

# **WHAT UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PERCEIVE TO BE THEIR MEANING IN LIFE**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

For centuries people have wondered about the meaning of life. Scholars and common people have looked at this colossal question and have imagined the possibilities. An assortment of perspectives exists about what brings meaning to human life. Metz (2001) attempted to view the literature on this vast subject and cataloged various viewpoints into two overarching categories: the Supernaturalist perspective, and the Naturalist perspective. These umbrella perspectives refine and process some of the unconnected notions that exist in the fields of philosophy, primarily, but also in the field of psychology, about the meaning of life. Metz's framework was used in this study as a means to analyze and understand some of the varied perspectives. From his outline, this study was born.

The purpose of this study was to understand what undergraduate students believe to be the meaning of life for them. Philosophical and psychological scholars suppose that certain factors in human beings' lives bring them meaning and fulfillment. This study surveyed students' responses to these suppositions. In the survey students indicated which aspects of their lives brought them meaning, using a Likert-type scale.

A survey was constructed by this researcher, using themes from the literature about meaning of life issues. The presented survey was used to uncover how people would rate the existing themes when confronted with them in a self evaluation. One hundred thirty two undergraduate students from the College of Education, at the University of Saskatchewan were surveyed, in October of 2002. Three Educational Psychology 258.3 classes were used in this research.

The study found that the participating men and women tended to think similarly about most survey items that were related to their meaning in life. Three hypotheses were examined in this study. The first hypothesis was that the overall ranking given to the meaning of life statements in the survey will differ by gender was supported. Although some similarities did exist, rank order differed between males and females. Hypothesis two was that males and females will differ in their responses on each of the relevant statements relating to the meaning of life. This hypothesis was supported to an extent as well. However, only ten of the forty questions were demonstrated to show statistically significant differences in males/female responses. Hypothesis three was that males and females will differ in their responses to items on the Supernaturalist and Naturalist conceptions of a meaningful life. This was not supported to a great extent. Both males and females tended to rank Naturalist statements higher than they did Supernaturalist statements.

The results of the survey indicated that the responding students found relationships to be of primary importance to them. For this sample of students, relationships with friends, family and a significant or intimate partner appeared to be the factors that contributed most to having meaningful lives.

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Thank you to my parents, Bruce and Fern Pringle, who have always supported me in whatever endeavor I chose to embark upon. More than once they must have believed that I had leave of my senses, as I attempted to pursue too many activities than is healthy or possible.

Thank you to Chad my dearest friend, for who you are, and what you do for me on a daily basis. I am grateful that God brought me such a wonderful husband. What an adventure we have gone on in the last four years!

Thank you Lord, it looks like I'm finally finished!

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the three people, who have made the most impact on my life,

Bruce and Fern Pringle,  
and,  
Chad Nelson.

Thank you for all your love and prayers!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Review of the Literature

But to whom—or to what—is this question addressed? Am I asking myself whether my life has a meaning? But if I can function as the source for the answer to this question, what need do I have to ask it? Am I then perhaps addressing it to some order of things beyond me from which I expect to receive the illumination? But how can some order totally foreign to my life, from which the datum “my life” is altogether missing, possibly deliver the verdict on whether that life contains value? Have we actually passed over a further ambiguity? In asking about the meaning-of-life, am I asking for enlightenment about human life as such or about my own singular life? Do I want to know what the nature of man is so that I can perhaps include myself within its intelligibility? (Gallagher, 2000)

### *Introduction*

Over the centuries, both philosophers and laypeople have asked two related questions regarding the nature of existence: “*What is the meaning-of-life?*” and, “*What constitutes a worthwhile life?*” Despite the stereotypical belief that “meaning-of-life” questions are for only the learned, in reality this question plagues humankind from every walk of life (Klemke, 2000).

People ask questions about the meaning-of-life for different reasons. Some are concerned with life’s meaning because of particular occurrences in their lives, in their countries or communities. For example, following the shattering event of the day now commonly referred

to as simply “9-11” (September 11, 2001), the quest to find both solace and meaning in life appeared to escalate in North America. Newspapers, magazines, and television shows attempted to respond to the multitude of questions provoked by the attacks. Discussions about meaning and purpose in life dominated conversations in homes, at work and public places, and in the media. Seligman (2001) expressed his viewpoint in a *Monitor on Psychology* interview: “I believe that we will see an entire generation of Americans, as of September 11, forming an identity and a purpose that America has not had for a long time” (p.52-53). Psychologist Puder-York (2001) experienced the attacks at close proximity; her office was located within a few blocks of the New York City World Trade Center. Following her own time of healing, she encouraged her clients to, “ ‘find meaning and purpose’ in the face of such tragedy” (p. 32). As will be discussed later in this chapter, when discussions about meaning-of-life issues arise, the word *purpose* seems to have a close link to the word *meaning*. Some theorists have postulated that people are most strongly motivated to search for the meaning-of-life when there are difficulties or tragedies in their own lives or in the lives of others (Frankl, 1970, 1997; see also Klemke, 2000).

Similarly, and at other times throughout global history, a variety of radically tragic incidents have jarred whole populations into meaning-of-life reflection and personal evaluation. An obvious example is that of the Jewish people during the era of Hitler and his Nazi death camps. Those individuals were forced to consider the meaning-of-life in the midst of unspeakable and overwhelmingly grievous circumstances (Frankl, 1970, 1997). Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust, committed himself to studying meaning-of-life issues as they concern such profound subjects as death, suffering, and the will of humankind to survive.

Other individuals are motivated to try to understand the meaning-of-life because of their particular life stages; life stage appears to bear an impact on how questions about meaningfulness are considered. A young person will probably have a different perspective from which to consider the meaning-of-life than an elderly person (Thomas, 2000). While the young person may connect the fulfillment of purpose and goals with what connotes meaning for the future, the elderly person will most likely look back reflectively, evaluating life, and examining experiences, pursuits, values, beliefs, and achievements (Munitz, 1993). Because “What is the meaning-of-life?” or “What is the meaning of *my* life?” are questions that people ask at different stages of their lives, the substance of that meaning will be quite unique to that individual in accordance to that person’s life as he or she has lived it thus far.

The question “What is the meaning-of-life?” is becoming less of a private and individual concern; this question is being raised more frequently in our society. The general public is becoming more noticeably curious about it. An analogy may assist in explaining how the questions are currently being addressed. Let us imagine that the huge body of questions and answers about the meaning-of-life are an underground river that ordinarily flows unnoticed. The questions exist, yet are not always real except to those who wish to seek out answers. The river is vital for the survival of life above ground, yet its components are only sometimes discussed in concrete terms. The discovery process about what is meaningful in life is a subtle, yet powerful force. The earth above the river is teeming with life. Questions about life and the meaning-of-life exist in a sort of nebulous but genuine fashion for those who dwell high above the water. The river and the life high above it are interconnected, for the river helps to sustain life.

If there was nothing meaningful about our existence—if there was no “meaning-of-life”, or nothing that we considered “meaningful in life” it would be curious whether we would live as we now do (Klemke, 2000). The river, then, is a symbol of what lies in wait of discovery. The ground between the topsoil and the river is occupied by those individuals who are attempting to bridge the gap. Some of these are philosophers, professors, talk show hosts, novelists, counselors, psychologists, journalists, and spiritual mentors. What these people have to say is vitally important in the quest to discover some answers about the meaning-of-life. Some of the views discussed in this chapter are those people who work as scholars and teachers, whose wisdom may be deemed more valuable because they have a Doctoral Degree. On the other hand, as valuable as this input is, it is how people actually live out what is meaningful and worthwhile in their lives that impact on what is ultimately most meaningful. Fewer people read what the philosophers write than those who watch movies, listen to music, consult religious leaders and look to people like Dr. Phil for guidance. People have often captured their own meaning in life by how they actually live it. As the philosopher Kingwell (2001) writes, “Professional philosophers are not, as a group, wiser or deeper than other people” (p. 3). It is both to the common-wisdom-giver and to the philosopher that this chapter will turn for illumination on this great quest to discover “What is the meaning-of-life?”

What is meaningful for people, or what is of value to them, can be what is observed in how they live out their daily lives. People tend to put energy into those things that are important to them. If making money is important to someone, then working an eighty-hour work week may hold a significant level of meaningfulness for that individual. If someone else views having a family as important then raising the children at home may hold strong meaning for that person.

If worshipping God is significant to an individual, then he or she will direct energy and focus toward the worship of a divine power. When people begin to ask themselves “What is the meaning of *my* life?” they will most probably turn first to whatever it is that they put greatest time into, and then ask themselves what the meaning is behind those important things or endeavors. Often, when people delve deeply into thoughts about the meaning of their lives they realize that the importance they feel they should attach to material things is much less than the importance that society places on them (Elias, 2002).

In this chapter, we will look at the philosophical approach to the question “What is the meaning-of-life?” Following and exploring the philosopher’s perspective, we will examine what makes a life worth living, borrowing from philosophy as well as from other sources. Finally, a linking discussion about counseling and psychology and their relation to meaningfulness will close the chapter.

### *Scholarly Perspectives*

Throughout history, philosophers and other scholars have pondered the meaning-of-life for several millennia. Their arguments are informative, although often abstract in nature, and certainly there are many times when such perspectives seem to be in conflict with one another. This conflict can cause confusion in the seeker, who may be left feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of discussions surrounding the question, “What is the meaning-of-life?” It is possible that when one opens the box of questions about life and meaning, many more questions than expected will jump out. This is not always a comfortable feeling. A comment by Kingwell (2001) advises the person who seeks out meaning about an imposing and challenging reality:

[A]s Kant reminds us, we are equipped to ask questions we may not be equipped to answer. That is to say, we can give answers of a kind, but they may not do the sorts of things we have come to expect of answers. They may lead to more questions, or throw us back upon ourselves, or reveal that we are bound up by linguistic and conceptual confusions--or all of the foregoing. And that is not a condition to which most people readily submit. (p. 7)

Kingwell goes on to state that sometimes when people are confronted with the magnitude of the questions about meaning-of-life issues, they choose to avoid those questions by searching for diversions to mask the philosophical angst. Different people may turn to different sources to search for the calm. People's emotions can become overwhelmed, leaving them feeling vulnerable. The need to protect vulnerability may lead to the deep questions remaining unexplored and unanswered. In this chapter, I attempt to uncover some of these questions through the words of philosophers and other interested seekers. Philosophical opinions often differ from one another, yet there appear to be threads of similarity interwoven within the broader field of thought. The following discussion, then, will highlight this actuality, and will likely open the door for more questions concerning the meaning-of-life.

To assist in understanding some of the philosophical perspectives in the literature, the article "The Concept of a Meaningful Life" by Metz (2001) will be adopted as a loose framework. This structure will be used to help bring clarity and understanding to the varying views about "What is the meaning-of-life?" Metz's article is particularly illuminating because he has looked at the literature over the past century and has highlighted two distinctive, overarching categories: Supernaturalism and Naturalism (within Naturalism lie Objectivism and

Subjectivism). The relevance of Metz's work is that it brings some unity to much of the writing done in the literature on the meaning-of-life.

Metz (2001) is particularly concerned about finding out what "constitutes meaningfulness . . . to clarify what we are asking when posing the question of what (if anything) makes a life meaningful" (p 137). He explores the meaning-of-life by looking to the literature in an effort to uncover various perspectives. He looks at different viewpoints proposed, highlighting their usefulness in understanding meaning-of-life discussions and offering criticisms about the reasons these conjectures cannot fully answer the question, "What is the meaning-of-life?"

Metz's first category, Supernaturalism, assumes that people make and have meaning in their lives through a connection with some sort of supernatural Being or spiritual Purpose. Supernaturalism may include aspects of Naturalism within its boundaries, although a connection with a spiritual being is primary. The foundation for meaning in life is in fact found in a spiritual connection. Craig (as cited in Klemke, 2000) discussed supernaturalism in this way:

"Who am I?" man asks, "Why am I here? Where am I going?" Since the Enlightenment, when he threw off the shackles of religion, man has tried to answer these questions without reference to God. But the answers that came back were not exhilarating, but dark and terrible. "You are the accidental by-product of nature, a result of matter plus time plus chance. There is no reason for your existence. All you face is death."

Modern man thought that when he had gotten rid of God, he had free himself from all that repressed and stifled him. Instead, he discovered that in killing God, he had also killed himself. For if there is no God, then man's life becomes absurd. (p 40)

Metz's second category, Naturalism, does not presuppose that one must be connected to the divine in order to find meaning and purpose. Naturalism focuses on the details of life, which bring meaning to people's lives. Within Naturalism, two sub-categories are discussed by Metz: Objectivism and Subjectivism. Subjectivism presumes that the meaning-of-life can be established if the desires and needs surrounding *one's own* meaningfulness are met. Whatever is meaningful for the person, even if it appears strange or useless to others, *is* meaningful. Objectivism rejects this assumption to a large extent. Objectivists assume that even if some people believe that a certain thing or activity is meaningful, belief in its meaningfulness alone does not connote a meaningful activity. Objectivists believe that activities that "enhance the significance of a life" (Metz, 2001, p. 140) are those things that promote meaningfulness. The essential viewpoint of each sub-category can be demonstrated by using the Sisyphus example of a person's repetitively rolling a rock up a hill again and again. Each time the rock rolls down the hill, the individual dutifully rolls it back up. Objectivists declare that this is a useless, repetitive activity that is not meaningful. Subjectivists look at the same example and argue that if the person has found some sort of significance in the activity of rolling the rock up the hill again and again, whether through spiritual ritual or other means, then this activity is meaningful to the person (Pratt, 1970). Although the following discussion separates the two perspectives into what appears to be dichotomous viewpoints, in the actual living out of the perspectives, there is likely to be considerable overlap. The subsequent discussion considers the two perspectives, Supernaturalism and Naturalism, in more detail.

### *Supernaturalism*

Supernaturalism, although sometimes a contentious subject is relevant to the discussion, “What is the meaning-of-life?” Supernaturalism declares that its meaning-of-life stance is related to the notion of *ultimate purpose*. Supernaturalism is less concerned with small day-to-day issues which bring about meaningfulness, although these are relevant and consequential, and pays more attention to the overarching need to find a critical rationale for life, usually connected to a Divine Being or Spiritual Purpose.

Hill (2002) provided a helpful example about the supernaturalist belief system when considering the meaning-of-life. His thesis simply maintained that, without an all-knowing God, there can be no ultimate meaning for human beings in life. He believed that when people begin to wonder about the meaning-of-life they are really wondering about something that exists far beyond them. When this query alerts the conscious minds of individuals, they begin to ask about “the explanation . . . for the presence of life or existence of living things” (p. 12). Hill contended that something can have meaning only if intention or purpose has initiated that meaning. Therefore, the “meaning-of-life” must have, at its root, a *reason for existence*. “As far as *life* is concerned, then, life has a meaning only if there is an explanation of it in terms of the purposes of an agent that brought life about” (p 12). For Hill, the purpose-giver was a creator-God, who has only good objectives at heart. Hill stated further that it was not only people who were created to glorify God, but that all of creation was made for this purpose. Not everyone will agree with Hill’s argument that the purpose of life originate from a master designer who creates living things for his ultimate glory. Hill challenges those who do not believe in a God who offers purpose to his creation to consider an antithesis: Although there may be small purposes

within each individual's life, which add up to make some larger purposes, the entirety of one's life cannot have overall meaning without God. The reason, Hill claimed, is that before a person is mature enough to identify that he or she has defined a purpose for self, a significant part of that person's life has already passed. It is not viable for that person to create purpose out of what has already passed him or her by. That time is lost, and the individual now can focus only on the time at hand and that on which resides in the future.

According to Hill (2001), because God has all of time at his fingertips, both time past and future, he can chart for his creation a purpose or purposes: "There is an infinite number of possible purposes for a designer, some good, and some bad, but God could only have a good purpose, since God is by definition, good" (p. 13). But why would God create beings to glorify himself? It seems that God's desire, according to Hill, is to be in relationship with his creation—because of his own good pleasure.

Hill discussed other, less significant objectives that humans have in their lives. Some, he stated, are noble, and others are not as noble. Hill asserted that it seems there is some general standard about what is worthy or good, even if that standard does not have a definitive moral framework. Noble objectives have worth in themselves; however, they cannot compete with the conception of ultimate purpose for human beings. Hill cited great works including *Hamlet* and the Mona Lisa as venerable intentions. He concluded his argument that God (with a purpose in mind for humanity) created people for the intention of glorifying himself: "An artist creates a picture not for the picture's sake, but for her or his own sake, to redound to her or his own credit" (p 13).

An ancient thinker King Solomon, who believed wholeheartedly that God existed, evaluated the arguments for meaninglessness of life by saying, “ ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!’ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Although King Solomon queried about the meaning of his life, despite being considered one of the wisest men of his time, his final conclusion is similar to that of Hill (2001): “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 1:13b-14).

Kelly (2000) believed that theology and philosophy go hand in hand in any serious exploration for truth about the meaning-of-life. In his article “The Search for Meaning in Philosophy and Theology: Hegel to Baltazar and Beyond,” Kelly systematically discussed the views of scholars who contributed to his (Kelly’s) belief system concerning the connection between philosophy and theology. Through the philosophical discoveries of scientific cosmology and the ontology of Nicolai Hartmann, certain philosophers have indicated that the idea of *process* in the development of the world and of humanity is pivotal to understanding the meaning-of-life. Kelly argued that with every process, there is an end. Life is a process, one within which the individual is confronted with the question, “What was the purpose of it all?” Kelly asserts that this questioning inevitably will lead to a consideration of life’s “end”: “Every change that occurs within a process is directed towards that end. If we are to identify the unifying principle of any process we have to discover the Telos (beginning) of the process. If we want to understand the meaning of the world, we have to identify the Telos of the world” (p. 8).

According to Kelly, then, human beings must discover the “end.” In discovering this end, an ultimate spiritual purpose to life is uncovered. For the theologically inclined, that purpose is God.

Tolstoy, a distinguished and respected man in his time, came to a point in his life where all he could see was despair—despair, because he saw that his life was meaningless (Klemke, 2000). He had experienced pleasure, success, and prosperity, yet despondency and thoughts of ending his life plagued him. He questioned his existence. He became desperate to find the answer to the meaning of his own life. Although he understood the scientific explanations of the world and of human life, these did not alleviate the angst he felt when regarding his own reality. He looked to science for answers, but could not find a solution to the meaninglessness that confronted him. Eventually he came to a place where faith in a good God gave him the peace and consolation he was searching after. Tolstoy lived with the peasantry for two years, looking deeply into their lives to try to understand why they experienced contentment despite all their hardships. He noted that members of his own “circle” were idle and discontent:

I began to examine closely the lives and beliefs of the [peasant] people, and the more I examined them, the more did I become convinced that they had the real faith, that their faith was necessary for them, and that it alone gave them a meaning and possibility of life. . . . What happened with me was that the life of our circle,--of the rich and the learned,--not only disgusted me, but even lost all its meaning. All our acts, reflections, sciences, arts,--all that appeared to me in a new light. I saw that all that was mere pampering of the appetites and no meaning could be found in it. . . . (p. 19)

Regardless of the individual's belief about God or religion, it seems that experiences where people encounter a divine happening or person prompts them to ask questions about life in a different manner. History demonstrates that many people have looked beyond themselves to the supernatural for answers about life. Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and other ancient religions, as well as more modern spiritual belief systems, point to experiencing supernatural interaction as meaningful and purposeful.

### *Naturalism*

Naturalism is the view that “only nature exists and by implication that the supernatural does not exist. The [natural] world is all of reality; it is all there is; there is no ‘other world’ ” (Edwards, 1972, p. 15). Naturalism focuses on what is here, or has been here. It does not consider that spirituality has a viable contribution to the search for meaning in life.

### *Objectivism*

The form of Naturalism called “Objectivism” by Metz (2001) assumes that there are things in life that can be considered as contributors to a meaningful life, and things that cannot. Just because one believes an activity or purpose is meaningful does not require it to be so. Meaningfulness must be associated with aspects of life that are intrinsically worthwhile or valuable. Meaningfulness in this sense, of course, is difficult to evaluate. However, some clear statements from objectivist proponents help to elucidate some of the ambiguity. A brief overview of objectivist thinking is presented below.

“The meaning-of-life” may seem to be an obscure phrase, yet most people have heard it, have discussed it, or have wondered about their own life's meaning. The naturalist philosopher Sharpe (1999; see also Metz, 2001) claimed that the word “meaning” is actually unclear in this

context. Despite the word's lack of clarity, however, "meaning" has a number of helpful synonyms. Sharpe cautioned that the synonyms carry only the broad essence of the word and are not able to capture its entire spirit. For example, "What is the *central point* of life?" is close to the desired question of essential meaning, but not quite close enough. "What is the *explanation* of life?" plays a role in the resonance of "meaning," but yet does not quite grasp the full idea. "What is the *relevance* of life?" and "What is the *goal* of life?" both fit within the framework of "meaning" and give this concept added depth. Sharpe indicated that "(meaning) can either be equivalent to 'significance' or it can connote 'purpose.' " He made a clear distinction by demonstrating to the reader that a person may not have an overriding purpose in life, yet can still have value and significance in their lives (see also Kleinig, 1991). Conversely, in citing Hitler's mission to destroy the Jewish people, Sharpe described his desire for destruction as one of Hitler's main purposes. Although Hitler had a purpose, it was a purpose with no beneficial value. Furthermore, his significance seemed to rest in his mission to annihilate a group of people. Sharpe concluded by stating, "Most human lives are meaningless in that they have no overriding purpose. It does not follow that they have no value or significance. Indeed they may achieve more and do less harm than those who are devoted to some grand plan" (p. 15). For Sharpe, the meaning-of-life had much to do with what is valued and significant for humankind (the welfare of human beings), rather than meaning's having an extra individualistic purpose.

Carrier (2001) believed that there are definitive ideals that are objectively worthy in life; essentials that bring meaning to life. He claimed that human beings have the power to create their own happiness, and can do so in a manner that is capable of contributing to others' happiness. According to Carrier, the fact that human beings subsist on the planet is reason

enough to be glad, for if humans did not exist and did not cherish their existence, “then the universe would indeed be pointless, but since it becomes meaningful the moment we come to know and appreciate it, our lives share in that meaning and become the most valuable thing that can ever exist” (p.1). Carrier’s optimism was further projected by declaring that *love* is the key in bringing meaning into people’s lives. He posited that loving others, being devoted to one’s own beliefs, committing to one’s own smaller purposes in life, as well as loving those things that contribute to happiness are all crucial in bringing meaning into one’s life.

Although Carrier’s perspective was not supernaturalistic, like Hill’s viewpoint it concentrated on ultimate meaning. Carrier asked, “How does the atheist’s life have meaning?” (p.1). Carrier stated that the atheist’s life has meaning when it is focused on the universal good; that universal good, for Carrier, was love (see also Albom, 1997). Frankl included love as an important element in a meaningful life as well; he argued that important contributions to people’s experiencing meaning in life are loving relationships and worthwhile work. Frankl (1997) stated that meaning could be found in: “First, doing a deed or creating a work; second, experiencing something or encountering someone; in other words, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love. Most important, however. . . . Facing a fate we cannot change, we are called upon to make the best of it by rising above ourselves and growing beyond ourselves, in a word [sic], but changing ourselves” (Frankl, p. 141-142).

According to Frankl, there is an epidemic of *meaninglessness* in our society that expresses itself as disinterest and lassitude. His term “existential vacuum” spoke to his belief that suffering from meaninglessness has to do with a person’s lack of connection to others and with their inability or unwillingness to contribute to the world in an objective, helpful, healthful

manner. Furthermore, psychological concerns such as depression and aggression, along with different types of addictive behaviors, may in some cases be connected to an underlying sense of futility, according to Frankl. With industrialization and the rapid changes that come with modernity, there is more of self to fulfill and, in many cases, more time to fulfill the self. Unfortunately, modern culture has rarely been able to target the deep need for meaningfulness, and many people consequentially express a sense of meaninglessness and lack of fulfillment in their lives (Frankl, 1997).

Taylor (1999) took a different approach in determining what was objectively meaningful in life; he directed his readers to first make note of “what is *meaningless*.” He asserted that once one discovered what a “meaningless existence” was, then understanding what “the point of living” is all about was the next step. Taylor expressed that a meaningless existence has very much to do with the performance of that which is “endless and pointless,” with much repetition. The lack of movement beyond a single activity or event implies a kind of “stuckness”. The activity or event is incessantly repeated and holds no meaning, for it has little purpose. If then, it has no purpose, and, discovering meaning comes from understanding what is not meaningful, it seems that purpose itself has much to do with the meaning-of-life, in Taylor’s assessment.

Taylor initially asked if our human lives can be considered meaningless, for we frequently repeat the same kinds of activities throughout the course of our lives with variations occurring only because of our unique circumstances and efforts. However, because there are original, distinctive, inventive, and imaginative possibilities for life, Taylor concluded that “a meaningful life is a creative one, and what falls short of this lacks meaning, to whatever extent” (Taylor, p. 26). For Taylor, purpose, value, creativity and individuality all came together to

connote a meaningful existence. “Nothing simply ‘is,’ everything ‘becomes’ through creative freedom and creative evolution” (Kelly, 2000, p. 2). Human existence has not been meaningless in Taylor’s definition, for although there has been a type of repetition in human activities through time, much variation has existed, and much of the variation has been due to human creativity and human attempts at different kinds of activities.

A concluding objectivist statement made by Taylor (cited in Klemke, 2000, p. 175) brings to a close an article he titled, “The Meaning-of-life.” He wrote that “the meaning-of-life is from within us, it is not from without, and it far exceeds in both its beauty and permanence any heaven of which men have ever dreamed or yearned for.”

### *Subjectivism*

Subjectivism is the other component of the naturalistic perspective. Subjectivism supposes that whatever a person desires or wishes for in life is what will be meaningful for him or her. While the objectivist believes that there are intrinsic human principles that are universally meaningful, the subjectivist does not adhere to a particular code of meaningful ideals. Subjectivists’ views on meaningfulness tend to be individualistic and relativistic. Munitz (1993) looked at life and meaning by alerting interested parties to ask an important question before moving on to the “meat” of discovering “What is the meaning-of-life?” Before one can look closely at this question, he contended, one must decide whether life does, in fact, have meaning. Frankl concurred, “I . . . regard it as a prerogative and privilege of man not only to quest for a meaning to his life but also to question whether such a meaning exists at all. No other animal asks such a question . . . but man does” (Frankl, 1997, p. 140; see also Klemke, 2000). If the seeker believes that life does have meaning, then looking at the question “What is the meaning-

of-life?” is a worthwhile pursuit. According to Munitz (1993), if one does not believe that there is some sort of meaning to life, then the pursuit of discovering its meaning may be a waste of time. The subjectivist does not necessarily have an ultimate purpose in life. However, he or she does have a series of small purposes that are intended to fulfill wants and desires. For the subjectivist, if meaning exists, it is purely related to individualized meaningful pursuits:

“Perhaps we put ourselves in the position of the judge: each of us can ask whether life has meaning to *me*, here and now. The answer then depends. Life is a stream of lived events within which there is often plenty of meaning—for ourselves, and those around us” (Blackburn, 2001, p. 80).

Bertrand Russell (as cited in Klemke, 2000) commented on the subjectivist perspective, implying that the age of a person may have some bearing on how he or she perceives meaning in life: “To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation. For the young, there is nothing unattainable; a good thing desired with the whole force of a passionate will, and yet impossible, is to them not credible” (p. 74). The person who believes that “the world is my oyster” may buy into the subjectivist perspective willingly. However, to those who have certain conditions placed on them, whether physical, financial, relational, or otherwise, it is less easy to believe that “anything is possible.” Despite the audacious “anything is possible” North American slogan, reality does not concur. Often, as people become older, maturity begins to solidify those things that are meaningful in a particular life and dissolve those things that are not.

In a commentary by Huxley (as cited in Klemke, 2000), naturalistic philosophy was used as the framework for discussing meaning-of-life issues. Huxley’s statements were both personal and universal. They attempted to explain and clarify his beliefs about modern life. Despite his

allusions to principles that seemed to be somewhat universal, he also acknowledged the subjectivist perspective: “. . . Nor do I suppose that we can grade every valuable experience into an accepted order, any more than I can say whether a beetle is a higher organism than a cuttlefish or a herring . . . . I do not believe that there is any absolute truth, beauty, morality, or virtue, whether emanating from an external power or imposed by an internal standard” (pp.79-80).

To summarize, Metz distinguishes between two types of naturalists—subjectivists and objectivists. For the naturalist, meaning is not dependent upon a connection with a supernatural being. For the *subjectivist* naturalist, meaning is achieved when specific desires are actualized. These desires can take the form of goals, objectives, ideals, material possessions and so on. These desires do not have to conform to any objective standard; there are no universal parameters for the subjectivist. The *objectivist* naturalist discards this view, arguing that not everything can be meaningful simply because one desires to do it, experience it, or have it. The objectivist believes that there are certain pursuits that contribute to a meaningful life; pursuits that “seem to enhance the significance of life” (Metz, 2000 p. 140).

*What people do: living above the river*

All people, whether they adhere to the naturalist perspective or to the supernaturalist perspective, are mandated to live life. It is the meaning that they place on life itself and on the things in life, that are paramount to this study. Once again, it is helpful to make a distinction about people’s perspectives about meaning-of-life issues. Firstly, there are people who uncover meaning in their individual lives (whether viewed subjectively or objectively) from a naturalistic framework. Secondly, there are people who believe that there is a purpose to human life that is external to them. This purpose is uniquely connected to God. Whichever belief system people

choose to adhere to, there are still elements of life that need to be attended to. Some of these elements have more value than other elements. Because people do not live in vacuums, their activities contribute to how they construct meaning in their lives.

According to the naturalist philosopher Simon Blackburn (2001), the meaning-of-life is found in the details of life. Blackburn's perspective illuminated those aspects that fit together to make life worthwhile. What people *do above the river* is a way to consider the activities, goals, objectives, and ideals that work together to fulfill specific purposes. Some people consciously think about the totality of meaning in their lives. Many of these people believe that they have an overriding purpose in life, and through the achievement of small personal goals gradually work towards the greater meaning. Others believe that there is no overriding purpose to life. Rather, the focus of the latter is to be given to subjective aims that fulfill a particular need for that individual. Whether a naturalist or a supernaturalist, all people live in the details of life simply because that is the substance of life lived. One's orientation is dependent on how one views those details. Blackburn concurs: "The architect Le Corbusier said that God lies in the details, and the same is true of meaning-of-life to us, here, now. The smile of her child means the earth to her mother, the touch means bliss for the lover, the turn of the phrase means happiness for the writer. Meaning comes with absorption and enjoyment, the flow of details that matter to us" (p. 80).

This study assumes that there are a number of elements in people's lives that are found to be worthwhile and that contribute to making their lives meaningful. It also assumes that there are some overriding themes about meaning-of-life that are common to many people. These themes are briefly highlighted simply because they can be observed in the daily lives of people.

Work (financial security) (Brooks, Brown & Associates, 1996; Brief, Nord, 1990), relationships (family, friends, intimate partner) (Frankl, 1997; Conly, 1999; Wong, 1999; see also Albom, 1997), making a choice about parenthood (Conly, 1999; Ames, 1999), social and/or civic responsibility (Adams, 2000), culture (Kelly, 2000), personal fulfillment (mission or vision for self) (Hayes, 1998; Seligman, 1998), personal significance (Kirkham, 1999), and spiritual belief or practice and living life according to personal values and beliefs (Kelly, 2000; Klemke, 2000) are some of the groupings that are assumed to be connected with a worthwhile life. Although these designations seem easily distinguishable, they often are interrelated. This interconnectedness seems to be an indication of the complexity of understanding that which is *worthwhile* in life: “Getting the most out of one’s surroundings requires full participation without overwriting the uniqueness of those things which constitute one’s context” (Ames, 1999, p.22). Despite the obvious difficulty in discerning the “one true” meaning-of-life definition, this study attempts to outline some of those aspects in life, and, of life, that people believe promote meaning and assist in living a valuable or meaningfully perceived life. It is here that “meaningful” takes on two meanings: that of “important”, and that of “purposeful.”

A number of worthwhile or important “details” of life seem to be related to the quality-of-life literature that discusses universal values linked to human wellbeing. Deiner, (1995), and Deiner and Suh, (1997), have systematically measured these values. For countries like Canada and the United States that are deemed to have economic security, “advance values” are considered (1995), such as “Physicians per capita,” “Subjective Well-Being,” “College/University Attendance,” “Income Equality,” and, “Per Capita Income.” Since Canada is a country that is considered to fall into the “advanced” category, these quality-of-life

groupings seem particularly relevant. It seems that, for this thesis, quality-of-life literature, particularly that related to subjective well-being, financial ability, and status-related concepts, fits closely together with those things that are considered to be worthwhile in life. Because primarily Canadian students were used in this study, it can be assumed that Deiner's conceptions about quality of life are accepted by most of these students. Therefore, the "details" that have been discussed are those that will likely be desired by the participants in this study. The survey (Appendix C) considers quality-of-life perspectives as well as philosophical belief systems.

*Counseling and psychological perspectives in the quest for understanding  
the meaning-of-life*

However we rank the question—["What is the meaning-of-life?"] as the most urgent of all or as one of the most urgent of all--most of us do find the question to be one that merits our serious attention. Part of its urgency stems from the fact that it is related to many other questions that face us in our daily lives. Many of the decisions we make with regard to careers, leisure time, moral dilemmas, and other matters depend on how we answer the question of the meaning-of-life. (Klemke, 2000, p. 2)

Questions about the meaning-of-life are especially relevant to individuals who practice counseling and psychology (Wong, 1997, 1998, 1999). In fact, Wong believed that "meaning seeking is a psychological construct, because it involves motivational, cognitive and behavioral processes" (1997, p. 8). Not only can a client gain insight from the quest of discovering what the meaning-of-life is, counselors and therapists can expand their own thinking about life by clarifying for themselves what is the meaning-of-life. Queries about life and its meaning are relevant and valuable to those who search out help for themselves from a desired therapist. Life

is where we find ourselves, and understanding its meaning gives a context for working through individual issues. No matter the orientation of the counselor, whether naturalistic or supernaturalistic, certain questions raise awareness about the need for understanding the everyday meaning-of-life, or perceived “worthwhile-ness” of life, for clients. According to Wong (1999), Meaning Centered Counseling and Therapy (MCCT), addresses essential life issues that are involved a meaningful life. “The four major needs of being significant, belonging, growing, and making sense . . . The four major life tasks of growing up, career, marriage and parenting . . . The four major life challenges of failure, illness, ageing, and dying.” (p. 1). Meaning in counseling and therapy is an exploration that deals with client growth, discovery and development. The counselor journeys along with the client in this process, assisting and supporting the client’s meaning making process.

For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will describe only two general meaning-of-life needs that can be addressed when clients seek counseling. Firstly, there are clients who experience life as lacking meaning because of personal issues. These people are having difficulty dealing with the details in their lives. They may have problems in a marriage or in another relationship; they may be experiencing an illness or the loss of a job, a close relative may have died, or financial pressures may be so devastating that they feel the need for counsel and a listening ear (Berg & Dolan, 2001; Ivey & Ivey, 1999; Gleitman, 1995). According to Wong, “most clients seek therapy because they feel overwhelmed by life’s problems, they feel trapped by their current situations and they are worried about their future” (Wong, 1997). Because counselors have the unique privilege of listening to people’s stories, sometimes there are opportunities to assist clients in finding meaning in their lives. Facing one’s own death or the death of a loved one

often leads individuals to begin to wonder about their meaning *in* life, or the meaning-of-life.

Ivey and Ivey (1999) gave real-life examples of counselors who work with AIDS patients, assisting in the meaning-making process. A positive offshoot of this work is that often the counselor is impacted about the meaning of his or her life as well. “Working with people who have no choice but to live in the present can change our perspective. It can help us find a deeper meaning in life.” (Ivey & Ivey, p. 163). Philosophers often point to the difficulties in people’s lives as the springboards that propel them to look at meaning- of-life issues (Frankl, 1997; Wong, 1997).

The second group of people that experience life as lacking meaning are those who enter a therapist’s office and say that their lives are actually very good, yet they feel that life for them, does not hold a great deal of meaning—they feel that they are missing something. Tolstoy expressed a personal example of this dilemma in his paper “My Confession” (as cited in Klemke, 2000). According to Wong (1999), one of the therapeutic goals that is often addressed with clients in Meaning Centered Counseling and Therapy, is to “explore what is missing in their lives and discover what they really want” (p. 2).

The naturalist counselor commonly assesses that the client has needs in a certain area of life. These needs can be addressed by using particular theories or techniques (Corsini & Wedding, 1995). For the counselor and client who share a naturalistic or supernaturalistic philosophy about meaning in life, the manner of addressing meaningfulness is relatively straightforward. Effective therapists are trained to be objective practitioners, who find a way to work within a client’s framework (Ivey & Ivey, 1999; Sinclair & Pettifore, 2001). Understanding a client’s individual meaning-of-life framework may assist the counselor in clarifying counseling

goals and objectives. For example, when a counselor realizes that a client has a supernaturalistic framework about life, this knowledge gives the counselor some insight into how that client will view meaning-of-life issues. Similarly, a client who has a strong naturalistic viewpoint on meaning-of-life issues will address meaning from a perspective that is likely quite different from the supernaturalist.

The counselor must also be prepared to respond to the second group of people, those who enter the counselor's office and confide that life is really quite good for them, but something much deeper seems to be missing. Although the counselor inquires further, attempting to understand the lived context of the person, no obvious or suspicious issues arise; the client's story seems valid. Living apparently is relatively problem-free, yet something is missing. It is at this point that a therapist may begin to wonder about the overarching purpose to life. It is possible that the client is unconsciously targeting this deeper issue as well. If the life of someone seeking therapy is not wrought with difficulties and yet, according to common assumption, counseling is concerned with helping people deal with problems, then what is creating the void? If life is truly good, and yet there is something absent, what does one do to find the answers necessary for fulfillment? It is possible that at this crossroads the supernaturalist has an option that the naturalist does not have. This option opens the possibility that the meaning-of-life is found in understanding God's role in one's ultimate purpose for life (Tolstoy & Craig, as cited in Klemke, 2000). According to Wong (1997), religion and transcendence are important aspects in making one's life meaningful.

Another way of looking at the question "What is the meaning-of-life?" has to do with the difference between "What is a worthwhile life?" (in the sense of individually meaningful), and

“What is a meaningful life?” Both of these are important questions for the counselor, for if a client’s beliefs about the meaning-of-life are intrinsic to his or her well-being, then counseling issues may be closely connected to these questions (Lowen, 2001). The question “What is a worthwhile life?” appears to be based on personal beliefs, attitudes, desires, motivations, personal experiences, and dreams, along with quality-of-life measures. The naturalist would likely be comfortable with this explanation of a worthwhile life, and may consider it to specifically indicate a meaningful life.

Bradford (1990) shared the idea that “projects” are the meaningful things that we *do* is a helpful way to put our activities into a meaning-of-life context. Meaning has to do with the experience of living one’s own life—what one has; what one does; how one perceives and carries on in life. It is not the counselor’s role to determine what perspective the client will take in pursuing meaning-of-life questions. As already mentioned, however, it is helpful to understand how the more naturalistically inclined client views life and how the one who has a supernaturalistic perspective perceives living.

Psychology has begun to ask about life and its meaning in a new way. In fact, a paradigm shift is currently underway, caused by the emergence of “positive psychology” as an alternative to the “disease model”. Distinguished psychologists such as Seligman (1998; 2001) and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) are encouraging psychology to examine the question “What is the good life?” This movement has as its groundwork the concepts of prevention, resilience, and protective factors: “We have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against mental illness: courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, the capacity for flow and insight . . . finding purpose . . . to

name several” (Seligman, 2001, pp. 1, 6). In so doing, psychologists will focus on what is *right* with people, instead of focusing solely on what is *wrong* with them. Quality-of-life literature and questions about the “good life” are closely related. In Seligman’s (2001) view, there are a number of factors that contribute to the good life; additionally, it appears that people can experience the good life whether they hold a supernaturalistic or a naturalistic perspective.

The concept of social and civic well-being is central to this pursuit. According to Ruark (2001), two of psychology’s original aims were to foster human dignity and to help create satisfying lives. In some cases, meaning is equated with “happiness” or “the good life” in the literature on meaning-of-life (Kurtz, 1977). Certain authors claim that although happiness can be involved in living a meaningful life, they question whether happiness and finding meaning in life are the same thing (Klemke, 2000).

Glasser (2000) believed that there are certain components within every person’s life that are necessary before the pursuit of meaning can fully begin. Theoretically speaking, if one does not have *love and belonging, fun, freedom, mastery, and security* in one’s life, obvious gaps in personal development exist and as a result people will often seek professional help when they realize that their needs are not being met. For the naturalist, these are the kinds of details that are a necessary part of a meaningful life. People may feel emotionally or psychologically unhealthy, and seek out support because they are aware that their lives are not reaching the level of meaning that they know they want (Gleitman, 1995). This view supports Taylor’s (1999) subjectivist viewpoint that meaninglessness is connected to our understanding of what is meaningful. He claimed that when we understand those things in our lives that have no meaning, we can more clearly see those aspects of life that contribute to a spectrum of meaning. What is meaningful

tends to be deeply connected to what we believe. Beliefs and values play a pivotal role in what we find to be worthwhile and meaningful in our lives.

A subjectivist example of a meaning-of-life concern can be observed through a discussion of Brief Solution Focused Therapy (BSFT). In this theoretical orientation, a desirable life is tied to what is acceptable to an individual (Berg & Dolan, 2001). The concept of hope is pivotal to bringing change and “worthwhile-ness” to a client’s life. Proponents of this theory continually affirm that it is not the therapist’s view of what is worthwhile and acceptable, but rather the client’s perspective, that is important. The client’s belief about his/her meaning is tied to what is worthwhile, and what is worthwhile is connected to his/her desire for a meaningful life. Although meaning questions do arise in BSFT, Frankl’s Logotherapy targets issues surrounding meaning more centrally. In fact, meaning is where Frankl *began* in his work as a psychiatrist and as a philosopher (Frankl, 1997, 1970; Lowen, 2001). Frankl has had a profound impact on people’s search for meaning and may in fact be someone to whom people return again and again for insights regarding meaning-of-life issues in the years ahead.

### *Summary*

In summary, the quest for discovering the meaning-of-life can be found in the river, on the street, and in the rich soil between the two. Meaningfulness seems to be found in all spheres of society and life. Meaningfulness may have to do with value and purpose, and it can be observed in the activities that people pursue in their lives. How meaningfulness is constructed appears to be a personal endeavor, where individual convictions propel people toward a naturalistic or supernaturalistic framework. These viewpoints are lived out in ways that are often influenced by culture and society, experience, and relationships. Although meaning-of-life

questions have been asked for centuries, the questions remain. The problem is not an absence of lack of responses to these questions—indeed, answers are constantly forthcoming. However, the challenge is that one must sift through the multitude of ideas, opinions and perspectives to find one that is suited to one's own way of understanding meaning-of-life questions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methodology

#### *Procedure*

This study used aggregate, primary data collected at the University of Saskatchewan, during the fall of 2002. The study was conducted by surveying 132 undergraduate College of Education students about their perceptions pertaining to what they believe to be contributors to meaning in their lives. The mean age of the students was 23 (2.34 SD) years. The students (M = 35; F = 97) were predominantly Caucasian.

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to examine what university students consider some of the main components of a meaningful life to be. This investigation commenced using an original survey constructed by this writer. The statements on the survey were drawn from philosophical, psychological, and lay perspectives about life, and those things that divergent authors' have considered meaningful in their lives. Initially, approximately 60 statements were developed, taken primarily from philosophers' comments about what brings meaning in life. For example, "What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group)" is an idea taken from Taylor (1999), and, "The meaning-of-life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being" is a statement that fits into Hill's (2002) perception of meaning in life.

Clarifications have been made between the concepts of “the meaning-of-life” literature, and recent “quality of life” research which is situated in the field of epidemiological research. Although both concepts may have some overlap, they are distinct from one another.

### *Important Descriptions (Definitions)*

#### *Meaning*

In this thesis, the word meaning is concerned with the philosophical, abstract sense of meaning, rather than the literal, concrete sense. We are not asking, “What is the meaning of the word ‘life’?” or, “What does ‘meaning’ mean in ‘What is the meaning-of-life?’”. Rather, we are asking, “What is the meaning behind living?”, or, “What gives meaning to your life?”

#### *Meaning-of-life*

Meaning-of-life is the philosophical, and/or spiritual belief about the overall purpose of life. Meaning-of-life incorporates those things that are worthwhile in life. However, it goes beyond looking simply at the worthwhile nature of things, for meaning-of-life points to a particular end. Meaning-of-life issues are of intrinsic importance to individuals, whether consciously, or not. As Loptson (2001, p.180) points out, “[This ] big question deserves to be addressed for its own sake, partly because it is one of the questions most often asked of philosophy by non-philosophers and most often evaded, by the professional philosophical practitioner.”

#### *Supernaturalist viewpoint*

Proponents of Supernaturalism assume that people have meaning in their lives because of a connection with some sort of supernatural Being or spiritual Purpose. This is not to say that day-to-day activities are not meaningful for the supernaturalist. Day-to-day activities are a part

of a meaningful plan that is ultimately connected with a divine Being (Hill, 2002). Examples of survey items that capture the Supernaturalist viewpoint are items 24, “The meaning-of-life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life” and, 25 “The meaning-of-life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being”. Survey items 1, 22, 24, 25, 26, 31, and possibly 13, 18, 19, 20, 22, 27, 29, 31, 32 are consistent with this perspective.

### *Naturalist viewpoint*

Naturalism does not presuppose that one must be connected to a divine purpose or Being to experience meaning in life. Naturalism focuses on the details of life; those things which bring meaning to people in day to day living. Within Naturalism, two sub-categories exist: Objectivism and Subjectivism.

*Subjectivism* presumes that the meaning-of-life can be established if the desires and needs surrounding *one's own* meaningfulness are met. Whatever is meaningful for the *person*, even if it appears strange or useless to others, *is* meaningful. Two exemplar Subjectivistic items are 35, “Life has purpose only in the everyday details of life” and, 38, “What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group)”. Survey items 8, 14, 16, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, and possibly 2, 3, 4, 6, 13 support the subjectivist viewpoint.

*Objectivism*, views life's meaning from a slightly different perspective than does subjectivism. Objectivists believe that activities which “enhance the significance of a life” (e.g. love) (Metz, 2001, 140) to all, or the vast majority of people, are those things which promote meaningfulness. Objectivists tend to accept that even if some people deem certain things or activities as meaningful, simply judging them to be meaningful does not connote a meaningful activity in the sense that they are considered essential, common, contributors to a meaningful life

for all (or almost all) people. Examples of survey items that support an objectivist viewpoint principally are items 28, “People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find the meaning-of-life” and 30, “Some aims and goals are more valuable than other goals”. Other items that tap into an objectivist perspective are as follows: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 29, 31, 32, 33, 33.

Metz’s (2001; 2002) discussion about the three main overarching views pertaining to the meaning-of-life: Supernaturalism and Naturalism (Objectivism, Subjectivism) was used to some extent to create the survey items. Statements from counselors, psychologists and other important writers also contributed to the survey item statements. Table 2.1 outlines how some of the survey statements fit within the Naturalist (Objectivist & Subjectivist) and Supernaturalist structure. As human beings are complex creatures, Table 2.1 is not implying that people hold a uniform view (either Supernaturalistic or Naturalistic) about life’s meaning, for it is assumed that people tend to be somewhat eclectic in how they approach meaning-of-life issues. It can be seen that a few of the survey items do not fall satisfactorily within one category. The items intersect at various points, and will likely differ when diverse perspectives are utilized in evaluating their fit in a particular category. However, for ease of communication, an attempt has been made to categorize these items to correspond with the structure that Metz (2001) has described. Independent viewers assisted in categorizing the statements into the three groupings, giving general consensus to Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 outlines the survey items in order of appearance in the survey. An asterisk has been used to identify which items are connected with the Supernaturalist, Naturalist-Objectivist,

Naturalist-Subjectivist categories. As already mentioned, overlap between categories exists.

The categories that Metz (2001) outlines are not mutually exclusive.

*Table 2.1. Categorized Survey items.*

<b>Survey Items</b>	<b>Supernaturalist</b>	<b>Naturalist Objectivist</b>	<b>Naturalist Subjectivist</b>
1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are?	*		
2. To <i>have</i> trustworthy and intimate friend(s)		*	*
3. To have a fulfilling career		*	*
4. To be closely connected to family		*	*
5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community		*	
6. To have and raise children		*	*
7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself		*	
8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)		*	*
9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends		*	
10. To contribute to world peace		*	
11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person		*	
12. To <i>give of yourself to others</i>	*	*	
13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure		*	*
14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure	*	*	*
15. To be seen as physically attractive		*	
16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself		*	*
17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment		*	
18. To take responsibility for your mistakes	*	*	
19. To make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary	*	*	
20. To be involved with social or political causes	*	*	
21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends		*	
22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals	*		
23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile		*	*
24. The meaning-of-life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life	*		

25. The meaning-of-life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being	*		
26. There is a reason for everything that happens	*		
27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning of life	*	*	
28. People unearth the same <i>basic values</i> when attempting to find the meaning-of-life		*	
29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards	*	*	
30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals		*	
31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness		*	
32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others	*	*	
33. The meaning-of-life is the same as a happy life		*	*
34. The meaning-of-life is found in realizing my potential		*	*
35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living			*
36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life for all people			*
37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life more meaningful for them			*
38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group)			*
39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm		*	*
40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do			

*Quality of life (QOL).*

Quality of life is concerned with a “universal set of (basic) human values” and needs (Deiner, 1995, 108). Quality of life measures highlight those values that make an impact on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of human life. Examples of QOL tenets are: “Physicians per capita”, “Gross human rights violations”, “Per capita income”, and, “Deforestation” (113). QOL requirements focus more on the satisfaction of needs deemed

important for a basic standard of living for human beings. Their satisfaction does not necessarily imply a meaningful life.

### *Description of Sample*

A total of one hundred-thirty-two undergraduate students in the College of Education in the fall session of 2002 were asked to complete an original survey designed by Coralee Pringle-Nelson. This sample incorporated both males and females (male  $n = 35$ ; female  $n = 97$ ). The mean age of the students was 23 (2.34 SD) years. The students were primarily Caucasian, with possible divergent ethnic backgrounds. The ages of the sample varied, as mature students are represented in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. The oldest respondent was in her forties, and the youngest was not yet 20 years old.

Consent for this study was granted by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board on September 19, 2002. This researcher was given permission to use 3 different undergraduate College of Education, Educational Psychology 258.3 classes to conduct the research. A discussion with the individual instructors prior to the data collection confirmed the process of the collection as well as times, dates, and how long this researcher would take in each class. Each class was given an overview of the research as well as the opportunity to participate in the study voluntarily. College of Education students were informed that they were being surveyed about the subject of what constitutes or contributes to a meaningful life. The students were given two copies of the consent form constructed by this author for the participation in this study. One copy was for their records, and one copy was for the researcher. The students were told that all participation was voluntary and that they could choose to stop the survey at any time. All information retained from the survey is confidential.

*Measure: Survey Description*

The statements in the survey that may, or may not, be considered by students as contributing to a meaningful life, were initially evaluated by three individuals, including this writer, to ensure that there was as little content overlap within the questions, as possible. The survey items were obtained from individuals advocating the three central categories utilized by Metz (2001). Item content, taken from prominent philosophers, counselors and psychologists addresses what are considered to be central meaning-of-life concerns (Hill, 2002; Taylor, 1999; Sharpe, 1999; Smart, 1999; Flew, 1999; Ames, 1999; Almond, 1999; Conly, 1999; Kirkham, 1999; Singer, 1998; Klemke, 2000; Ruark, 2002; Wong, 1999; Brown, Brooks, et al., 1996; Ivey & Ivey, 1999; Seligman, 1998; Seligman, 1998). Given the philosophical nature of the topics the views of recent philosophers are given the central focus. Hence, the statements for the survey were drawn both from Metz (2001) and other prominent researchers and theorists writings on the topic. These expert judgments contribute to the face and content validity of the scale utilized in this study.

The construct validity of a survey dealing with philosophical issues about the meaning-of-life cannot be established by external validation like constructs like intelligence, creativity, and anxiety. Hence, the most important contributor to the survey will be content validity of the item-statements. We can also check out the congruence of items in our survey with other individuals who have worked with meaning-of-life issues (Wong, 1999).

The statements targeted many issues which appeared to be more, or less, relevant to a large number of people. For example,

*To have a fulfilling career*

*To live up to the expectations of family and close friends*

Age was another factor that was initially considered important in this research. Although the researcher believes it is a valid factor, the relatively small, homogeneous sample did not provide enough data to support age as a factor in this study to be considered.

Three sub-types of Likert scale were utilized in the study to better address the appropriate measure for individual survey items (Not at all-Very; Low priority-high priority; Disagree-Agree). The use of the three scales does not have any relevance to the data-analysis of subsequent post-hoc ANOVAS. The scale differences are only relevant when interpreting the meaning of the individual items.

### *Hypotheses*

The hypotheses generated to be examined in this study were:

- The overall ranking given to the meaning-of-life statements in the survey will differ by gender
- Males and females will differ in their responses on each of the relevant statements relating to the meaning-of-life
- Males and females will differ in their responses to items in the supernaturalist, subjectivist, and objectivist conceptions of a meaningful life.

### *Analysis*

The data was initially analyzed using the computer program *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* (2002). The first hypothesis was examined using a correlation coefficient on the male and female mean rankings for the items. Mean values on each item for

males and females were calculated and ranked according to the size of the mean. The agreement between the two sets of means provides information on whether the same concerns are meaningful to both males and females. A high, statistically significant, correlation coefficient ( $r=0.80$  or above), for example, would indicate high agreement between males and females on the perceived relevance of the individual factors. The data was analyzed more extensively by Multivariate Analysis of Variance with gender as the independent variable to test the second hypothesis. The MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) was selected because it provides an overall test of the individual differences between males and females on each item.

Sex was chosen as the independent variable because sex differences have been found in a number of applicable areas in the social sciences.

#### *Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)*

The data were analyzed by using a one factor MANOVA. The MANOVA allowed the researcher to analyze each of the 40 survey questions on their own, viewing the mean ( $M$ ) for males and females for each question. Each of the questions was considered to be a dependent variable; it was thought likely that some or all of the questions were correlated with each other to some extent.

MANOVA allowed the researcher to analyze the data by comparing how males and females responded to the items on the survey. A statistically significant MANOVA will indicate whether there is a difference between males and females on one or more of the forty dependent variables (questions on the survey). The null-hypothesis that was tested was whether males and females had the same population means for each of the forty statements. A MANOVA will be

significant if there is a gender difference on at least one of the dependent variables. While traditionally a 0.05 significance level is utilized in research, in this study a more lenient level ( $p=0.10$ ) for the MANOVA. The reason for this more generous level is that the sample size ( $n=132$ ) was rather small for an analysis utilizing 40 dependent variables. This small sample size resulted in a less powerful study and could have an increase in type 2 errors (missed real gender differences) at the traditional level of significance.

A statistically significant MANOVA indicates that a gender difference exists on at least one of the 40 survey statements. Follow-up one-way ANOVAS were utilized to determine exactly on which items the gender differences were found. Forty one-way ANOVAS were conducted to determine where statistically significant differences on individual items are located. The use of ANOVAS as a follow-up to a significant MANOVA is the most commonly used post-hoc test social science research.

*Conceptions of a Meaningful life: Supernaturalism and Naturalism*

*(Objectivism and Subjectivism)*

The framework used to examine meaning-of-life issues considered in this thesis is primarily based on that of Metz (2001; 2002) and other contemporary writings in philosophy and psychology. The third hypothesis, namely that males and females will differ in their responses to items in the supernaturalist, subjectivist, and objectivist conceptions of a meaningful life can not be overall analyzed using a statistical approach. Some of the items will fit into more than one of the categories (see Table 2.1). The reason is that although the overarching philosophical background to each of the categories may differ, for example, the objectivist and subjectivist do

not require a supernatural reality; all three may agree that many aspects of everyday life (eg. friends, family, etc.) are constituents of a meaningful life.

A major issue that arises with Metz's (2001; 2002) framework is that people live on different levels in their lives. Although people share a common lived experience of dealing with family, external relationships, their role and status in their society, they also have more, or less, abstract world views by which to make sense of their lived experiences. The three theories of meaning described by Metz (2001; 2002) therefore cannot be mutually exclusive. For example, those advocating a supernaturalistic framework are not committed to denying that all human beings may share many essential commonalities as exhibited in their daily living experiences as part of societies. An example follows that may encompass all three viewpoints, despite its obvious Supernaturalistic bent.

Those who hold a Supernaturalistic framework will not necessarily disagree that individual human beings may have idiosyncratic interests that contribute to meaning in their lives. According to Hill (2002), the supernaturalist believer finds meaning in glorifying God. He also contends, "there seem to be some purposes that are right or appropriate for humans and others that are not. The purposes have to be worthwhile or important to some degree, and they have to be morally good", and the precise way in which individual humans can be in relationship with God, "can only be known...from God's revelation or by experience, since God might command me to do a particular sort of action, but you to do a different sort of action".

Within Hill's (2002) description it is clear that there is support for objective beliefs about what is important and valuable. Supernaturalism, as Hill describes it, encompasses *worthwhile*

*purposes*. Worthwhile purposes (i.e.: love, beauty and truth) are also endorsed from the Objectivist standpoint, although Hill is not discussing Objectivism in this quotation.

The Subjectivist position emphasizes the small *purposes* each of us may have, depending on our individual desires (i.e.: the details of life). In light of the quotation by Hill (2002), the idea of individual purposes may fit within with a Supernaturalistic framework. It is here that it becomes clear that the three categories overlap each other even when supposed “pure” deliberations about a particular framework are discussed.

### *Summary*

The data was analyzed using the statistical software program, *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* (2002). The first hypothesis, that the overall ranking given to the meaning-of-life statements in the survey will differ by gender was examined using a correlation coefficient on the male and female mean rankings for the items. The second hypothesis that males and females will differ in their responses on each of the relevant statements relating to the meaning-of-life was analyzed by using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance with gender as the independent variable. The third hypothesis that males and females will differ in their responses to items in the supernaturalist, subjectivist, and objectivist conceptions of a meaningful life was examined by a descriptive analysis of student agreement with items in each of the three categories.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Data Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The survey results suggest that men and women think in ways that are different from each other about some meaning-of-life issues, and in similar ways about many issues. The hypotheses established for this study were supported to an extent.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.76, indicating that the items on the survey were related to each other. The relatively high values indicate that the items were internally consistent and homogeneous in what was being measured.

The overall ranking given to the meaning-of-life statements in the survey did differ by gender, as shown on tables 3.3 (female) and 3.4 (male) (Hypothesis 1). Females tended to prioritize relationship-based items uppermost in the survey. The highest ranking statement for the females was, 4, *"To be closely connected to family"*. The second highest ranking statement was 11, *"To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person."* The third highest ranking statement was, 2, *"To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s)"*. Although males ranked these three statements in the top ten in their ranking scheme, only statement 2, *"To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s)"*, made it into the top three in the males' ranking structure.

In the ranking scheme for males, statement 14, *"To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure"*, was endorsed highest overall. Items, 2, *"To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s)"*, and 8, *"To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)"* placed second and third in the ranking scheme for males.

There was a very strong positive correlation with the means of the statements supporting hypothesis one. The correlation coefficient was: 0.96. This correlation suggests that for both males and females there is robust agreement about the overall order of important and less important contributors to a meaningful life. Further, both males and females ranked items 35, *“Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living”*, and 40, *“Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do”* at the very bottom of their individual ranking structures.

Some interesting groupings can be observed as the survey results are considered between the genders. Although the overall ranking orders of items between males and females are similar, differences do exist. Interestingly, statements about involvement in relationships appear to be deeply important to both genders. Relationships with family (4), friends (2) and a significant relationship with a partner (11) are more important for both males and females than other kinds of pursuits in people’s lives. Despite these highly ranked statements, the question, 9, *“To live up to the expectations of family and close friends.”* was not rated particularly high for either gender. For both males and females, this statement was ranked at number 26. Having and raising children (6), another relational statement, was ranked fairly high for both males and females. Although the higher mean value for women suggests that that raising children is more important than for men, men did rank parenting as a somewhat valued component related to having meaning in life. Relationship with self was also ranked highly for both genders. 8, *“To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)”* fits into the top 5 in the ranking scheme for males and females. The act of maintenance in relationships also found its way near the top of the ranked items for both genders. 18, *“To take responsibility for your mistakes”* and, 19, *“To*

*make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary*” ranked as worthwhile. Both males and females ranked statement 18 in 12<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking scheme. Item 19 was ranked at the 11<sup>th</sup> place for males, and in 13<sup>th</sup> place for females. It seems that resolution in interpersonal relationships is valuable for both genders.

Statement 30, *“Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals”* is a statement that was ranked fairly high for men and women. It seems that having and maintaining relationships as well as having a career are central to meaning-of-life issues. 3, *“To have a fulfilling career”* was ranked at number 8 for females and number at 6 for males.

Males and females differed in their responses on *some* of the statements relating to meaning-of-life items (Hypothesis 2). The MANOVA was statistically significant, indicating that the genders differed on the importance attached to some of the items ( $F(39, ) = 1.53; p = 0.049$ ). Hypothesis 2 stated that, on average, men and women would rate differently on *each* of the relevant meaning-of-life statements. This did not prove to be entirely true, as most statements were rated similarly by males and females. The second hypothesis of gender differences was supported for 10 of the 40 survey statements, when a post hoc, analysis of variance was conducted on gender differences with each of the 40 items. These 10 items were demonstrated to have statistically significant mean values between the male and female responses. Statistical significance suggests that there is a real difference between male and female responses that did not occur by chance on those items. Interestingly, females prioritized the statistically significant meaning-of-life items higher than men on all but one item. For example, for the statements, *“People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find the meaning-of-life”*, and, *“To have and raise children”*, men rated them as less important than women did. The only

significant statement that men rated as a higher priority than women was number 14, *“To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure”*.

Table 3.1 displays the means, standard deviations and p-values for males and females on each of the survey questions. Table 3.2 shows the order of statistical significance of the survey items, from the least significant to the most significant. Table 3.3 and 3.3a show the rank order for female mean values, from highest to lowest, and a graph to show the rank order. Table 3.4 and 3.4a show the rank order for male mean values, from highest to lowest, and a graph to show the rank order.

The results indicate that men and women are prone to think alike about most meaning-of-life issues. Essentially, it is the actual mean values that are dissimilar for 10 of the items, suggesting that priorities, although of consequence, are not necessarily valued the same for both genders. For example, both men and women considered the statement, *“A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others”* to some extent a priority, however, men ranked this statement at number 13, and women ranked it at number 10. The two lowest ranking statements for both genders were items 35 and 40: *“Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living”* and, *“Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do”*.

Hypothesis three presumes that males and females will differ on how they perceive meaning-of-life statements in relation to Metz’s (2001) overarching categories (naturalism and supernaturalism). This did not appear to be the case. Men and women tended to share similar perspectives on meaning-of-life statements as seen by how they rated particular items in the survey. Generally, naturalist items appeared to be ranked higher than supernaturalist items for both sexes.

The results in this study demonstrate that there are a number of issues in life that are extremely important to the surveyed sample of people. Items that demonstrated a high mean ranking value for both genders had to do with relationships (others, self) and career. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Discussion of Results. It is interesting to look at these results in light of the framework Metz (2001) provides. Table 2.1 highlights the imposed categories for each item. This table may be referred to in the Discussion of Results chapter, as it pertains to how the literature is born out in this study.

### *Summary*

Three hypotheses were examined in this study. The first hypothesis that the overall ranking given to the meaning-of-life statements in the survey will differ by gender was supported. Although some similarities did exist, rank order clearly differed between males and females. Hypothesis two, males and females will differ in their responses on each of the relevant statements relating to the meaning-of-life was supported to an extent as well. However, only ten of the forty questions were demonstrated to show statistically significant differences in males/female responses. Hypothesis three, males and females will differ in their responses to items on the supernaturalist and naturalist conceptions of a meaningful life was not supported to a great extent. Both males and females tended to rank naturalist statements highest, while supernaturalist statements tended to be ranked less high.

Table 3.1: Means and standard deviations for males &amp; females and p-values from f-test

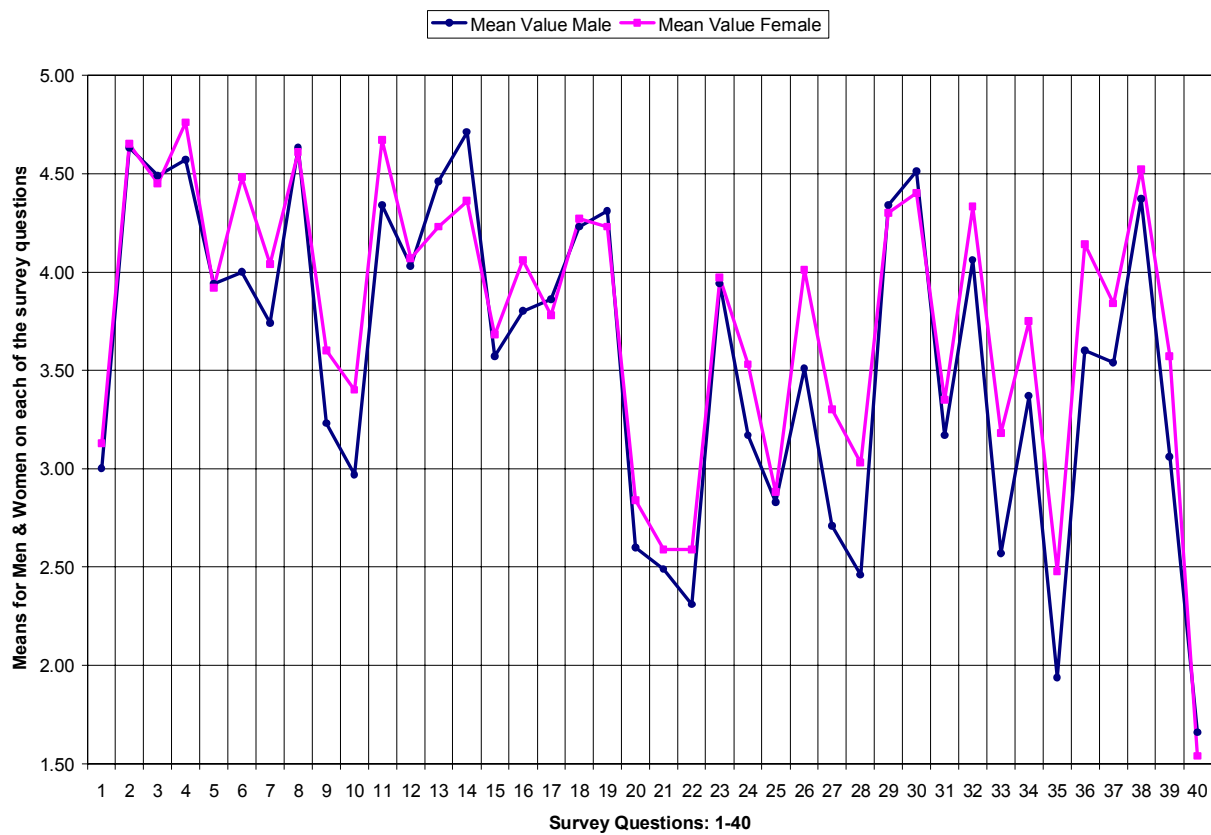


Table 3.2 Order of Statistical Significance for Survey Items

Females	Males	p-values	Questions
4.63	4.71	0.0015	14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure.
3.03	2.46	0.0029	28. People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find the meaning of life.
4.48	4.00	0.0098	6. To have and raise children.
3.18	2.57	0.0131	33. The meaning of life is the same as a happy life.
2.48	1.94	0.0165	35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living.
3.30	2.71	0.0267	27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning of life.
4.67	4.34	0.0355	11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person.
3.40	2.97	0.0361	10. To contribute to world peace.
4.06	3.80	0.0363	16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself with.
4.01	3.51	0.0403	26. There is a reason for everything that happens.
4.14	3.60	0.0524	36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life.
3.75	3.37	0.0538	34. The meaning of life is found in realizing my potential.
3.60	3.23	0.0729	9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends.
4.33	4.06	0.0976	32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others
4.76	4.57	0.0980	4. To be closely connected to family.
3.57	3.06	0.1005	39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm.
3.53	3.17	0.1176	24. The meaning of life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life.
4.04	3.74	0.1275	7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself.
4.23	4.46	0.1478	13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure.
3.84	3.54	0.2052	37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life mor meaningful for them.
2.84	2.60	0.2165	20. To be involved with social or political causes.
2.59	2.31	0.2647	22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals.
3.35	3.17	0.3562	31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness
4.52	4.37	0.3978	38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person.
3.68	3.57	0.5161	15. To be seen as physically attractive.
4.23	4.31	0.5168	19. To make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary.
4.40	4.51	0.5336	30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals.
1.54	1.66	0.5551	40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do.
3.13	3.00	0.6168	1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are?
2.59	2.49	0.6221	21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends.
3.78	3.86	0.6751	17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment.
4.27	4.23	0.7811	18. To take responsibility for your mistakes.
4.07	4.03	0.7903	12. To give of yourself to others.
4.30	4.34	0.7983	29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards
4.45	4.49	0.8151	3. To have a fulfilling career.
4.61	4.63	0.8552	8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel go about yourself).
2.88	2.83	0.8632	25. The meaning of life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being.
4.65	4.63	0.8698	2. To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s).
3.97	3.94	0.8790	23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile
3.92	3.94	0.8821	5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community.

Table 3.3 Rank Order of Female Mean Responses

Females	Males	p-values	Questions
4.76	4.57	0.0980	4. To be closely connected to family.
4.67	4.34	0.0355	11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person.
4.65	4.63	0.8698	2. To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s).
4.63	4.71	0.0015	14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure.
4.61	4.63	0.8552	8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself).
4.52	4.37	0.3978	38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group).
4.48	4.00	0.0098	6. To have and raise children.
4.45	4.49	0.8151	3. To have a fulfilling career.
4.40	4.51	0.5336	30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals.
4.33	4.06	0.0976	32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others
4.30	4.34	0.7983	29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards
4.27	4.23	0.7811	18. To take responsibility for your mistakes.
4.23	4.31	0.5168	19. To make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary.
4.23	4.46	0.1478	13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure.
4.14	3.60	0.0524	36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life for all people.
4.07	4.03	0.7903	12. To give of yourself to others.
4.06	3.80	0.0363	16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself.
4.04	3.74	0.1275	7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself.
4.01	3.51	0.0403	26. There is a reason for everything that happens.
3.97	3.94	0.8790	23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile
3.92	3.94	0.8821	5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community.
3.84	3.54	0.2052	37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life more meaningful for them.
3.78	3.86	0.6751	17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment.
3.75	3.37	0.0538	34. The meaning of life is found in realizing my potential.
3.68	3.57	0.5161	15. To be seen as physically attractive.
3.60	3.23	0.0729	9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends.
3.57	3.06	0.1005	39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm.
3.53	3.17	0.1176	24. The meaning of life is found in understanding one's ultimate purpose for life.
3.40	2.97	0.0361	10. To contribute to world peace.
3.35	3.17	0.3562	31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness
3.30	2.71	0.0267	27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning of life.
3.18	2.57	0.0131	33. The meaning of life is the same as a happy life.
3.13	3.00	0.6168	1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are?
3.03	2.46	0.0029	28. People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find the meaning of life.
2.88	2.83	0.8632	25. The meaning of life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being.
2.84	2.60	0.2165	20. To be involved with social or political causes.
2.59	2.31	0.2647	22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals.
2.59	2.49	0.6221	21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends.
2.48	1.94	0.0165	35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living.
1.54	1.66	0.5551	40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do.

0.960022892

Is the correlation of male/female mean responses

Table 3.3a In Rank Order Female Mean Responses

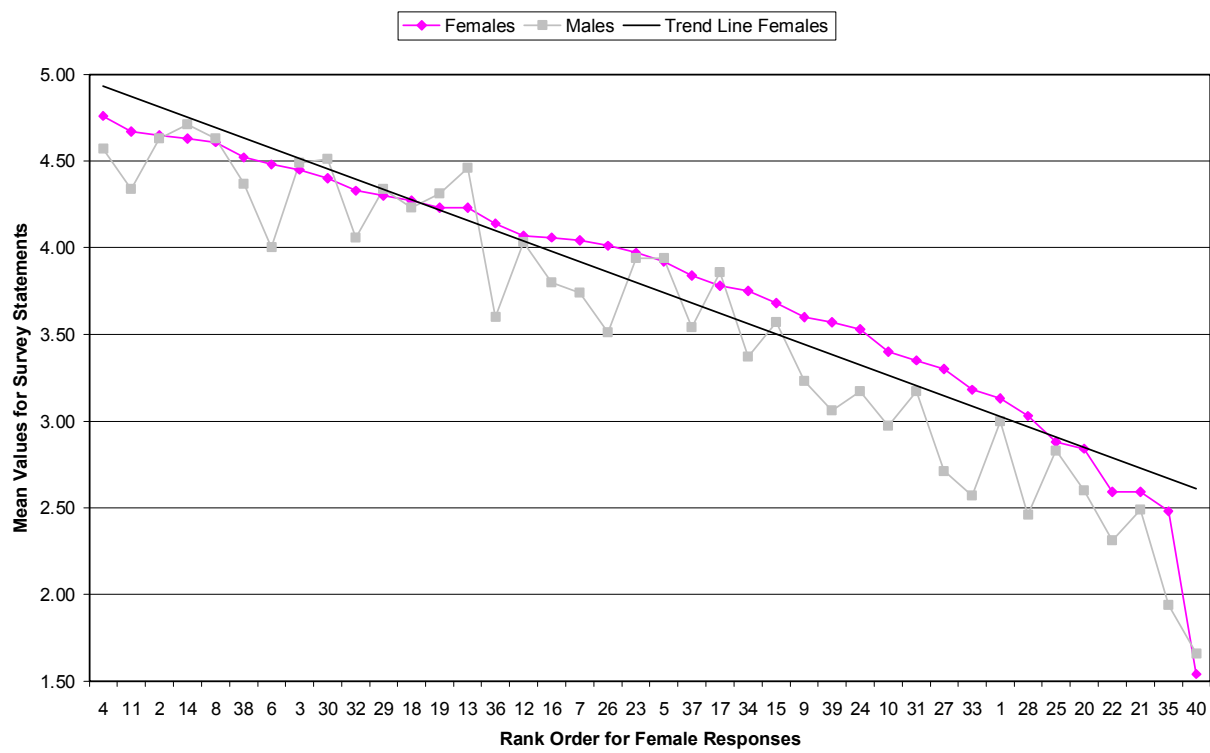
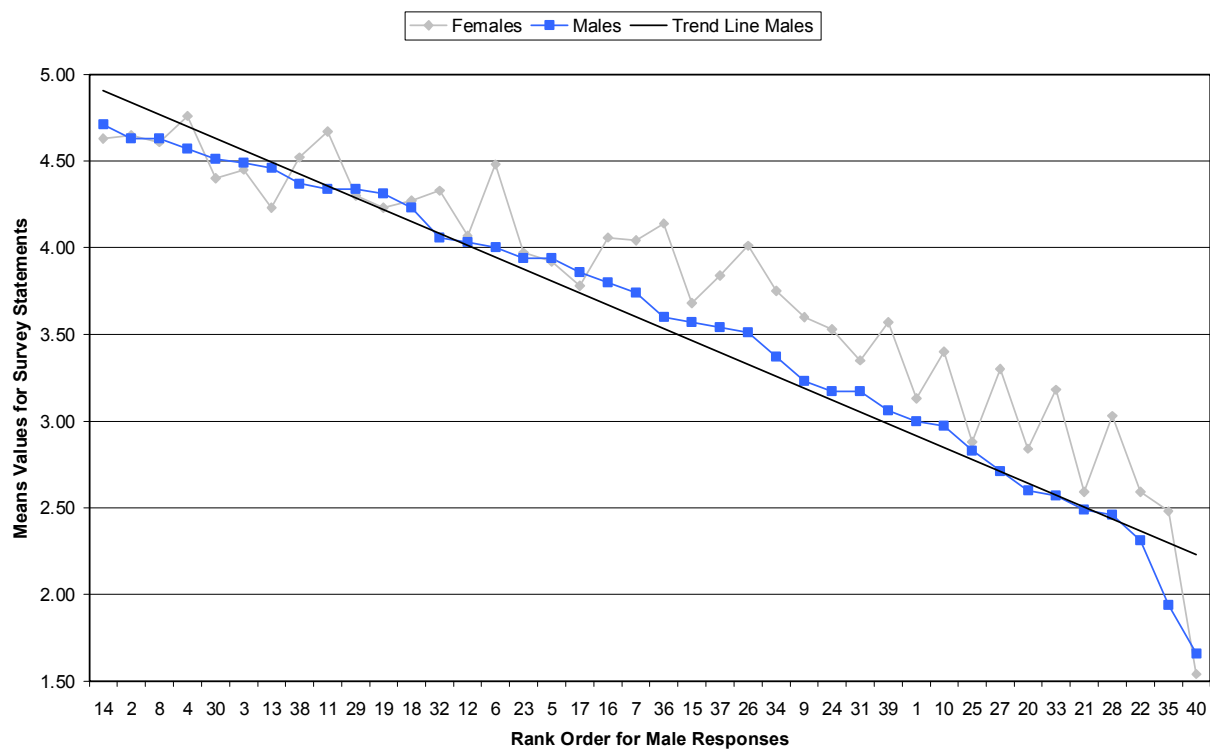


Table 3.4 Rank Order of Male Mean Responses

Females	Males	p-values	Questions
4.63	4.71	0.0015	14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure.
4.65	4.63	0.8698	2. To have trustworthy and intimate friend(s).
4.61	4.63	0.8552	8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel go about yourself).
4.76	4.57	0.0980	4. To be closely connected to family.
4.40	4.51	0.5336	30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals.
4.45	4.49	0.8151	3. To have a fulfilling career.
4.23	4.46	0.1478	13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure.
4.52	4.37	0.3978	38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person.
4.67	4.34	0.0355	11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person.
4.30	4.34	0.7983	29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards
4.23	4.31	0.5168	19. To make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary.
4.27	4.23	0.7811	18. To take responsibility for your mistakes.
4.33	4.06	0.0976	32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others
4.07	4.03	0.7903	12. To give of yourself to others.
4.48	4.00	0.0098	6. To have and raise children.
3.97	3.94	0.8790	23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile
3.92	3.94	0.8821	5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community.
3.78	3.86	0.6751	17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment
4.06	3.80	0.0363	16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself with.
4.04	3.74	0.1275	7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself.
4.14	3.60	0.0524	36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life.
3.68	3.57	0.5161	15. To be seen as physically attractive.
3.84	3.54	0.2052	37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life mor meaningful for them.
4.01	3.51	0.0403	26. There is a reason for everything that happens.
3.75	3.37	0.0538	34. The meaning of life is found in realizing my potential.
3.60	3.23	0.0729	9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends.
3.53	3.17	0.1176	24. The meaning of life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life.
3.35	3.17	0.3562	31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness
3.57	3.06	0.1005	39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm.
3.13	3.00	0.6168	1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are?
3.40	2.97	0.0361	10. To contribute to world peace.
2.88	2.83	0.8632	25. The meaning of life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being.
3.30	2.71	0.0267	27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning of life.
2.84	2.60	0.2165	20. To be involved with social or political causes.
3.18	2.57	0.0131	33. The meaning of life is the same as a happy life.
2.59	2.49	0.6221	21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends.
3.03	2.46	0.0029	28. People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find the meaning of life.
2.59	2.31	0.2647	22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals.
2.48	1.94	0.0165	35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living.
1.54	1.66	0.5551	40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do.

Table 3.4a In Rank Order Male Mean Responses



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Discussion of Results

This study was designed to survey undergraduate College of Education students about what they perceive to contribute to a meaningful life. The purpose of this study is to introduce some preliminary findings about both the similar and the different ways that men and women perceive meaning in life.

No attempt has been made to examine all of the literature about meaning-of-life issues, nor was there any possibility of constructing a survey that could comprehensively evaluate all the different beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about meaning in life. However, the survey does provide feedback that clearly demonstrates that certain issues in life are important for a sample of people. Furthermore, the survey demonstrates that men and women tend to think differently about some issues related to meaning in their lives.

Noteworthy differences exist between the way men and women view the world. Socially learned roles play a considerable part in the varying perceptions (Gilligan, 1982; Williams, 2000). This study suggests that men and women view some meaning-of-life issues differently. It must be noted, however, that they share similar values about a substantial number of the survey items.

It was hypothesized that the survey would demonstrate statistically significant differences between men and women's beliefs about what contributes to a meaningful life. 10 of the 40 items in the survey differed significantly, allowing the researcher to conclude that there were

clear but relatively small distinctions between the perceptions that males and females hold about meaning-of-life issues. The non-significant results (30 questions) indicate that the differences in responses are not related to gender.

It has been argued by scholars like Carol Gilligan (1982; see also csmonitor, 2000), that there are essential differences between the sexes, whether these are obvious or subtle distinctions. According to Gilligan, women tend to view moral situations, for example, differently than men. While men tend to view morality in terms of justice, using rational, abstract principles, women are more inclined to consider morality in terms of relational, social viewpoints. Because women in most cultures have typically been the caregivers in families, they perceive their moral obligations in terms of relationships (Thomas, 2000). For women, compassion seems to be an important characteristic in judging a moral circumstance.

*The male approach* to morality is that individuals have certain basic rights, and that you have to respect the rights of others. So morality imposes restrictions on what you can do.

*The female approach* to morality is that people have responsibilities toward others. So morality is an imperative to care for others (csmonitor.com, 2000).

If, indeed, concepts, such as morality are typically viewed differently between males and females, it would be reasonable to expect that attitudes toward meaning in their lives are viewed in different ways as well (Gleitman, 1995).

To illustrate this concept, it was found in the survey, that the statement, “*To contribute to world peace*” (10) brought forth significantly different responses from males compared to females. The mean response from females to the question about contributing to world peace stated it to be of moderate importance to them (3.40). The mean response from males suggested

that contributing to world peace was of less than moderate importance (2.97). The conclusion may be drawn for this moral/ethical issue, that this sample of females finds contributing to world peace of greater importance than do the males in the particular sample surveyed.

The concept of gender is an essential variable to be considered, when addressing issues relating to the meaning-of-life. However, in this survey male/female differences were small.

Women and men clearly have different biological make-ups. Some social scientists claim that men and women express some emotions differently than do men (Gilligan, 1982; Nothof, 1997). Much has been written about social roles, beliefs, values, and traditions which impact on women in culture. Williams (2000; see also Conly, 1999), discussed the beliefs still held in society about women bearing primarily “domestic” responsibilities. Despite the feminist belief that domesticating women impacts both males and females negatively, Williams claimed that the notion of women finding identity in being a wife and mother are still the norm (p. 271). The notion that women believe that raising children is a meaningful activity is supported in the survey. Women ranked the statement about raising children (item 6) higher than did men (Females ranked item at number 7; Males ranked item at number 15).

Although Western society claims to value egalitarianism between the sexes, there are very clear differences between men and women socially and in other ways. Gender typing happens early, and despite many of the legal attempts to equate males and females, men and women have continued to carry different roles and responsibilities in society. Not only are men and women different from a physiological perspective, socialization and patterns based on cultural gender typing are also unique. Because of these obvious distinctions, it is reasonable to expect that men and women will have some different perceptions about what is meaningful in

life. Furthermore, even when similarities exist between the sexes, survey statements were ranked in different orders. Below, some of the statistically significant statements which highlight male/female differences will be briefly discussed.

*14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure.*  
(Statistical significance:  $p\text{-value} = 0.0015$ )

Question 14 was answered differently for men and for women. Interestingly, this question was the only question that men rated higher on the 1-5 scale than did the women. In Western, and certain other societies, men have typically been viewed as authority figures in the home, work setting, as well as holding principal governmental and bureaucratic positions. Independence has often been a sought after goal for men in society. Men often receive societal endorsement for taking on independent roles whether within a career setting, relational setting or other setting that provides approval for individualism (Gilligan, 1982). While the men in this survey were more likely to report that they act on their own personal beliefs, women were less likely to do so than the men were. Women have typically deferred to men, particularly when it is clear that they are in a situation that supports a patriarchal system (Thomas, 2000). According to some feminist theorists, this gender difference in the survey would not come as a surprise.

*28. People unearth the same basic values when attempting to find meaning in life.*  
(Statistical significance:  $p\text{-value} = 0.0029$ )

Female mean values suggest that women agree with this statement more than men do. Women have tended to be socialized in ways that promote a level of dependency on the community, and/or men. As women have typically been primary child-care givers in the home, their connection to family and community is often assumed to be intrinsic to the well-being of themselves and others. This is not to say that women do not value personal goals or aims, for

survey results indicate they do. However, men have typically taken more independent, autonomous, self-determined roles in society than have women. It is possible that women rated this statement highly because shared values are often a part of relational living (Thomas, 2000).

Another noteworthy observation is that this survey statement is consistent with the objectivist framework. Females may tend to believe that there are some fundamental values related to meaning-of-life issues that are common to all people.

*6. To have and raise children.*

(Statistical significance rates: p-value = 0.0098)

Females ranked raising children as an important contributor to a meaningful life. Sarah Conley (1999) conferred that women find deep meaning in having and raising children. Men also found this a meaningful activity, although significantly less so than did women. Despite the observed statistical significance, both males and females ranked raising children as meaningful to an extent. The result was shown by the item being in the top 20 of ordered survey items for both sexes.

It must be noted that the group of respondents chosen for this survey are mostly young adults. It is possible that their developmental stage of life contributes to how they view raising children. Wong (1999b) noted that parenting is a major life task; it is an important contributor to developing meaning in life.

*11. To be involved in a relationship with a significant person.*

(Statistical significance: p-value = 0.0355)

Females endorsed this question with a higher mean value than did males. It is possible that women, who have traditionally been more dependent on men than vice versa, continue to find some of their value and worth in an intimate relationship. Despite the significant p-value

relationship for this item, it was ranked highly for both males and females. Research has shown that relationships are significant for both men and women (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, et al., 1998). According to proponents of positive psychology, “The happiest people spend the least time alone. They pursue growth and intimacy...” (Elias, 2002, p. 1). Philosophers like Paul Kurtz (1977) connected happiness with meaning in life. Although not all philosophers share his view, happiness is a desirable emotion for most people. The idea that strong relationships contribute to meaning in life is supported in this survey. Strong relationships also appear to contribute to happiness. Wong (1997) stated that relationships and intimacy are important factors that lead to personal meaning in life.

The result of the statistically significant items among genders is interesting. However, it is the similarity of ranking orders that stands out in this research. Men and women ranked many items similarly. For, even on the 10 items that had statistically significant p-values, the size of differences is relatively small.

Survey statements that had to do with relationships (self, other) and career, ranked to a large degree in the top half of the survey for most people in the study (see Tables 3.3 & 3.4). Statements that were ranked less high had to do with meaning-of-life issues that tended to be more global, less impacting on day-by-day living. For example, “*To be involved with social or political causes (20)*” and “*To contribute to world peace (10)*” were statements that did not rank particularly high on the list of 40 survey items. Table 4.1 illustrates the items that rate in the top 20 of the survey statements considered to be related to self-pursuits, relationships and career.

It must be noted that the participants in this research study were College of Education undergraduate students. Therefore, in some respects they may be considered a relatively

homogenous group. It may be assumed that choosing a career in education involves developing and maintaining relationships, as well as being motivated to pursue some level of personal development and career planning, as well as helping and supporting others (altruism). It is therefore not surprising that the results of the survey suggest that this group of respondents prioritized certain items over other items.

Independent viewers were used to evaluate the survey statements in relation to how they fit into the three post hoc categories of self-pursuits, relationships and career. Despite the attempt at distinguishing survey statements into categories, the statements are not mutually exclusive; overlap does exist. However, an attempt has been made to place some of the highly ranked items for males and females into a table (Table 4.1), outlining their relationships to self-pursuits, relationships and career.

*Table 4.1:* Survey items that fall into three overarching categories: self-pursuits, relationships and career

Survey Items	Self-Pursuits	Relationships	Career
2. To <i>have</i> trustworthy and intimate friend(s)		*	
3. To have a fulfilling career			*
4. To be closely connected to family		*	
14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure	*		
6. To have and raise children		*	
7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself	*		*
8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)	*		
11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person		*	
12. To <i>give of yourself</i> to others		*	
13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure	*		
16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself	*		*
18. To take responsibility for your mistakes		*	
19. To make restitution for your mistakes, if necessary		*	

Survey Items	Self-pursuits	Relationships	Career
23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile	*		*
29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards	*		
30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals	*		*
32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others		*	

Interestingly, materialistic pursuits did not seem to be major contributors to meaning in life for this sample of respondents. According to Tim Kasser (as cited in Reardon, 2002), materialism may actually lead to unhappiness, as the desire for possessions overtakes people's lives, leaving them feeling deflated. Furthermore, even people who achieve material wealth are sometimes left feeling empty.

...not only do anxious, insecure, depressed people tend to be more materialistic, but that treadmill effect of materialism in turn produces anxiety, insecurity, and depression as soon as the high of the latest purchase wears off. Similarly, studies show that materialistic people spend significantly more time watching television and reading consumer-oriented magazines, which in turn engenders feelings of anger, frustration, and insecurity in the face of a continual barrage of consumerist messages, unrealistic lifestyles, and subliminal signals that inferiority and wretched uncoolness befall those who don't buy their way into the fantasies on display (p.1).

In a society that pushes materialism on its members, it is difficult to turn a deaf ear to the bombardment of messages that are insisting on the "things" that will promote happiness and meaning in life. Despite these messages, it appears that the survey respondents put less stock in materialistic pursuits, and more energy into relationships.

Literature on supernaturalism suggests that many people find their meaning in a life that is connected with God, a spiritual cause, or set of beliefs. Daniel Hill (2002) hypothesized that people's ultimate purpose is to glorify God. Other philosophers, such as William Craig (as cited in Klemke, 2000) endorsed this view as well. Community psychology confirms that a spiritual community contributes to psychological well-being (McMillan, 1996). However, the sample of people used in this study did not rank a spiritual purpose or belief system particularly high when considering meaning-of-life issues. This was an unexpected result, as society seems to be addressing needs related to spiritual attributes and pursuits as vital (Kelly, 2000; Craig, Quinn, Tolstoy as cited in Klemke, 2002). The survey statements that address spirituality directly did not rank in the top 20 of the 40 survey items. The most highly ranked items in the survey fit into the Naturalism category, particularly the Objectivist grouping (see Table 2.1). Objectivism seems to be able to capture the essence of the common lived experience in a manner that is universal to most people surveyed in this study.

From a counseling/psychology perspective, examining meaning-of-life issues have credence. As Wong (1997) stated, "meaning is a psychological construct, because it involves motivational, cognitive and behavioral processes" (p. 8). Relationships with self and others, as well as developing and maintaining career pursuits have often been considered major issues of need for individuals who seek counseling support in Western Society. "Individual counseling", "couple/relational counseling" and "career counseling", labels have been used to define different styles of interventions and give a clear picture of the needs raised in our general society.

Researchers at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University hypothesized that *community* was a pivotal component to human living and living meaningful lives. "It is clear that sense of

community is a powerful force in our culture now” (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Within communities, relationships are central; without meaningful relationships, loneliness and depression can ensue (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, et al., 1998). “Each of us needs connections to others so that we have a setting and an audience to express unique aspects of our personality. We need a setting where we can be ourselves and see ourselves mirrored in the eyes and responses of others” (McMillan, 1996, p. 315). McMillan suggested that there are a number of components relating to the spirit of community that impact on people’s lived experiences. Emotional safety, boundaries, sense of belonging, trust, trade and art are aspects of community that are essential in developing a place where members are connected and feel that they belong. The venues for experiencing community can be in professional settings, school settings, neighborhoods, religious settings, recreational settings or in other applicable settings.

As technology has advanced, Western society has seen a change in how community is lived out. A group of researchers became interested in how the Internet impacted on people, particularly in their relationships with others (Kraut, et al., 1998). To summarize, the researchers found that more Internet use was related to certain concerns that were linked to community functioning. More Internet use was found to compromise family communication, showed decline in people’s local, and to some extent distant social circles, contributed to loneliness, certain types of stressors and depression. The conclusion of this study was that individuals may substitute time on the internet with time they would usually spend in community. “...it [Internet] is associated with declines in social involvement and the psychological well-being that goes with social involvement” (p. 1029). Although the authors acknowledged that Internet communication allows for people to meet new individuals, as well as keep up with family and friends who live at

a distance, these on-line relationships are limited, in part because they do not include the “same day-to-day environment” (p. 1030). Individuals involved in a great deal of Internet communication “will be less likely to understand the context for conversation, making discussion more difficult...and rendering support less applicable” (p. 1030). Although convenience appears to be a “requirement” in our culture, the authors in this study suggested that “convenience may induce people to substitute less involving electronic interactions for more involving real-world ones” (p. 1030).

Relationships were shown to be vital to survey responders in this study. Community, as discussed, involves relationships that have depth, support and care among its characteristics. The implications of technology on community indicate that relationships can be vulnerable to outside forces, such as the technological advances in our world. Counselors and psychologists, understanding that relationships are pivotal to meaning-of-life issues and psychological well-being for most people, may consider ways to encourage community and relational growth in the lives of their clients.

From philosopher Richard Carrier’s perspective, “love” was intrinsic to discovering meaning in life (2001; see also Wong, 1998). Loving others, being committed to one’s own beliefs and smaller purposes in life, as well as loving those things that contribute to happiness are all essential to bring meaning into a person’s life. In counseling and therapy, finding, acquiring and maintaining loving relationships is a high priority for many people seeking therapeutic services (Gibson & Mitchell, 1999). The survey confirmed that people value relationships with a significant person, with family and in care-giving relationships. Intimacy can be experienced when love and trust are central factors in their relationships.

The survey results demonstrated that for both genders, the issues raised can be seen from a meaning-of-life perspective. Not only do people struggle emotionally and psychologically when their relationships are suffering, or when career pursuits are not what they had hoped for, but these core issues are central to how people make meaning in their lives. From an existential perspective as well as from a therapeutic standpoint meaning-of-life issues are foundational to people making sense of their lives.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This study focused on a small, fairly homogeneous sample of people. Undergraduate students in the College of Education represent this sample. There were significantly more female participants than male participants. One of the goals of the study was to determine what, if any, differences could be noted between males and females concerning meaning-of-life perspectives. Although some statistically significant differences were noted, the sample size for males and females makes these results somewhat suspect for generalizing to other populations.

Meaning-of-life literature can be noted from ancient times to the present; the survey used in this research could only cover a small portion of the ideologies represented in the literature. Literature that pertains to this study covers a broad range of ideas, philosophies and perspectives. Not all of these perspectives could be discussed in this study.

The scale itself had some limitations. Firstly, it did not provide adequate respondent statements from the supernaturalist perspective. It would have been helpful to explore more aspects of this domain as was done in the naturalist perspective. There are a number of different viewpoints from the Christian perspective alone. For example, one theory of religious meaning maintains that God has a plan for the entire world that can only be accomplished if each person

discovers and completes the part that God has assigned to him or her. Hill (2002) may be aligned with this view. Another perspective is that the world was created as an expression of God's glory, and as the extreme expression of His glory, God redeems sinful humanity. People live their lives according to this view, by repenting of their sins, and obeying God (Brittan, 1969). A final example is that human beings exist in this world in order to prepare themselves for the after-life. Life in the next world completes one's life on earth (Hardy, as cited in Britton, 1969).

### *Implications for future research*

This study was preliminary in nature. It began to look at some questions that may fit within a framework about meaning-of-life issues. Metz (2001, see also Metz 2002) provided a useful structure to begin to view the literature and develop survey items. As already noted, the sample used in this study was College of Education undergraduate students. Because of the relative homogeneous nature of the participants, it is possible that a number of major meaning-of-life issues were not addressed at the level of depth that might be most elucidating. It is possible that with this particular sample, that being, University students, issues such as relationships (child-rearing, intimate partner) and education/career were foremost on their minds. Spirituality did not seem to be a priority for this group of individuals. However, it is possible, that given a different sample, the results would be somewhat different.

Future research is needed to develop questions that tap into meaning-of-life issues in more depth. Metz's framework could be used to address meaning-of-life questions that are specific to particular groups of people. Surveying different samples of people, such as those who have different ethnic or racial backgrounds (Wong, 1997), senior citizens (Wong, 1997), people

of diverse economic status, as well as people who have different educational backgrounds would be helpful in broadening the awareness of meaning-of-life issues for more people.

Qualitative study would benefit this topic greatly, as individual items on a survey do not add the riches that individual narratives might. The survey did include a brief qualitative component that will be used for study in the future.

### *Summary*

In examining the survey results from the framework that Metz (2001) provided, it became difficult to separate out some of the naturalist (objectivist and subjectivist) and the supernaturalist components because of perceived overlap in content. For most of the respondents, the themes of relationships, career and self-pursuits appeared to be most important in their lives. No matter what perspective respondents had in regards to Metz' overarching categories, the three themes were largely present in this sample.

There were so-called "pure" survey statements that could be ferreted out as demonstrating supernaturalist and naturalist perspectives (i.e.: tem 25, supernaturalist; item 35, subjectivist; item 30 objectivist). However, there were more statements that could have fit within either category, as each category considered them to have a level of importance.

This study was a captivating venture that seemed to open up more questions than it answered. Meaning-of-life questions can be addressed from a common, having coffee with a friend perspective, to a more academic, counseling-psychology or philosophy perspective. No matter how the questions are addressed, they seem to interest people at very deep levels.

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## APPENDIX A

## Results of follow-up one-way ANOVAS to MANOVA: F-values and p-values

Survey Items	f-values	p-values
1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are?	0.252	0.617
2. To <i>have</i> trustworthy and intimate friend(s)	0.027	0.870
3. To have a fulfilling career	0.055	0.815
4. To be closely connected to family	2.778	0.098
5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community	0.022	0.882
6. To have and raise children	6.872	0.010
7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself	2.353	0.127
8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)	0.033	0.855
9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends	3.270	0.073
10. To contribute to world peace	4.484	0.036
11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person	4.514	0.036
12. To <i>give of yourself to others</i>	0.071	0.790
13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure	2.120	0.148
14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure	10.572	0.001
15. To be seen as physically attractive	0.424	0.516
16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself	4.475	0.036
17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment	0.176	0.675
18. To take responsibility for your mistakes	0.078	0.781
19. To make restitution for you mistakes, if necessary	0.423	0.517
20. To be involved with social or political causes	1.542	0.216
21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends	0.44	0.622
22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals	1.255	0.265
23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile	0.023	0.879
24. The meaning-of-life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life	2.482	0.118
25. The meaning-of-life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being	0.03	0.863
26. There is a reason for everything that happens	4.291	0.040
27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning-of-life	5.025	0.027
28. People unearth the same <i>basic values</i> when attempting to find the meaning-of-life	9.25	0.003
29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards	0.066	0.798
30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals	0.390	0.534
31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness	0.858	0.356
32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others	2.785	0.098
33. The meaning-of-life is the same as a happy life	6.330	0.013
34. The meaning-of-life is found in realizing my potential	3.788	0.054
35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living	5.906	0.016
36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life for all people	3.834	0.052
37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life more meaningful for them	1.622	0.205
38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group)	0.720	0.398
39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm	2.736	0.101
40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do	0.350	0.555

APPENDIX B  
ETHICS APPROVAL DOCUMENT

## APPENDIX C

***Survey***  
***“What students perceive to be meaningful in life”***

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

***Circle the best answer***

*Not at all* *Very*

1. How religious/spiritual would you say you are? 1.....2.....3.....4.....5

On a rating scale of one to five, with one being a *low personal priority*, and five being a *high priority*, rate each statement to fit with what you would consider to be an important part of a meaningful life for you.

- |  | <i>Low priority</i>       | <i>High priority</i> |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 2. To <i>have</i> trustworthy and intimate friend(s)                     | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |
| 3. To have a fulfilling career   | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |
| 4. To be closely connected to family                                     | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |
| 5. To share values/beliefs with others in your close circle or community | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |
| 6. To have and raise children  | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |
| 7. To continually set short and long-term, achievable goals for yourself | 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 |                      |

	<i>Low priority</i>	<i>High priority</i>
8. To feel satisfied with yourself (feel good about yourself)	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
9. To live up to the expectations of family and close friends	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
10. To contribute to world peace	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
11. To be involved in an intimate relationship with a significant person	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
12. To <i>give of yourself to others</i>	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
13. To be able to plan and take time for leisure	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
14. To act on your own personal beliefs, despite outside pressure	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
15. To be seen as physically attractive	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
16. To feel confident in choosing new experiences to better yourself	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
17. To care about the state of the physical/natural environment	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
18. To take responsibility for your mistakes	1....2.....3....4....5	
19. To make restitution for you mistakes, if necessary	1....2....3....4....5	
20. To be involved with social or political causes	1.....2.....3.....4.....5	
21. To keep up with media and popular-culture trends	1....2....3....4....5	
22. To adhere to religious practices based on tradition or rituals	1....2....3....4....5	
23. To use your own creativity in a way that you believe is worthwhile	1....2....3....4....5	

On a rating scale of one to five, with one being you *disagree* with a statement, and five being you *agree*, rate each statement to fit with what you would consider to be an important part of a meaningful life for you.

	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
24. The meaning-of-life is found in understanding ones ultimate purpose for life	1...2...3...4...5	
25. The meaning-of-life can be discovered through intentionally living a life that glorifies a Spiritual being	1...2...3...4...5	
26. There is a reason for everything that happens	1...2...3...4...5	
27. Obtaining things in life that are material and tangible is only part of discovering the meaning-of-life	1...2...3...4...5	
28. People unearth the same <i>basic values</i> when attempting to find the meaning-of-life	1...2...3...4...5	
29. It is more important to cultivate character than to be consumed with outward rewards, or, awards	1...2...3...4...5	
30. Some aims or goals in life are more valuable than other goals	1...2...3...4...5	
31. The purpose of life lies in promoting the ends of truth, beauty, and goodness	1...2...3...4...5	
32. A meaningful life is one that contributes to the well-being of others	1...2...3...4...5	
33. The meaning-of-life is the same as a happy life	1...2...3...4...5	
34. The meaning-of-life is found in realizing my potential	1...2...3...4...5	
35. Life has purpose only in the everyday details of living	1...2...3...4...5	
36. There is no, one, universal way of obtaining a meaningful life for all people	1...2...3...4...5	
37. People passionately desire different things. Obtaining these things contributes to making life more meaningful for them	1...2...3...4...5	

*Disagree**Agree*

38. What contributes to a meaningful life varies according to each person (or group) 1...2...3...4...5

39. Lives can be meaningful even without the existence of a God or spiritual realm 1...2...3...4...5

40. Our lives have no significance, but we must live as if they do 1...2...3...4...5

41. Do you think that there are some things in life that constitute a meaningful life for all people? If you do, what are some of those things?

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42. Does the meaning-of-life come from things that are external to human beings, or from the way humans live their lives? Please explain your views about your answer.

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43. Please comment about things that you contend may contribute to a meaningful life that was missed in the survey.

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Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. For further comments or inquiries, contact: Coralee Pringle-Nelson, 374-2850 or, Dr. Ivan Kelly (Supervisor), 966-7715.

## APPENDIX D

## CONSENT FORM

**Researcher(s):** Coralee Pringle-Nelson, M.Ed candidate; Ivan Kelly, PhD (supervisor); Educational Psychology and Special Education, College of Education

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to understand what undergraduate students perceive to be a meaningful life. The study asks students to fill out a survey during class time about the meaning in their lives. The survey should take between 15-25 minutes.

**Potential Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants in this study. No deception is being used in this thesis. The nature of the survey is not perceived to be more stressful or time consuming than a written in-class exam or assignment that might be given in the College of Education.

**Storage of Data:** The data collected will be stored at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Education, Educational Psychology and Special Education. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years upon the completion of the study.

**Confidentiality:** Although the data from this study will be published and presented at conferences, the data will be reported in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the survey, so that it will not be possible to associate a person with any given set of responses.

*Please do not put your name on the survey; only your gender and age are necessary.*

**Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort (and without loss of relevant entitlements, without affecting academic or employment status, without losing access to relevant services, etc.). If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed. You may also refuse to answer individual questions in the survey.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have any questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Sciences Research Ethics Board on September 19, 2002. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee through the Office of Research Services (966-4053).

Results of the study can be acquired by contacting the researchers at the given numbers. A printed copy of the thesis will be stored in the College of Education, Educational Psychology and Special Education thesis library.

**Potential Benefits to Participants:** Participants may benefit from considering more deeply those aspects of life that are worthwhile and purposeful to them. Furthermore, students may begin to examine their lives from a meaning-perspective, and consider ways to make their lives more meaningful.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records.

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**Signature of Participant**

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**Date**

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**Researcher**

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**Date**