all three legs of Integrity to be present enables individuals to sail safely between the *Scylla* of self-indulgence and the *Charybdis* of delayed affirmation via a punitive and often dramatic, narcissistic sense of over-responsibility.

The role of the media

The media places a high value on tragedy, and one must be cognizant and wary of its concomitant environmental structures, which can become either the source of immobilizing anxiety and meaninglessness or the reverse. The self must make the at once frightening and liberating choice between these two polarities. Death is a fact of life that is frequently over- or under-valued. One must be wary of the wearying erosions of the values of society and other external structures in life's context that fuel the dread, fear, angst, and anguish about death and dying, and that provide the substrate for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to flourish. This in turn reflects Western civilization's value of youth, as seen through the collusion of the cosmetic, fashion, pharmaceutical, and fitness industries in promoting youth and youthfulness with an insidious denial of

death and dying. These highly financially successful industries fuel the fear of death for material gain. Consequently, one again is faced with the choice of deciding who is actually defining the self, and what values will fuel a life of meaningfulness rather than meaninglessness.

Working with suicidal individuals from an Integrity model perspective

In working with a clinical population often in crisis, we have worked with many individuals whose depressive rage has been marked by suicidal ideations, some with a long-standing history of flirting with death through suicide attempts. Working from an Integrity model perspective, I—Nedra—begin by clarifying my own valuing of life and of finding personal meaning amidst the angst, agony, and rages of present environmental structures in my life, and to note that anger, fury, and rage are my favourite emotions. For most, this is curious and thus interesting, and elicits an impish desire to see how this notion is going to be peddled to them.

Working with me is presented as an informed choice. This is perhaps the only time in the medical system that an individual has been genuinely offered a choice, and so to make it a valid choice, I let them interview me. They usually say that they do not know how to do this, and so I talk about the Integrity model. I review the definitions of Integrity, so that we can examine together the Integrity violations that may have led to the present crisis, the points of 50/50 accountability, the notion of stress as resulting from a clash of values, especially societal values, and last but not least, my love of rage and guilt.

I also present Mowrer's notion that feelings are responses, not stimuli (Lander & Nahon, 2005), and thus that the work of therapy focuses on identifying the stimuli that call out one emotion or another. At this point, individuals catch themselves becoming interested and engaged in entering into a dialogue about these things, and how they can apply to them in their own lives. And then they play the suicide card.

I remind them that it is the right affect but the wrong target. It is murder that is in their hearts, but they are too well socialized to own it. Murderous feelings are responses, not stimuli, but they have failed to look for the stimulus. Consequently, in order to be true to the affect and the power behind it, they present themselves as the target of the affect, with the concomitant rationales to justify it.

In four decades of work with suicidal individuals, I have never been contradicted. I have certainly been challenged to walk them through this process, and challenged to support their original views that their emotions had been the cause of their suicidal impulses—which I decline from doing. At times, like Scheherazade, I offer a possible topic for the next session, which leads individuals to immediately make an appointment, which I usually honoured as rapidly as possible, in view of the difficult environmental structures that they are dealing with.

Mowrer understood human nature and the fact that no one does anything for nothing. Change happens if it is worthwhile and if it is meaningful or if the price is worth paying. Responsibility is a hard sell: to be responsible for one's fifty percent with reference to the structures in one's life versus the perceived absolution of being "clinically depressed with an Axis I diagnosis" and in need of major psychotropic medication or even a drug cocktail, which offers individuals a narcissistic stroking that is hard to walk away

from. I remind them that they are free to choose, and that Mowrer's three options if one does not like the situation or the contract are: (a) to stay and endure; (b) to leave completely; and (c) to stay and try to make environmental changes in order to ameliorate the situation (Lander & Nahon, 2008).

Individuals now come to see their depressive rages as both legitimate and affirming of them. They see it as a precious value that has been violated, so that rage can now become a warning signal of a problem that needs to be addressed. They understand this guilt as an internal feedback signal, letting them know how well a problem has been addressed while being able to honour their values. They can now see their rage as being no problem. They find themselves being able to own their desire for revenge, and find greater meaning by daring to use that energy with integrity either to close the psychological space or to walk away. Consequently, Integrity becomes a first necessary and sufficient defence against stress and despair.

Addressing end of life themes

We would like to offer an Integrity-based perspective of some issues which were recently raised by the call for papers for a special issue of the *Journal of Death Studies*, as follows:

1. All through history, human beings have developed elaborate defence mechanisms against the terror of death both at the individual and cultural levels. We now have a huge literature on death denial and terror management.

Much of the literature on death denial and even terror management tends to focus on the group aggregate and on global, macro, and cultural levels. Though helpful, it can be overwhelming for the ordinary person to have to do something about what is wrong with the group or in the global community when they can barely tread water getting through daily life sane, sober, making financial ends meet, and, for some, battling suicidal ideations. We would like to call for a renewed focus on unique individuals' struggles to get through each day while feeling beset and besieged by what we feel is not only a terrorizing and PTSD-inducing media but also what the Integrity model views as the human being's constant, existential struggle to choose between the good and evil in everyday life as follows:

Congruent with Lowe's (1969) definition of the existential position, Mowrer suggests that "man is perennially disposed toward goodness, wisdom, and virtue, as well as toward evil, stupidity, and folly" (Mowrer, 1970, p. 1), and thus, that the human being has the capacity for both good and evil. ... Mowrer (1956) ... suggests that there is or may now be a sense of rapprochement between traditional analysis and traditional religion, for example through the writings of Viktor Frankl (1955). Mowrer (1959) suggests that religion has always intended to help individuals to regain a sense of well-being through a return to responsible living, integrity, and concern and compassion for others. This, it seems, is 'therapy' of the most profound variety; and it is perhaps our great misfortune that this conception is today accepted and practiced with so little confidence (p. 229; in Lander & Nahon, 2005, pp. 17-18).

In our view, human beings need to make an ongoing, moment-by-moment choice between doing good versus evil, as manifested between the polarities of the healthy versus dark side of human nature:

We define the healthy side as the inner receptacle of all of the human creative forces for productivity, love, and emotional well-being—mind, body, and soul. The dark side is that part of the self which focusses on and aims towards a self and other destructive thrust. The concept of the dark side of human nature has been explored since antiquity, starting with symbols and metaphors of early cultures, Greek and Roman mythology, and the Bible. Its use precedes both Freud's (1939) concepts of Eros and Thanatos and Jung's (1933) concept of the shadow, also reflected in the Mythopoetic branch of men's studies (Barton, 2000; Bly, 1990). (Lander & Nahon, 2005, p. 51)

We see the human capacity for evil as inherent in the daily words spoken and the daily deeds done to one's fellow sojourners in life. This daily tendency towards a nasty evil, intentional or not, is often missed as a major source of chronic abuse and suffering resulting in PTSD, equal if not more worrisome than global strife and the degradation of the planet. The need to become accountable for its existence rests in each of our sand boxes (Lander & Nahon, 1995b).

Because of such daily patterns of behaviour, the existence of evil flourishes and is nurtured on the micro level; this is why it can flourish on the macro level. How often have we heard someone tell us "don't be silly," or "get a grip and move on"; thus one has not been heard but instead devalued and isolated from comfort, solace, and healing. This is hurtful and harmful; it is profoundly lacking in Integrity, and it is traumatizing.

We believe that one must not and cannot compare traumas; a trauma is a trauma to the one experiencing it. To compare it to another's is to devalue and negate the sacredness in an individual's experience. In our view, Integrity provides an antidote to this existential angst and terror, in inviting individuals—independent of circumstances—to assume the power and the responsibility for choosing to live according to their values, providing an understanding of self and meaning to their lives. This allows each one of us to be able to find meaningfulness in day-to-day living and feeling, stand in front of the mirror and brush one's teeth at night with the secure feeling that one has lived this day well—always with room to grow, but "good enough" (Lander & Nahon, 2005). We believe that this can only be achieved by attending to the tasks in our "acre-age" (Nahon & Lander, 2007)—those age-appropriate developmental tasks that stand before us in our own backyard. This in turn requires a daily, disciplined fidelity to one's value system and to do no harm, ensuring that one's "acre-age" has been weeded of evil behaviours toward others. Over-valuing global action and concern misses the boat of focussing on the harmfulness that is done one to another in daily interactions. Our concern regarding the notion of death anxiety is that global anxiety gets us off the hook for being responsible for day-to-day quality of life and meaningfulness. If one lives the more difficult path, there may with time be a sense that one has acquired the energy and commitment to do some reparative work for the planet as a whole.

2. We cannot live forever in a culturally and psychologically induced state of denial. At some point, we will be confronted with the unsettling fact that our life's journey will soon come to an end.

In North American culture, there seems to be a decades-old value system which adulates youth. Youth, in turn, is developmentally inclined to rank its top values in a manner that excludes examining the meaning of life and the inevitability of death. If one examines the media as a mouthpiece of societal value formation, validated by its singular focus on the lives of celebrities and its advertisements that both set and perpetuate societal and cultural values, one finds an insidious, covert and overt denial of the aging process, which implicitly leads to a denial of or invulnerability to death. This preoccupation with the denial of death, with its concomitant search for lotions, potions, spa treatments, gym memberships, etc. as indispensable, highly valued, finance- and time-consuming values, comprises one of the most egregious environmental contextual structures that nurture the underlying existential anxiety and dread of aging, dying and death.

3. The time has come for us to seek a better understanding of the process and phenomenon of death acceptance. There are numerous reasons for embarking on this positive exploration.

The focus on death, its awe and mystery, is difficult if not impossible to address therapeutically unless one has addressed a person's willingness to build a meaningful, i.e. value-focussed, life. While we can understand therapists' concerns about the reluctance to understand the process and the phenomenon of death acceptance, we feel that this therapeutic value may ironically not always be helpful in addressing the chronic daily and sometimes crippling anxiety about death and dying that plagues our time. In our view, the choice of living a non-meaningful life, i.e. not being true to one's personal values and not "walking the talk", is a personal, internal environmental structure that creates a chronic sense of what Mowrer referred to as a state of dis-ease (Mowrer, personal communication, 1969) and a sense that life is meaningless, such that what one truly becomes is one of the living dead. With that sense of dread and despair, suicide becomes an attractive antidote.

4. We cannot fully understand the meaning of life, until we stare at death unflinchingly. Paradoxically, death holds the key to life. We cannot live authentically and meaningfully without embracing death.

For us, this statement perhaps places the cart before the horse. Facing death "unflinchingly," we feel, can only be done with complete Integrity when one has been able to live life unflinchingly. From the Integrity model perspective, living a meaningful life unflinchingly requires the willingness to pay the prices of the value hierarchies which influence our decisions, and ultimately, those behaviours for which one is willing to be totally responsible and/or accountable, both for the stimulus that they present to others, as well as their impact on one's own self-esteem and ultimate sense of meaningfulness.

5. We all need to come to terms with our biological destiny sooner or later. To be prepared for this eventuality enables us to live fully and die without regrets.

While one usually does not know when one's death will happen, and while this lack of control over choosing when, where, or even, for some, whether (through the illusion of immortality), one will die, we believe that the only way to be prepared, with minimal regrets, is through the daily fidelity to one's personal value hierarchy. This translates into daring to keep one's plate clean of those "to-do lists" which have not been valued enough to have put in the time and effort, or to have paid the prices and honoured one's values, so that there are no regrets.

Integrity gives meaning to the drill and the sense of drudgery in daily life, the latter signalling a need to affirm values being lived out or a need to tweak or change them. There is no need for a "bucket list" unless these are highly ranked values that need to be attended to, and, if so, they must become integrated into one's life meaningfully. A life lived with Integrity allows for a sense of no regrets, as one's plate has been kept clean. Consequently, death can be accepted better even though there are some bucket items that have not yet been actualized. Death cannot be meaningful without a life lived with Integrity, and yet, in the last few lucid moments, one can take care of a major value.

6. There are cultural as well as individual differences in death attitudes. Our conceptions of the good death and our preferred pathways to death acceptance may impact how we live and how we die.

This is the nub of the existential dilemma. It is the very essence of defining oneself as an individual, with a roadmap for a meaningful existence (Lander & Nahon, 2005). The contextual structures or artefacts that seek to define the self and threaten to undermine our unique authentic selves are the value systems of family, friends, peer group, culture, religion, society, and the media. Out of this morass of conflicting, powerfully embedded value hierarchies external to the individual, individuals are impelled to enter the existential crucible and choose to be or not to be. One can have a meaningful life depending on the choice that has been made. The prices that one must pay in order to have a meaningful life must be paid by choice. Because of the implicit fidelity to one's personal value system, and the prices paid for it in walking this path, one ironically seems to acquire a better compassion for others with different values and can find the way to close the psychological space with others. The end result of this process is a flexible and meaningful movement toward a sense of community with many others rooted in a basic sense of community with the self.

7. We need to learn how to talk about death in a way that is liberating, humanizing, and life-enhancing. We hope that through an increased understanding of death acceptance, we may learn to treat each other with respect and compassion not only in the medical context but also in daily interactions.

From the Integrity model perspective, it is through the acceptance of the burden and liberation of choosing to live life meaningfully on a daily level of existence that the fear

and anxiety of death can be muted. By being faithful to oneself by behaving with Integrity and honouring one's values, there is a lack of defensiveness about being challenged by others with different value systems. One is able to evolve a genuine caring and compassion for others, no matter who they are or where they may be in life's journey. Mowrer always reminded us that "we are all somewhere on the road to recovery" (Mowrer, personal communication, 1969). For each of us, this comprises the recovery of our unique individual selves whereby the meaningful life chosen brings a sense of comfort and serenity about living and thus about dying as being somehow OK, and about the way that it is supposed to be.

The concept of the importance of acknowledging the reality of death reflects a professional value system. Acceptance reflects a value of embracing death in order to decrease the anxiety of death. The Integrity model invites and encourages individuals to focus on a life that is meaningful on a day-to-day, minute-by-minute basis as a more practical approach in tackling one's death anxiety. Our concern is that the anxiety about death and dying could in fact reflect a defense against being responsible for living a meaningful life. The Integrity model perspective invites us to focus on the unique individual's responsibility and burden as ironic antidotes to anxiety in general and death anxiety in particular.

In some cases, Integrity and fidelity to one's values asks one to choose to pay the price of one's life, and, in doing so, death becomes meaningful. It is important to remember, for example, that many of the military personnel who fought overseas in the World Wars knew that they would die, and all casualties paid a price. Not to have honoured one's values would have created a meaningless life.

Meaningfulness is highly unique to each individual. What is meaningful for a given person creates passion and joy, and makes existence worthwhile, such that even if the environmental structures raise the question of whether life is worth living, Integrity finds a way of answering yes.

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DEATH ACCEPTANCE THROUGH RITUAL

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In 1989, I completed the research for my doctoral dissertation exploring ritual as a psycho-therapeutic strategy for maladaptive grief. Twenty years later, I am still using the principles I uncovered to assist grieving clients to develop therapeutic rituals. This article describes the elements that need to be in a ritual in order for it to be perceived as therapeutic. Other issues for the practitioner will be outlined. The article's focus will be on using a ritual when an individual experiences their grief as "stuck" or maladaptive, usually some months or years into the process. I also use the information to assist griever who have recently suffered loss to create more meaningful death-related rituals such as wakes, funerals, scattering of ashes, and road-side memorials.

The original phenomenological research consisted of five co-respondents, four women and one man, who had developed rituals that were successful in moving them out of a seemingly chronic experience of intense grief. Two co-respondents were grieving the sudden, unexpected deaths of mothers; one woman, a successful artist, grieved a long period of "creative block" which had brought her to the brink of penury; a man grieved his former self, "killed" by an impaired driver who hit him and his motorcycle, resulting in severe brain injury and numerous orthopedic injuries; finally, a mother believed that her dysfunctional relationship with her adult daughter was moving toward a severing of all contact.

Defining ritual

I define death-related ritual as a ceremony directly involving at least one person and the symbols of the loss, usually directly and indirectly involving others. The ritual involves heightened meaning and emotion, and is often experienced as spiritual. It is focused around a specific situation or event, and involves out-of-the-ordinary activities.

My definition of ritual was influenced by ethnologist Arnold van Gennep, whose work in many different cultures and countries resulted in his 1909 book, "Rites of Passage." He described societal and religious rituals as helping participants to cross thresholds from one status to another. The Latin word for threshold is "limen." Rituals for status changes such as birth, death, initiation into a religion or community, or the bonding of two individuals into a couple are considered by van Gennep to be liminal. The wake, memorial service, and funeral are the most common death-related liminal rituals.

Often there are pre-liminal rituals to prepare the dying person or their loved ones for the threshold. Examples of these include the Catholic Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, given just before death, or a "death-bed" gathering, to hear the last instructions of the dying person and to say good-bye. Post-liminal rituals can include scattering the ashes on the first anniversary of the death, holding a pot-latch, or a ceremony to install the memorial marker at the gravesite. These rituals are often concerned with a shift away

from acute grief. As well as status change, van Gennep (1960) also viewed rituals as being developed for purification or protection.

Turner (1969), who expanded on the work begun by van Gennep, describes these three phases of ritual, using the metaphor of a journey across the threshold:

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. During the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the “passenger”) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more, and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and “structural” type. (p. 95)

In my clinical experience, people are rarely neutral about death-related rituals. I believe that many of those who relate negative experiences with these ceremonies have participated in one that did not meet the “phase” they were experiencing. Some years ago, I attended a funeral for a child who had been born with a congenital heart defect. Her three years of life involved many operations and much pain. In the two weeks prior, I had a number of counseling sessions with the family, as they prepared for Melissa’s final breath. Both parents told me, just before the service, that they were so “wrung out” with grieving that they wanted permission to let go of some of the pain, and to use some energy to focus on other parts of their lives. Although they knew their grief would continue, the parents were open to moving, at times, into a post-liminal phase. Deeply faithful, they hoped to hear some words during the service that would support them to “let go.” The funeral was not helpful. Their pastor was obviously in the liminal phase. He used words and phrases such as “we will be in shock for a long time,” “unexpected death,” “you are now starting the grieving process,” and “life will be bleak for some time.” A helpful ritual takes the primary grievers’ phase into consideration.

Ritualized behavior

People often speak of their daily “rituals.” I describe those instead as “ritualized behaviors,” those habits or routines that are so much a part of our day. Ritualized behaviors, such as reading the morning paper prior to dressing for work, may have some psychological or even spiritual effects, such as relaxing or opening our hearts to those in need, but they do not usually take us to the out-of-the-ordinary experience of a true ritual. A true ritual is unrepeatable. It is impossible to replicate every aspect of a previous ritual, and trying to do so keeps participants in the past. For example, treating each weekly worship service or family Thanksgiving feast as the same as preceding ones does not allow changes that reflect current reality.

Psychotherapeutic ritual

I’ve been to a number of conference workshops where presenters speak of prescribing rituals to their clients. They may say, “Go to your mother’s grave and tell her what you

think of her.” Or, “Keep one chair empty at Christmas dinner so that you remember Frank is still in your hearts.” I am extremely nervous about deciding what ritual needs to be done, and what specific activities it needs to include. As my clients explore their issues, they may realize that going to the gravesite is important, or they may decide that another therapeutic strategy such as writing a letter to the deceased, or doing an “empty chair” Gestalt technique, would meet their needs better. And, if my clients do decide on a ritual, I want to help them build it from elements that are meaningful for them, not for me. I may experience the color “red” as angry, while they may view it as bringing good fortune.

Claire’s ritual

To give a sense of the “flow” of a therapeutic ritual, here is one from my own clinical practice, which was also part of my research.

When Claire came out of her three-week long coma at Victoria General Hospital, she was told that her father had also survived the car accident. Her mother, however, was dead. At first, her injuries took most of her attention, for both her head and her body were broken. Among other injuries, her jaw and left leg were fractured, she had lost vision in her right eye, and she sustained a diffuse head injury. Some of these injuries would heal; others might restrict her forever. This realization sunk in slowly and painfully, leaving her no psychological space to come to terms with the death of her mother.

At 24 years of age, Claire was living alone and loving her full-time work with young children. Petite and slim, with a shy, sensitive nature, she had good relationships with her parents, her two younger brothers, and her friends. Altogether, her future had looked bright.

It seemed to Claire that her life and her parent’s car shattered simultaneously. She couldn’t imagine living on her own again, much less working. She was concerned that men would find her physically and/or mentally unattractive.

Then a major impediment to rehabilitation occurred. A common symptom of traumatic brain injury is concrete, rigid thinking. Claire told the neuro-psychologist that, according to the Roman Catholic Church, no one could accept the reality of a death without attending a funeral. And she had been in a coma during the service for her mother. Therefore, acknowledging her injuries would mean acknowledging her mother’s death and, in Claire’s mind, go against church teaching. As a result, Claire refused to participate in the treatment plan set out for her. Because of the head injury, no one could shift Claire in her too-rigid interpretation of church doctrine.

Claire was referred to me for psychotherapy. In our first session, she said, “I just can’t get on with life until I accept her death.” As we discussed this, Claire shared her concern that acknowledging her mom’s death meant rejecting her faith. She saw no way out of the problem.

After a few sessions to build trust and rapport, I asked Claire if she could imagine developing a ritual to help her. The suggestion evoked a strong negative reaction. For Claire, a ritual must be done in the church and she was certain that the church would not allow another ceremony. She was equally certain that another ritual would deeply upset her dad.

I asked, "If these two concerns did not exist, how would you feel about taking part in a ritual?" Claire responded that she would welcome that. Her homework from that session was to meet with her parish priest and her father to tell them of her problem.

The next psychotherapy session saw an excited Claire announcing that both her priest and her dad were very agreeable to the idea of a ritual. The three of them decided on a memorial Mass. Claire was bursting with plans and decisions to make, as her priest wanted her to be deeply involved. In fact, Claire said she would be so busy choosing readings, inviting people to the ritual, organizing a reception afterwards, and decorating the church that she wanted to postpone psychotherapy until after it was over. Because her memory, speed of thinking, and organizational skills had all been damaged in the accident, Claire realized that participation in the hospital rehabilitation program would be essential to ensure she had the ability to carry out her ritual.

It took Claire three months to improve enough to feel ready to undertake the ceremony. Responding to her invitation, 40 people attended the Mass and all came to the reception afterwards. When Claire saw me a month later, she said, "I didn't think I was capable of planning this. I mean, anyone who had come out of what I had. . . . Well, it's made me realize that I don't give myself enough credit."

Claire's self-confidence increased after the ritual, and through her rehabilitation. A few years later, she sent me a letter telling of her recent graduation from school, and her new position working with preschoolers with special needs. One of the children told his mother in her hearing, "My teacher only has one eye and walks funny like me. I really like her." Claire saw herself as a role model for her young charges. A few years later, I received wedding pictures in the mail, and a few years after that, a picture of a beaming couple with their new baby. Claire's body might limp through life, but her spirit was soaring.

Developing a psychotherapeutic ritual

The following points were described as "essential" by all of my co-respondents.

Careful preparation

It takes time and energy to create an effective ritual. The goal of the ceremony needs to be clarified and kept in mind during the preparation. It also takes time to determine the when, where, what, and how of the ritual. Often, the preparation itself is therapeutic. Claire prepared herself to undertake her ritual by working hard at the rehab hospital. Another woman, whose mother had died giving birth to her, spent months "getting to know" her mom by interviewing relatives who had kept silent through her whole life in a misguided attempt to not upset the child. She discovered characteristics and interests she shared with her mother, and described herself as "owning" her adulthood, for the first time, even before participating in her ritual.

Importance of symbols

A ritual takes us out of our usual life in order to impart knowledge and experience around a particular topic. Since the duration of a ritual is usually quite short, powerful tools are needed to direct and invite participants' attention away from their everyday thoughts and

actions, towards the purpose of the ceremony. Symbols are frequently the tools of choice to facilitate this shift.

Last year, I gave a workshop at the Spiritual Directors International conference in Chicago. I started the presentation the way I often begin grief groups. When the spiritual directors arrived for the session, they found a circle of chairs around a somewhat battered, bare table. I had already fended off a number of helpful volunteers who tried to lay a tablecloth and flower arrangement on it.

“Before we introduce ourselves,” I said, “I invite you to close your eyes and focus on a loss that is weighing on your heart and mind. How do you experience that weight? Is that worry or pain in a specific part of your body?” After a few seconds, I added, “Thank you, please open your eyes. You see before you an empty table. Often people who experience loss feel that their lives are empty, like this table. On the larger table at the side of the room, are a number of objects. One of them might be a symbol for you of comfort, of healing power, of love, or of something else you might need at this time. If you find a helpful symbol, you may wish to place it on the center table. There are also small pieces of paper and pencils, in case you wish to write a word or phrase that will be helpful to you.”

The participants moved to the side table, and soon the center one was laden with soft cloth, candles, a pine cone, some jewelry, photographs of loved ones, a Bible, and a number of words written on the slips of paper. As they reseated themselves, I suggested, “Now close your eyes again and focus on your pain or concern. See if there is any difference?”

The following was shared a few moments later:

“I feel lighter”

“I don’t think it’s so hopeless anymore.”

“It hurts worse, and I realize I’ve been avoiding it. So this is a good thing.”

“I feel more connected to the rest of the group now.”

So, within a few moments, just by turning their attention to a symbol, a number of people in that room moved along the path from restriction to freedom.

When helping grievors design their ritual, I give them a list of questions, such as “What colors or fragrances do you associate with the goal of your ritual?” One woman told me she did not want her adult children to be present, much as she loved them, because her ritual was undertaken to heal psychological wounds that had been created in her childhood, years before she became a mother. Her children were a symbol of a different life and she wanted her heart and mind totally focused on her own childhood.

Participation

A young man approached me after an evening talk. “My name’s Roger, and I have a problem. I just read in the obituaries that a man I know died suddenly of a stroke. George and I were members of the Outdoors Club and the only contact we had was while hiking with the group. In spite of our infrequent meetings and the forty years’ difference in our ages, I really cared for him—and I’m grieving. I loved his sense of humor and kindness, and I’ll really miss him the next time I’m on a hiking trail. The funeral is next Tuesday, and I’ve already booked the time off work.

“My problem is I want to wear my hiking clothes to the service, to kinda honor our relationship and the activity we loved, but I’m worried his loved ones will think I’m being disrespectful, not wearing a suit. I don’t know any of them, and I’m sure they’ve never heard of me.”

I suggested to Roger that he tell someone in the family, prior to the funeral, his reason for wearing hiking clothes. There is a “grapevine” active in every human group—from families, to the workplace, to religious communities, to sports teams. In each of these groups, there is at least one person, who, if given information, will spread it rapidly. A friend told me recently, “My co-worker Beth disseminates information faster than the official memos!”

The young man thanked me and left. The next week, I received an e-mail from him. “I called the funeral home and they put me on to a family friend who was helping organize things. I told him why I wanted to wear hiking clothes and he said he would inform the family. Was I ever surprised when I walked into the church! So many people came up to me and said something like, ‘You must be Roger. George was passionate about the hiking club, and you represent that part of his life. Thank you so much for coming and thank you for wearing your hiking clothes.’ So, although I thought I was the only one who would benefit from my apparel, it turned out that many people felt I had enhanced the service.”

Participation implies an attitude, an intention to be fully present to the current activity. It means clarifying our individual reasons for being present and then living out those reasons in the ritual. Roger actively participated in the funeral through the clothes that held deep meaning for him.

Active participation promotes congruency—an agreement or harmony in all dimensions of our being. Congruency is the experience of mind, heart, body, and spirit all working together. It is an important psychological principle, for when we are not congruent, it is difficult to acknowledge, clarify, and meet our psychological, physical, or mental needs.

Congruency has a number of benefits. We process information more efficiently and learn more effectively when we are congruent. When we bring our whole self to an experience, we will understand many more implications and interconnections, since we can “see” the experience through the “eyes” of our heart, mind, body, and spirit. Congruency also encourages commitment to a value, to a job, to a relationship, to a life path. When we are “touched” in all aspects of our being, we are more motivated to implement the changes in attitudes and behaviors that will bring us to increasing alignment with that to which we are committed. We will “walk the talk.”

Inclusion of others

Most rituals include more than one person. Even when a ceremony is undertaken alone, by the griever, I have found that others usually play an important role in the background. Daniel told me, “It was important to spend Christmas morning, by myself, at Dad’s gravesite. But, of course, I told my family where I was going, asked for their prayers, and debriefed with them when I returned home.” Other people seem to fill one or more of three major roles around the ritual. Some grieverers need the presence of others as supporters, some want witnesses to acknowledge and understand their loss, and some

experience the presence of others as “includes,” giving an invitation to rejoin the community.

Past/present/future

My co-respondents found it important to acknowledge and clarify the past, and present, before reaching out to the future. Through elements such as song, story, or objects, the past relationship with the deceased was made visible to all. Expressing the current experience of loss allowed others to support the griever, and publicly admitting the goal of the ritual firms the griever’s intent to embrace it. One man spoke in his ritual about his struggle with alcohol after his daughter’s death. He told me, some months later, that whenever he thought of reaching for a drink, he remembered his public vow to use healthier supports. “That memory gave me the courage I needed.”

Benefits of therapeutic ritual

An effective therapeutic ritual can be beneficial in many ways. Here are a few:

- provides a forum where the death is acknowledged and accepted as real
- legitimizes grief and different styles of grieving
- provides structure and stability at a time of great uncertainty or chaos
- raises self-esteem
- being time-limited, it can be a safe place to express emotion or grieving issues
- sets the climate for a potent honoring of the deceased, the relationship, etc.
- issues are often clarified
- since it includes symbols and activities around the future goal, promotes a positive sense of life direction or meaning
- with the inclusion of others, gives sense of community
- promotes congruency, since body, mind, emotions, and spirit all participate
- public statements of intention encourage follow through

I have seen much evidence that a therapeutic ritual helps grievers accept the reality of their loss, in a way that promotes hope for healing. I do not suggest rituals to every griever I encounter, however. A true ritual takes time and effort on the part of client and counselor, and if another intervention would be quicker and easier, I would usually use that instead. For the appropriate situation and person, though, a therapeutic ritual can be transformative.

EXPLORING ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH AND LIFE THROUGH STORY AND METAPHOR

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Introduction

In the summer of 2007 I joined a chaplaincy training program in a mental hospital. The trainee is forced to explore within themselves their relationship to life and to death. In the mental hospital, there were not many deaths that occurred, though there was a threat to life and a threat to existence. What came into question for me was the nature of reality. The picture of life that I had did not include a place for people who struggle to hold a sliver of existence. Most people were walking a tightrope between mental stability and psycho-social-spiritual annihilation.

This experience has deepened my phenomenological grasp of death. It may have very little to do with the final breath leaving the body. The physical death may or may not be preceded by emotional, mental, and spiritual deaths. To truly face death is to explore one's vitality in life. The heart of this exploration can be touched through the unit of the existential—through story and metaphor.

Following is an existential fictional work which challenges the reader to think about the possibility of living a dead life versus seeking out opportunities to reawaken and find meaning in a dying world. The story is written in the thick physical language of the existential narrative. There is a story within a story, and multilevel access to meaning. The intention though is that this is *one* story about facing death in life and life in death.

The story: *Born Again*

I wake up in the middle of the night.

Reaching out for the small table at the side of my bed with stumbling, shaking hands, I grab for my glasses. My hands reach over things that I feel, but know not what they are. Something soft and delicate. Something hard and cold.

What day is it today? I hope that I am alone in this bed. I feel the wiry rim of my frames, pick them up, and fit them over my eyes. The little hard plastic bends on both sides find their usual places, hugging my ears with just the right pressure. I hate when they are too loose or too tight.

I am thrust into a world and I live.

The room is dark. Of course I knew this even before I opened my eyes. Darkness can be sensed. And it's more than just the absence of the shine of light that you can see behind closed eyelids in a lit room. It's a sense of safety and submission that is a paper-thin mask of complete terror, submitting to the mystery of the unknown.

When I put on my glasses the darkness changes. Suddenly, I am not just in a fuzzy dark space. I am immersed in *clear* darkness. There is no escape from it now. My awareness is completely attuned to the emptiness that surrounds me. And in this

moment, I feel so free. I can stop wondering about where this ride is going. I am at the end. In my simple pine box. And I am content.

A baby's cry disturbs my peace. It is not a cry from the outside. I am sure of it. The last time I heard this cry, I went around the house searching for hours. I did not find a baby crying. I looked everywhere. I even went outside and circled the block a few times peering into neighbors' windows.

Please, someone comfort that child.

The sounds of suffering make my skin crawl. Perhaps it needs a bottle, or a diaper change. Would you want to spend more than a second in a soiled diaper? The thought of it makes me sick. This baby is wailing so.

God, kid, shut up.

I start shouting out loud for help. My shouts become screams directed to everyone and to no one. No one hears the cries of children. They wash upon dammed ears. And because they cannot enter into the ears they are soaked up by the skin. The cry invades every pore of the body. It fills the veins and organs with gut-wrenching howls. We become walking flesh sacks, filled with invisible tears and silent ear-piercing shrieks of pain.

My mind is seized by memory.

I am walking down a familiar street in my neighborhood. It's a nice day. The sun is bright, and there is a light, perfect breeze that tickles my earlobes. There are shallow puddles on the sidewalk, leftover evidence from a rain-soaked evening. I inhale deeply...

I smell smoke. My strut and smile are broken by the smell of smoke. I peer in the direction of the scent. The sky is pure blue, a perfect sapphire crystal with swirls of steady white cloud. And there, emerging from behind a four-story brick apartment building, I spot the dragon-like tail of a smoke cloud. My peace shatters and my body is hurled towards the belly of the beast. I run around the corner and can now hear sirens in the distance. Heat rattles my body as I come face to face with a small house that is set aflame.

I hear the baby's shriek. It comes from the second floor of the burning house. I impulsively run towards the front door, and am fiercely repelled by the scalding temperature of the air around the house. The sirens get louder, but still there is no hero-filled fire truck. The cry gets louder. It becomes insane. I am driven to madness and a thought erupts like a volcano.

The back door.

I flash around the house and see that it has not yet caught fire, not as bad anyhow. I ram the wooden backdoor with the full force of mustered courage. My shoulder crushes hard against the thick wood. I shout in pain. Inhaling sharply, I grab the door's handle. By luck it turns. The idiots or lucky bastards, whoever they are, left the back door open. I enter into a fiery hell. The fear of every fanatic believer is alive in my sight. The scream continues. My eyes wildly search for a way upstairs. As I look across the open kitchen into the living room, there is a framed picture of Jesus' face that is slowly being devoured by fire. It is one of those picture perfect, pretty boy Jesuses. His mouth is closed and his eyes are soft and inviting. For an instant the baby's shrill seems to come from behind his serenity. It is pouring out of his skin, defying his pleasant countenance. I inhale a thick gust of smoke and become lightheaded. My body becomes weak and I sense my knees wishing to collapse. With valiant thought I take a step forward. As my foot sets down

against the bamboo-colored linoleum floor, the front door is splintered open by a fireman's axe. The heroes have arrived in a fullness of glory, drabbed in yellow fire-retardant armor. I allow myself to faint into unconsciousness, a true victim of circumstance.

The next afternoon, as I head to the Metro, I grab a free local paper from a familiar gloved, outstretched hand. I am returning home after an expensive night in the hospital. Perhaps I needed the rest. The front-page headline reads, "New Public Parking Complex Transforms Downtown." In the bottom right corner of the second page there is a small column that tells the tale of a heroic fire squad that saved the lives of a man and a baby that were caught in a house that was on fire. Cause of fire, unknown. Why those people were in the house, unknown.

Here alone in my room, the burning picture of Jesus visits me. With fiery lips and blazing hair, he asks questions that I cannot answer:

"Where are you heading?"

"Can you tell me what is becoming of this world?"

I simply want to get lost in laughter. The image of this holy "prima donna," who has hallowed God's name, whose face is the foundation of this country's faith, makes me want to laugh. Am I really the one who is lost? Trying to wrap my head around his unceasing questions is like trying to fit a tiny rubber band around a banana tree.

I remember when you were enough, God. You were the answer to all my questions. When lost, I could look up at the Heavens and feel the shower of purpose rain upon me, a radiant downpour of honey-tasting manna. My tongue would sup up meaning with each breath, as I inhaled the soul breath that you exhaled into me.

This was unsustainable!

As I came to know you, things changed. You were knocked off your throne of glory and bound with doubt. Then your wretched body was tossed carelessly, but with joy, into a flaming inferno. Your skin was cremated to ash. When your ashes were held to the light, they glimmered a dazzle of perfect polished diamonds. Galaxies of stars filled my palms. You whispered in the ringing song of wind chimes and the shimmer of rustling autumn leaves, "I am here." The wind lifted the ash and carried it over all the land, as far as the eye could see and even farther. I gazed at my hands, and they shined brightly for a moment as my skin absorbed the powder that was once your flesh. The world, with me in it, became truly alive with your presence.

Attention Israel: the Mystery, our Master, is Mystery, Just One.

Tonight I can finally look into the mirror and know that the Me that I am seeing is enough. My name is Paul. I stand proudly short at five feet and five inches. I have a head full of gorgeous black curly locks. My eyes are the color of ripe hazelnuts. They reveal an infinite depth: pain, power, and wisdom. My nose is sharp and regal. Lips are full and pursed with passion. My cheeks are two apples that speak of stern gentleness. I am sick of living life in the slime of potential nothingness. I am a devotee of the Light and find meaning in all. I want to be free to be.

Twenty-seven years have passed. I sat in a prison of loneliness. Lonely because I never met myself. I did not understand that I had to choose who to be. The magic moment for which I waited, when the Me would collude and emerge, never came. I am a puzzle of infinite pieces and I construct myself in every moment. I was doing it all along,

but without awareness. Now I choose myself. I have unlimited fun being one person in my bedroom, a completely different person at work, and a third person at school. Life is not meaningless because there is no objective meaning, no God on high that is separate from me directing my life. Meaning is a flourishing garden that is seasonal and forever being gleaned.

This is not a story about nothing. There is a tale that I have to tell, though I have trouble getting down to the root of what I am trying to say. Inhale... breathe deeply, and here I go.

* * *

Once upon a time there was a farmer that lived in a quaint little house made mostly of brick, but thatched with thick wood. His wife lived with him too, only they did not share a bedroom. They had trouble getting along. Even though they lived in the middle of a vast field of corn rows, pumpkin and cabbage patches, and cucumber and tomato vines, they could not seem to internalize the Edenic peacefulness that surrounded them. Early mornings, while the farmer was watering, tilling, or weeding, he would wonder what went wrong in his marriage. When he searched his soul he would witness there a deep hatred for his once beloved wife. He watched this pit of disdain grow inside of him. It tasted of rotted prune and thick resin. Until one day, as he was tugging on a particularly large stone that was buried in the path of a new herb garden, he was struck with insight.

"The reason that I feel this way is not because I hate my wife, but because I hate this house and this field. I hate waking up early each morning and getting dirty working with these crops. My back hurts and legs ache. If I were not married, I probably would never have settled down to this life. I would be out adventuring in the world, taking in new sights. There is so much to do. So many unexplored places. I think it's time to start living!"

The farmer, a tall, slender, just below middle-aged man, with a still rather full head of sun-bleached blond hair and deep hazel eyes, stood up from his hunched position and rounded his shoulders down his muscular back. Taking a deep breath of fresh air, he turned his gaze to his cozy green-roofed cottage, and prepared his mind to share his thoughts with his once beloved.

As if responding to a subliminal call, Edna appeared on the small wooden porch that jutted out quite randomly from their home. She was a short, stocky woman, with her head reaching up to her husband's chest. Her hair was kept in a long tight braid and her skin, untouched by worry, was smooth milky white. Gazing out across the field she saw her husband standing tall and facing the house, a strange look upon his face. She wondered what he might be thinking about standing there in his lanky dusty overalls. Their relationship had deteriorated into a silent storm. They even stopped eating meals together. Instead, she would prepare something for two, and set his plate with utensils at the small table that stood under the porch's awning. She would let the screen door slam shut to alert him that the food was ready.

"He is a good, hard working man," she thought, "but had I not been pushed into this marriage by my parents, things would have been different. I would not have ended up a farmer's wife, married to a kettle and stove. There is a great wide world out there to discover and I want to be part of it."

She tilted her head away from the direction her husband was standing, letting her tears flow freely down her cheeks. “No! I mustn’t cry,” she thought, “I can be strong like him and tell him how I feel. Perhaps, he might even want the same thing as me?” With the back of her supple wrist she wiped away a final tear and turned her body to proudly face the man whose heart she must break.

With surprise she saw that he was no longer standing there. “Very odd,” her frustrated mind blurted; “Where has he gone off to now?” She took a few steps closer to the rail of the porch and gazed the field in front of her. What she saw made her give out a short and muddled yelp. Her heart raced and stomach quaked as she saw her husband’s body lifeless on the ground at the spot that he stood only moments before.

“Jim,” she called. “Jim!” she yelled. But Jim did not stir.

One minute before, as he was looking at his wife, and past his wife to his new destiny, he felt a sharp, sudden pain shoot up his right arm, followed by an intense explosion of pressure in his chest. It bolted directly to his brain. He opened his mouth to call for Edna, but all that came was the faintest cough, as his last breath exhaled his limited existence into the infiniteness of nothingness. He died there, his body landing cushioned between two newly plowed garden beds.

Edna jolted down the three short steps of the porch and quickly made her way to kneel next to Jim. *What now?* Her tears began to flow more heavily now. *He has no family left to tell, a handful of friends that he sees once every few years.* Her head shot up toward the blazing sun above as she shouted, “Have we even begun to live?”

With automatic resolve she grabbed hold of the shovel that was lying next to her husband, thrown aside by Jim when its slightly rusted tip stabbed uselessly into the deeply embedded stone. Edna rose, her fingers firmly gripping the thick wooden shaft of the shovel. Surprised, she noticed how natural it felt to hold this tool. She was Eve, the first midwife helping the Ultimate Mother bear fruit.

She plowed hard next to the spot where the stone jutted out of the ground. Using her foot, powered by her short, bulky leg, she forced its head deeper. With all her weight she pushed on the shovel’s shaft, protruding now from the earth. She felt it give slightly, and pushed even harder. She could feel a furrow of catharsis carve itself into her once perfectly smoothed forehead, beads of sweat now freely dripping from her brow. With a grunt of pain and passion, Edna pressed her whole body against that shovel. With sweat and tears she felt the stone give way to the upward force of the shovel. Tearing through layers of dirt and tangled weed, the stone emerged from the ground. In unison with the stone breaking through, Edna’s body was treated to a free fall as the shovel, like a lever, pressed down toward the ground. Her head landed with a soft bounce on the belly of her dead husband. There was startled silence for a moment as Edna pieced together what she had discovered.

Laughter. Deep chortles and high-pitched cackles erupted from Edna’s full lips. Her body quaked and quivered with shockwaves of laughter beginning from her belly and ending at her fingers and toes.

I’m alive. She understood. *Dear Lord, I am alive.*

* * *

I'm about ready to wrap all this up. I am going to put this writing into a manila envelope. Fold the pages in half and carefully sharpen the crease with my thumb. On the outside of the envelope I am going to write in black marker: *For the baby who almost burned in this house.* Then I am going to leave it outside of what is left of that charred hovel. I doubt that someone will deliver it to the caretakers of the baby who would then save it for when Junior can read. My hope, though, is that someone will read these words and they might appreciate how I was saved.

Perhaps you will stop for just a moment and evaluate whether you are who you wish to be.

***FLOURISHING: A VISIONARY NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HAPPINESS AND
WELL-BEING, BY MARTIN E. P. SELIGMAN***

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Introduction

Overall impression of the book

Love him or hate him, Martin Seligman is arguably the most famous positive psychologist on earth. No other psychologist has ever achieved the kind of dominant presence in positive psychology that Seligman has. It is difficult to evaluate the work of such a legendary figure without being affected by the halo effect. I have only two modest objectives in this review: (1) assess the scholarly merits of *Flourish*; and (2) critique the role of big money in Seligman's extraordinary accomplishments.

Flourish begins with an introduction of Seligman's new theory of well-being and a summary of a number of exercises and strategies that can be used to boost happiness and well-being. The remainder of the book is Seligman's personal account of the rapid expansion of positive psychology into major domains of human activities from education and business to medicine and the military. In sum, it is a book more about the flourishing of Seligman's brand of positive psychology than the positive psychology of flourishing.

I am not clear about the intended audience. When Seligman said to his wife: "I don't have an audience in mind," she replied by suggesting, "Just write for yourself" (p. 267). Indeed the book feels like he is writing for himself and for his legacy. *Flourish* makes for fascinating reading only if one is interested in entering into the mind and heart of a brilliant psychologist, introducing its readers to the fairy-tale world of big money, big science, big names, and Seligman's mega projects.

Science or pop psychology?

It is difficult to do full justice to this book because it is neither a purely scholarly monograph on the psychological science of flourishing nor a full-fledged self-help book. Only the first three chapters are devoted to the theory of and research on well-being; even there it does not have the depth or sophistication of a scientific treatise on the five elements of his PERMA model. For example, there is a great deal of research on the role

of meaning in enhancing well-being (Wong, in press; Wong, 2010; Wong & Fry, 1998) which receives very little mention in his book.

On the other hand, it is also not a very useful self-help book because it does not provide clear step-by-step instructions or practical tools for readers to use to enhance their PERMA. In fact, some of the happiness-inducing and strength-enhancing exercises described in *Flourish* have already been reported many times elsewhere. No new evidence-based exercises are introduced.

On many occasions, Seligman makes the same sales pitch one would find in other self-help books. For example: “This book will help you flourish” (p. 1), or “Glimpsing the vision of a flourishing human future is life changing. And so this book will increase your well-being—and it will help you flourish” (p. 2). Needless to say, there is no empirical proof that the mere act of reading *Flourish* will actually lead to flourishing.

Another common sales tactic is to provide testimonial evidence. Here is an example of expert testimony by Seligman: “The people who work in positive psychology are the people with the highest well-being I have ever known” (p. 2). This statement is like the Pope claiming that all people working in ministry are people with the highest moral standards. There are no a priori or empirical reasons to believe that people doing research in positive psychology are any better or worse than psychologists working in other areas.

The Emperor’s New Clothes

Related to the lack of scientific rigor is the absence of a clearly articulated formal theory of flourishing. Seligman proclaims that he has developed a new theory of well-being:

I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. This theory, which I call well-being theory, is very different from authentic happiness theory. (p. 13)

Is There a New Theory of Well-being?

My immediate reaction is: by what scientific criterion does Seligman conclude that PERMA provides the gold standard for measuring well-being? Many researchers in the field of well-being, including myself, think that Ryff and Singer’s (1998; see also Ryff, in press) model of well-being is the gold standard. There is no conceptual or theoretical innovation that makes PERMA “very different from authentic happiness theory” (p. 13). Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence that PERMA represents a new theory of well-being “with a radical rethinking of what positivity and flourishing are” (p. 9). At most, Seligman’s PERMA is an expanded version of his authentic happiness theory, adding two new elements (relationship and accomplishment) to his original three pillars of positive psychology.

“Well-being theory is about all five pillars, the underpinnings of the five elements is the strengths” (pp. 24-25). However, nowhere in the book does Seligman explain how each of the five pillars is anchored to a particular set of strengths. Nor does he specify what mechanisms underlie the connection between strengths and the five pillars of well-being.

Is There a New Theory of Intelligence?

He also claims to have developed a new theory of intelligence. It turns out that this new theory is not so much about intelligence as it is about the importance of grit and character in achievement, which has to do with achievement motivation rather than intelligence. The formula—achievement = skill x effort—can be traced back to Bernard Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner, 1985). To define effort in terms of self-discipline and grit is as old as the Chinese tradition of education. He has added nothing new theoretically or empirically to the construct of intelligence.

Finally, the concept of grit is much richer than “the never-yielding form of self-discipline” (p. 121), because grit also connotes the great human capacity for endurance and courage in the face of extreme danger and suffering. Seligman's GRIT does not take into account the large literature on the behavioral mechanisms of persistence under adverse conditions (Wong, 1995).

The Future of Positive Psychology

Big Money, Big Science, Big Name

Right at the outset, Seligman acknowledges the big money that has contributed to the flourishing of his brand of positive psychology. In his statement to the CEO of Atlantic Philanthropies, he confesses that positive psychology “would not have happened without Atlantic” (p. 9). Available records also show that his vision of positive psychology would not have flourished without generous funding from the Government and many other big foundations.

With regards to his PERMA 51 vision of making more than half of the world's population flourish, I give him credit for his optimism and bold vision. However, I wonder what would happen if Seligman had all the money and all the power he needed—would he have a better chance of success than B. F. Skinner's vision of utopia in *Walden Two*?

In the final analysis, I conclude that even with all the power that big money and big science can afford, it is unlikely that PERMA 51 would succeed, for the following reasons: (1) there are competing theories of and visions for flourishing (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Singer, 2003; Schneider, 2011; Wong, 2011b), and Seligman's inability to cooperate with others with different views reduces the likelihood of enhancing global flourishing; (2) different people and different cultures may benefit from different approaches to flourishing; (3) training people to score high on PERMA does not necessarily mean true flourishing in real life because of problems of internal and external validity; and (4) any project that focuses entirely on the individual will fail because the situation variable always remains an important source of variance.

While Seligman emphasizes the important roles of ethics and values, he also believes that “What you care about—your values—is more basic than ethics” (p. 229). Furthermore, he prescribes caring for the five elements of PERMA as the most important thing in life. Here lies the conundrum: if people cared more about their own happiness and success than other people's well-being and ethical principles, then we would have an uncaring and chaotic society. Seligman recognizes that many of the

problems we experienced during the financial downturn were due to greed, corruption, and disregard for public interest or ethical rules. But, if doing what one cares about were more important than ethics, then there would be more scandals and crimes on Wall Street.

It is interesting that Seligman defines flourishing as PERMA plus at least three of five other qualities: positive self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, and self-determination. This seems so arbitrary because optimism and resilience are indispensable to well-being (Wong, 2011a). Furthermore, these elements are not autonomous entities—they are all related intricately.

Quoting from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on the final metamorphosis of the spirit into the Child Reborn, Seligman visualizes every human being as a reborn child, willingly saying "Yes" to Seligman's five elements of well-being. It seems ironic that Seligman should conclude his book by quoting Nietzsche's existential thought to support his own Pollyannaish vision.

In fact, Nietzsche's sacred Yes to life actually means having a Dionysian relationship to life. The Child Reborn represents a tragic hero's religious affirmation of life as it is—in its totality, in all its darkness and questions, including harsh human sufferings and the horrors of eternal recurrence of the same. To affirm life is to love fate—"amor fati"—the inseparability of pain and joy, and the unavoidable unity of the Yin Yang dimensions of life.

Conclusion

Flourish is a disappointment as a scholarly work on the subject matter because it is neither comprehensive nor original. The book is full of anecdotal and autobiographical materials, and lacks the rigor and sophistication of serious academic publications. There is little discussion of alternative views and findings that challenge his position. I often wonder whether anyone who spends as much time as Seligman does in managing several multimillion-dollar mega projects and a vastly expanding multi-national empire would still have the time and energy for serious research and writing.

When so much money is given to one researcher, without going through vigorous peer review and without considering the relative merits of alternative solutions, there is always the danger of corruption. Given the recent revelation of scandals involving big names in science and medicine, it seems to me that throwing most of the research money to one person may not be the best way to facilitate scientific progress. A case may be made that any good researcher given the same amount of money that Seligman has received could achieve the same kind of domination, which may not be good for the field.

Many people have criticized Seligman's positivity bias (Held, 2002; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011; Wong, 2011a). This book still suffers from the same positivity bias. For example, Seligman is fully aware that many nations throughout human history suffer from war, poverty, etc. He is also aware that in such nations survival and self-defense are of the uttermost importance. Nevertheless, he still maintains that human flourishing occurs at a time of peace and prosperity and suggests that "North America, the European Union, Japan, and Australia ... are at a Florentine moment: rich, at peace, enough food, health, and harmony" (p. 237). This raises the question: are people living in

poor and war-torn nations denied the possibility of flourishing? A balanced model of positive psychology (Wong, 2011a) maintains that flourishing is possible regardless of one's circumstances if we make meaningful living the cornerstone of positive psychology.

The two chapters I like most are "Army Strong: Comprehensive Soldier Fitness" and "Turning Trauma into Growth." These two chapters show the benefits of including experts from outside Seligman's immediate circle. Scholars such as Ken Pargament and Richard Tedeschi have greatly enriched and deepened positive psychology. I particularly like the statement about the comprehensive soldier fitness program that it "supports and encourages soldiers to search for truth, self-knowledge, right action, and purpose in life: living by a code that is rooted in belonging to and serving something the soldier believes is larger than the self" (p. 150). This sounds more like a page from my meaning-centered positive psychology (Wong, 2010, 2011a).

I would not recommend this book as a textbook because it gives students the wrong impression about the enterprise of scientific research. It also does not give students a broad and balanced view of the subject of flourishing. I would also not recommend the book as a self-help book because so much of the book is about Seligman's mega projects and personal experiences rather than step-by-step guides to increase flourishing for individuals.

To end my review on a positive note, I think that Seligman has done a good job in popularizing positive psychology. I think he is a great entrepreneur and communicator in psychology and has done much to educate the public about the relevance of psychology to their lives. Like his previous publications, *Flourish* would appeal to many segments of society. However, I believe that its biggest value is in the historical and autobiographical account of Seligman's positive psychology movement.