The causes, content and consequences associated with the belongingness and meaning of life

By

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between meaning in life and basic human needs of belongingness in social situations. The participants used in the experiment were 355 undergraduate Monash university psychology students, involving male and females aged varyingly, participated in a voluntary experiment. Based on the results of the experiment it was found that a high level of belonging has a statistically significant sense of belonging, hence a low level of belonging results in a lower sense of belonging. It was also found that sense of belonging does not affect meaning of life.

Feeling included is meaningful as it is important to human functioning in life. A person's meaning in life is often defined by several factors, which range from religion, science, genetics, and interpersonal relationships (Steger, 2012). These are just some examples; anything can define meaning into someone's life if they choose to. Meaning is a loosely defined term as it means something different to everyone but is commonly defined as an implied or explicit significance (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). A person's sense of belongingness in social situations has been known to play an important role on a person's meaning in life. Social interactions aren't enough in fulfilling the human need for belonging. They need to maintain fulfilling relationship and as well as being stable (Baumeister and Leary,1995). It's also been found that there is a link between anxieties and social exclusion that has been seen to affect a person's meaning in life as a discomfort and on-going threat and can reduce significance in their own life as a human being (Baumeister and Tice, 1990). The aim of the study targeted to examine the relationship between meaning and basic human needs.

Previous research from Stillman and Baumeister (2009) conducted a study on the relationship between participants' global life meaning and social exclusion. The experiment involved ostracizing participants by excluding them from a game that involved throwing a ball back and forth between two confederates. The results of the experiment showed that participants in the experimental group perceived life as less meaningful as compared to that of the control group. Moore, Huebner, and Hills (2012) conducted research investigating Electronic Bullying and Victimization and Life Satisfaction in Middle School Students. The experiment involved 8th grade students that answered a life satisfaction quiz involving online bullying. The results showed that participants that experienced bullying had a lower global life satisfaction among other issues such as grades being negatively impacted at school and family marital problems. Bayram, Bilgel and Bilgel (2012) looked at social exclusion and quality of life in Turkish citizens. Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman and the WHOQOL-BREF scale developed the level of social exclusion. The results of the experiment determined that material deprivation and social participation play an important role in the perception of psychological life quality.

Based on previous research it was hypothesized was hypothesized that those who have a lower sense of belongingness will score lower than those who have a higher sense of belongingness, whereas the one's sense of belongingness will not affect one's meaning in life. Moore, Huebner, and Hills study were specific to an age group which was 8th graders, however the conducted study between belongingness and meaning of life looked at an age group of 18 years and older which may have caused a variation in results as compared to 8th grade students.

Method

Participants

The participants used in the experiment were 355 undergraduate Monash university psychology students, involving male and females aged varyingly, participated in a voluntary experiment.

Design

An independent measures t-test was used to study the relationship between the level of belonging, high/low (independent variable) and the score on meaning of life (dependent variable) based on two different questionnaire scores: meaning of life and level of belongingness.

Method and Apparatus

Participants were required to explain a social situation where they either felt socially included or excluded (image 1) and then were required to answer two different questionnaires on the Moodle domain. The first questionnaire measured the participant's level of belongingness based on three questions involving social inclusion/exclusion depending on the participants group. (Social exclusion – In this situation I felt socially excluded, social inclusion – in this situation I felt socially included). A participant's level of belongingness was scored on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 was strongly disagree, and 7 was strongly agree in response to the question. A lower score on the test indicates a higher level of belongingness where a higher score indicates a lower level of

belongingness. The second questionnaire related to the meaning of a participant's life and satisfaction using the Steger et al's (2006) The meaning of life questionnaire (e.g. I have a satisfying life purpose). The questionnaire consisted of eight questions which was scaled from 1 to 7 where 1 was strongly disagree, and 7 was strongly agree.

Image 1

Situational response

Procedure

Participants involved in the experiment had anonymity, where the questionnaire was completed on a personal account online in the "Moodle" domain. The questionnaire was available for a seven-day duration, whereby after that period the chance of participation was closed, and data was collected. This study was ethically approved, and participants were portioned a consent form to participate in the experiment. All participants had withdrawal rights, as participants were not required to answer questions on the questionnaire if they didn't want to.

Data analysis

The data was run using IMB SPSS statistics program. The SPSS output showed the frequencies of participant's scores of levels of belongingness and meaning of their life. An independent measures t-test was used to measure the relationship between the level of belongingness and meaning of life,

Results

Table 1

Means and Standard deviations of high and low belongingness scores

Group	Mean	Standard deviation
High belonging	9.77	2.062
Low belonging	13.33	2.385

Level of significance, α=0.05

As seen in table 1 (Appendix A), two-tailed results found that participants in the high belonging group were found to have a higher sense of belonging (M=9.77, SD=2.062) than participants in the low belonging group (M=13.33, SD=2.385).

Table 2

Means and Standard deviations of high and low meaning in life scores

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
High belonging	39.12	6.663
Low belonging	39.64	6.079

Level of significance, α=0.05

Table 2 (Appendix B) showed that there was a very little difference between participants meaning in life between participants with a high belonging (M=39.12, SD=6.663) and participants with a low belonging (M=39.64, SD=6.079).

Discussion

The results from table 1 showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between a participant's sense of belongingness and the situation they were in. The results were supportive of the hypothesis that those who have a lower sense of belongingness will score lower than those who have a higher sense of belongingness. From this it was deduced that a social situation where a person feels socially included or excluded impacts on their sense of belonging. The results from table 2 showed that there was no statistical significance between belongingness and meaning in life. The data results also failed Levene's test for equality of variances. The data showed little to almost no difference between high/low belongingness and meaning in life. This also supported the hypothesis that one's sense of belongingness will not affect one's meaning in life. Hence it was deduced that a sense of belongingness doesn't affect the meaning in life.

Possible limitations that may have impacted on the results of the experiment could have been the effects of prescribed medications such as antidepressant. If participants had already been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, and we're using the medication during the experiment, it could have impacted on the hours of sleep they had. Most anti-depressants such as clomipramine and fluoxetine effect sleep patterns as they prevent reuptake of serotonin in the bodies system, as well as prolongs the onset of REM sleep and the duration of REM sleep (Wilson and Argyropoulos, 2005). With the loss of REM sleep it could have resulted in participants feeling more anxious the following day when the questionnaire was filled out (Smith and Aben, 1993). This could cause discrepancy in the data as the onset of anxiety from medication could cause an increase of state anxiety, as the participant would feel stressed in that moment for no reason, creating misrepresentation in the data for a high belongingness. To prevent this from occurring in future experiments is to screen participants before participation and remove them from the sample if they are on any anti-depressant medication. Another possible limitation is the manipulation of participants. A simple question asking participants to explain a situation they felt socially included or excluded may not be enough to induce a state of how they felt in that moment in time, as a result it would give an accurate score on the

belongingness questionnaire. To prevent this from occurring in future experiment, place participants in a real-life situation where confederates could cause a participant to feel social inclusion/exclusion using a ball game set up, where confederate (2 or 3) throw a ball to one another including the participant or excluding the participant before they answer the questionnaire (Williams and Sommer, 1997).

The results obtained from the experiment did not appear to be concordant with previous research expressed by Stillman and Baumeister as well as Moore, Huebner, and Hills, also including the result of Moore, Huebner, and Hills in which they found that social exclusion effect a person's perception on life quality, whereas the conducted study showed that was no significance that belongingness effects meaning in life. This may have been due to several differences between the conducted experiment and previous studies that may have produced some differences in results. Moore, Huebner, and Hills used a different scale and social exclusion test in measuring participants meaning of life. This scaling system that they used was the WHOQOL-BREF scale, whereas the conducted experiment used the Steger'ss (2006) The meaning of life questionnaire in determining the relationship between meaning in life and belongingness. Similarly, Stillman and Baumeister used a better manipulation of participants in placing them in a physical situation of exclusion involving a ball game whereas the conducted experiment required participants to retrieve situation in which they felt excluded/included and questions accordingly to that context.

Based on the results of the experiment it was found that high belonging has a statistically significant more sense of belonging, hence a low belonging results in a lower sense of belongingness. It was also found that having a higher sense of belongingness doesn't affect a Pearson's measure of meaning in life as data was found to be statistically insignificant despite data supporting that there is no relationship between meaning in life and belongingness.

References

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Appendix A

Notes		
Output Created		27-SEP-2013 13:24:01
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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User defined missing values are treated as missing.
	Cases Used	Statistics for each analysis are based on the cases with no missing or out-of-range data for any variable in the analysis.

Syntax		T-TEST GROUPS=Group(1 2)
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		/VARIABLES=Belongingness
		  /CRITERIA=CI(.95).

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Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Belongingness	High Belonging	193	9.77	2.062	.148
	Low Belonging	162	13.33	2.385	.187

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Belongingness	Equal variances assumed	6.210	.013	-15.108	353
	Equal variances not assumed			-14.918	320.582

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Belongingness	Equal variances assumed	.000	-3.566	.236
	Equal variances not assumed	.000	-3.566	.239

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Belongingness	Equal variances assumed	-4.031	-3.102
	Equal variances not assumed	-4.037	-3.096

Appendix B

Notes		
Output Created		27-SEP-2013 13:29:16
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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User defined missing values are treated as missing.
	Cases Used	Statistics for each analysis are based on the cases with no missing or out-of-range data for any variable in the analysis.

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Group Statistics					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MeaningInLife	High Belonging	193	39.12	6.663	.480
	Low Belonging	162	39.64	6.079	.478

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
MeaningInLife	Equal variances assumed	1.659	.199	-.759	353
	Equal variances not assumed			-.765	350.535

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
MeaningInLife	Equal variances assumed	.449	-.518	.682
	Equal variances not assumed	.445	-.518	.677

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
MeaningInLife	Equal variances assumed	-1.860	.824
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.849	.814