Understanding Meaning and Existence: Toward the Development of a Measure of Existential Authenticity

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Abstract

Psychological literature has attempted to address existential questions pertaining to attaining meaningfulness in life, activating one's full potential, persistence in the face of adversity, subjective growth after trauma, and dealing with the inevitability of death. Extant literature holds that many of the constructs currently used to study these phenomena might have common theoretical underpinnings that, at least in part, reside in human personality. A novel personality construct, existential authenticity, is advanced for the consequent development of this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Overview and Introduction

People are constantly challenged and serious setbacks are commonplace, but yet people often find something that makes life worth living, regardless. This topic is common in existentialism, and one that psychology has attempted to understand better. It is incumbent upon the current paper to examine how people find meaning in life, why they persist in the face of hardship, challenges, and threats, as well as what characteristics predispose individuals to seek meaningfulness and persistence. From a psychological research standpoint, it is unfortunate that there has not been much collaboration between the disciplines of social psychology, humanistic psychology, clinical psychology, and personality psychology, to address many of the standing questions about how people deal with great challenges in life and come to an enriched personal existence. Additionally, although researchers in the positive psychology movement have been instrumental in naming constructs that deal with these phenomena (Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Koole, & Solomon, 2010), there is a lack of agreement about how best to observe the people's tendencies to adapt, readjust, and persist in spite of hardships, nor is there agreement on what existential aspects of these phenomena are most salient. It is important to help integrate these perspectives, to note that advances are being made in our understanding of existential psychology, and begin to suggest ways this knowledge can contribute to greater society.

Although existentialism is generally thought of as a field of knowledge rather than a psychological state or trait, per se, emergent psychological research has made it important to consider existentialism as it relates to people's enduring, situationally invariant characteristics.

Existentialism esteems the value of individual choice and responsibility no matter the circumstances. It is a philosophy of strife, but also one of management, coping, courage, personal initiative, and focus (Kobasa, 1982). Thus, several known narrow-scope traits and characteristics might be involved in governing existential thinking and acting, such as optimism, authenticity, locus of control, self-efficacy, hardiness, and other intrinsic factors working in tandem. The following review of pertinent literature does not delve deeply into historical existentialism, although it draws from many of its main proponents for support and continuity; rather this paper aims to integrate research on psychological traits that relate to existentialist thinking and acting, recruiting material from both theoretical and empirical research from numerous psychological disciplines. Additionally, the current paper includes an investigation of the construct validity of *existential authenticity* as a personality trait. This term is being coined for new purpose in the current paper, and is not to be associated with existential authenticity as it is discussed in current tourism literature (e.g., Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

The underpinnings of this construct emerge primarily out of existential writings. Many major existential theorists and psychologists have written about the challenging nature of the human condition (Camus, 1955; Frankl, 1962; Fromm, 1941; Kierkegaard, 1992; May, 1981; Sartre, 1996b; Yalom, 1980). Yalom (1980), in particular, referred to four major existential crises, which all people experience: death, meaninglessness, isolation, and loss of freedom. Anyone has the potential to thrive, be free, and have a personally fulfilling existence, but people often are prevented from reaching that state. The existentialists held that people are actually *strengthened* by accepting this antinomy, in staunch contrast to worldviews that interpret pain

and suffering as wholly to be avoided or undesirable. Existential literature is replete with examples of people learning to grow from their sufferings, or find meaning from them, and ultimately find themselves to be better off than they would have expected at the onset. Suffering might in many ways be beneficial if people respond to it in an appropriate fashion, with resilience, with courage, efficacy, and with an elevated mental attitude (Frankl, 1962; Nietzsche, 2005). On this point, the existentialist philosophers were clear: people are free to choose how they respond to challenges. Many also noted that individuals are often not ready to accept the reality of this choice, either by sinking into despair or submissiveness (Kierkegaard, 1992; Nietzsche, 2005) or by clinging to ideologies or authorities to absolve them of the responsibility (Fromm, 1941; Sartre, 1996b). The existentialists wrote that this world is devoid of inherent meaning, however, and so these methods will be ineffective. However, if people do not retreat from their challenges and are cognizant of their own personal responsibility to choose their responses and attitude, logic would hold that they would choose to deal with challenges in ways that tend to bring about growth or fulfillment in the future. To deal with their challenges, even arduous ones, they will likely recruit or innovate a subjective purpose to endure and persevere.

Existential authenticity (EA), broadly, is a disposition in which a person is accepting of the existential parameters, such as the strife-ridden human condition, but also tends to actively and liberally cope with, reframe the circumstances, or readjust to circumstantial demands in a way that ameliorates the situation. Authenticity, to be clear, is inferred from an individual's willingness to act causally (as in mitigating or ameliorating circumstances, volitionally), and thus this definition diverges somewhat from its museum-linked usage of having a genuine pedigree.

Instead, it borrows more from the word's original meaning, the Greek αυτος, "self," and ἑντες, "being/doer"—a being who acts. In particular, this willingness denotes an existentially-themed willingness to take action with regard to one's circumstances. Existential *in*authenticity, on the other hand, would be constituted by thoughtless self-preservation, seeking of a painless existence having restricted willingness to reframe or readjust one's standing in the event of a challenge, and a lack of awareness of one's own capacity to choose. A number of other traits overlap with this construct; however, each of them also possess some additional qualities or lack others that make them essentially different from EA. Thus, the scope of the current paper involves developing a nomological network of related constructs, some of which share a great deal of overlap with existential authenticity, and some which are more disparate. Traits will be considered in terms of their centrality to EA. Current and past research on each related trait will be presented and synthesized in order to create a sensible picture of what is currently known, what is not well known, and what could still be gained from advancing another construct into the fray.

Many of the concepts discussed in this review will take on the form of personality traits, or persisting and situationally invariant characteristics of individuals (McAdams, 1996). There is some consensus that traits should be studied parsimoniously (Goldberg, 1993), as in the "Big Five" model of personality traits which collapses numinous dimensions of personality into more manageable descriptive units (ie, openness, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability, Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Existential authenticity is a novel construct, and so its conceptual overlap with Big Five traits is speculative, but it is theoretically feasible to advance educated hypotheses. For instance,

EA should involve a fair deal of resilience and emotional stability, inasmuch as individuals are facing life challenges frequently, and reaching a place where one is able to cope or navigate through them is more difficult when negative emotions like fear and anger and sadness are easily accessible (Gunthert, Cohen, & Armeli, 1999). Additionally, if one is able to find ways to deal with life challenges, he/she must possess at least as much conscientiousness as it would take to create and follow through with a plan of action (Watson & Hubbard, 1996). A person high in EA would need to be extraverted and agreeable enough not to be alienated or isolated from others, and fairly open to new experiences, as readjustments to challenges might require creativity or seeking out new or different paths (Penley & Tomaka, 2002; Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000; Watson & Hubbard, 1996).

Thus, elements of EA might be partially described by Big Five dimensions, although there are some components for which the model might not account. Recalling the previous definition of EA, broad traits can only offer an approximation of the description of a high EA individual (e.g., a resilient individual with some organization, openness, agreeableness, and extraversion). Indeed, evidence suggests that it is equally important to examine narrow-scope traits, or traits that describe a more limited and less global-level array of human behaviors, that capture variance that broad traits fail to account for (Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1999). EA will be considered one of such traits not well accounted for. There will be occasional references to the Big Five model for guidance, but the bulk of the current discussion concerns narrow traits and the proposes ways these might relate to EA.

Chapter 2: Existential Authenticity's Nomological Network

Post-traumatic Growth and Benefit Finding. Trauma literature is rife with investigations of the consequences of high end, severe stressors, but recently this research has also come to focus on the ways people grow and benefit from having endured these struggles (Helgeson, Reynolds, Kerry, & Tomich, 2006). Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that personal development comes about as a direct sequela of negative or stressful events (Andrykowski, Brady, & Hunt, 1993; Carver & Antoni, 2004; Cordova et al., 2007; Hogan, Greenfield, & Schmidt, 2001). The process of growth is said to occur in a number of ways (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996): perceiving changes in the self, usually as more experienced or self-reliant; increased closeness with others and better quality of relationships; and a change in perspective or life philosophy. Growth is not a mere glossing over past negative events with positive feelings; people are capable of re-casting their previous understandings of everyday living, family, creed, and their own corporeal existence in the face of severe trauma, and these readjustments often translate to real benefit. Summarizing broadly, it has been indicated that the extent to which individuals successfully negotiate the challenges associated with stress or trauma is positively associated with mental health and well-being (Andrykowski, Brady, & Hunt, 1993; Mols, Vingerhoets, Coebergh, & van de Poll-Franse; Thornton et al., 2012); the converse has also been found, that unsuccessful management or ongoing management of such events is associated with lower mental health and well-being (Helgeson et al., 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Stanton, Bower, & Low, 2006). This line of work suggests that how one responds psychologically to stressful life events has real consequences.

Some researchers have examined whether other factors also play a role in mitigating the aftermath. For instance, it has been proposed that a greater length of time after a traumatic or stressful event translates to more growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), and other research suggests that immediacy of developing a distress-mitigating strategy might be beneficial (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000). There is a relative paucity of longitudinal studies in this area, but some work suggests there might be a critical time point for benefit-finding to occur. For instance, a study by Affleck, Tennen, Croog, and Levine (1987) posited that failure to find benefits within seven weeks of a heart attack was a risk factor for a repeat heart attack. Further, a recent meta analysis indicated that one's inclination toward benefit finding was not related to levels of anxiety, distress, quality of life, or to subjective reports of health (Hegelson et al., 2006). These findings carry important implications for the measurement of well-being. On the one hand, factors that are readily associated with well-being include money and income, adequate friends, and good health; however, now there is mounting evidence that people find positivity in spite of and in reaction to events typically considered in league with lower well-being (Sodergren & Hyland, 2000). It is possible that, when managed effectively, distressing events might be indirectly related to well-being.

Existential authenticity shares a great deal in common with the benefit finding or posttraumatic growth process. They both involve significant and liberal readjustment in the face of challenge that may include a restructuring of one's life meaning, views, beliefs, and personal ties. They differ, however, in that existential authenticity is a dispositional quality, and does not require there to have been a traumatic event. EA is a disposition of readiness to adapt that

operates even in the absence of acute stressors, while there is no current standard for dispositional benefit finding, although authors have discussed a number of traits that might facilitate posttraumatic growth, including resilience, optimism, and hardiness (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Hardiness and Optimism. There are a few trait characteristics that imply a strength of character that enables one to persist in adversity. Early work on this topic arose out of interest in a catastrophic upheaval in the Illinois Bell Telephone company, in which staff were exposed to life stressors at a magnitude that would ordinarily predict development of stress-related illness (as per the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Scale; Holmes & Rahe, 1967), and in many cases, did. However, in spite of stressful conditions, a group of particularly hardy individuals continued in health (Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). After further study of this subgroup, hardiness came to be recognized by three C's: ***c***ommitment to community, internal locus of ***c***ontrol, and seeing change as ***c***hallenge (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). These characteristics involved, respectively, maintaining a solid base of social support and personally fulfilling activity, believing in one's own agency to effect positive change, and accepting stressful events as opportunities to improve or grow. It is not surprising, perhaps, that hardiness has been shown to correlate positively with agreeableness, extraversion, openness to new experience, and conscientiousness, and also negatively to emotional stability on the NEO, a standard measure of the "Big Five" personality traits (Maddi ; also see Rahmaniah, Sharp, & Byravan, 1999).

Indeed, hardiness has been shown to play a role in improved performance, coping, and mood, across a variety of settings and participant groups, using both subjective and objective

outcomes (Maddi, 1990; 2004; 2010). Additionally, owing to a pressing need for a standardized, succinct measure of a theoretically beneficial construct (Funk, 1992), dozens of investigations have been performed to disentangle the hardiness construct from social desirability, negative affectivity, and other aspects of personality (for a review, see Maddi, 2002). The culmination of these efforts was the current standard of hardiness measurement, the Personal Views Survey III-R (Maddi & Khoshaba, 2001), which does not derive a unitary factor solution for hardiness, but involves measurement of the 3 C's, separately (Maddi, 1997; Maddi & Hess, 1992). Additionally, high and low scorer groups in hardiness are determined by whether individuals consistently score above or below the median on all subscales (Rahmaniah, Sharp, & Byravan, 1999).

Hardiness is highly related to the current paper's proposed construct, existential authenticity, and the main difference between the two occurs at the level of measurement. Hardiness questionnaires (e.g., the Personal Views Survey III-R; Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Lu, Perisco, & Brow, 2006) have been criticized for tapping into separate, unintended constructs. For instance, Funk and Houston (1987) discuss how the hardiness metrics used shared a good deal in common with general maladjustment and depression. Generally, hardiness scales have tended to be comprised of items that correlate but are logically more representative of other established constructs. For instance, one might be determined to be “hardy” after affirmatively answering items regarding trying new things or having hobbies of interest (openness to new experience), believing that one is in control (self-efficacy, internalized locus of control), or not feeling discouraged often (emotional stability). These domain-generalizing items might also in

part account for the scale's initial borderline-acceptable reliability of .70, and three-factor solution. Hardiness scales have undeniably been helpful tools in research and organizationally, yet a good deal of evidence suggests that hardiness is an amalgamate of other constructs, some of which are relevant to EA. At the level of measurement, what is required is to address more explicitly how personal resolutions to persist, be connected to others, and be in control of oneself have bearing on the alleviation of life challenges. Additionally, it is unclear from hardiness literature how choosing novel or creative courses of action and being flexible in the present, or how one's projection of how things might pan out in the future might be beneficial.

The optimism literature certainly deals with the latter. Research on optimism has concerned both state and trait qualities, both of which deal with a person's tendencies to view the world in terms of positive outcomes instead of negative ones, opportunities instead of hardships or obstacles, and more positive explanations for events rather than negative ones (Andersson, 1996). People who are more optimistic have been noted as resilient to stress across many domains, particularly in the medical field, and quite reliably, dispositional optimists live longer, recover more quickly, and experience improved treatment outcomes than pessimists (Carver et al., 1993; Nes & Segerstrom, 2006; Rasmussen, Scheier, & Greenhouse, 2009), perhaps in part because of coping as an underlying mechanism (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006; Scheier & Carver, 1985, 1992).

In reviewing the optimism literature, it becomes clear that there is a pronounced bias toward optimism and optimistic attitudes. Perhaps part of this has to do with the parameters by which optimism is defined. William James wrote about optimism as a source of activation for

potential, saying that believing affirmatively in one's own ability was a source of greater energy, which then facilitated in bringing about one's sought after goals, whereas entertaining doubts had a depleting effect (Perry, 1936). Therefore, if one has the ability to choose an attitude about how to carry oneself, it makes more adaptive sense to have a constructive attitude. Later researchers have confirmed this (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). However, they have also proposed that there are multiple, different flavors of optimism and pessimism. For example, *unrealistic optimism* characterizes one's belief that great positive outcomes will result regardless of situational constraints, especially when disproportionally little effort is expected to bring large ventures into fruition (Weinstein, 1980). *Defensive pessimism* describes a stance where individuals actively guard against and try to prevent negative outcomes without necessarily resigning to their inevitability (Norem & Cantor, 1986). Interestingly, there is some evidence suggests that defensive pessimism might be advantageous over "chronic optimism" in certain laboratory contexts, since optimism sometimes draws upon ignoring or distorting negative information to one's advantage instead of thinking through many possible outcomes, positive and negative (Norem & Illingworth, 1993). The consensus among researchers has generally remained, however, that optimism is desirable and helpful, and pessimism is potentially dangerous.

Some more recent work has ventured away from optimism-pessimism as a bipolar construct and have instead suggested separated the two (Kubzansky, Kubzansky, & Maselko, 2004; Robinson-Whelan, Kim, MacCallum, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1997). This separation of optimism and pessimism may have resulted from the frequency of two-factor solutions in the most commonly used measure of optimism, the Life Orientation Test (Scheier, Carver, &

Bridges, 1994). Some researchers have commented that this is artifactual due to method bias, not because of true differences in item content (Hjelle, Belongia, & Nesser, 1996), while others have suggested that exhibiting optimism is qualitatively different than exhibiting pessimism (E. C. Chang, D'Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 1994). It has been suggested that researchers should be discerning whether they intend to treat optimism-pessimism as bipolar or as bivariate (Kubzansky, Kubzansky, & Maselko, 2004). Thus, practically, there might be some merit in other measurements of optimism, such as the Expanded Attributional Style Questionnaire (EASQ; Peterson & Villanova, 1988), which essentially sidesteps this debate and interprets optimism and pessimism as a learned responses to situational successes and disappointments (Seligman, 1991). The EASQ allows for nuanced interpretation of tendencies to construe positive and negative outcomes, but is less popular than the LOT and has been mainly used in clinical populations. Additionally, other studies have studied dispositional optimism in terms of dispositional hope, dividing the hope into the dual components "agency," or a characteristic of being goal-driven and orientated toward that which one seeks, and "pathways," or a quality or attitude of planfulness about reaching one's goals (Snyder et al., 1991). Hope shares with optimism the sense that things desired are attainable and in some sense expresses psychological ownership over positive outcomes prior to reaching them. It can be seen that research on optimism has confirmed that positive future expectancies is beneficial, but agreement has not been reached in terms of how optimism is best studied.

Dispositional optimism shares a good deal of overlap with the current definition of existential authenticity. Optimists, who have been seen to persist longer and believe in a positive

future, have a qualitatively different reaction to setbacks than pessimists. While the pessimist is traditionally passive, and submits to challenges when they arise, optimists are able to buffer off the stress and press onward. Existential authenticity is different, however, in that the type of persistence involves personal readjustment without regard for positive outcomes, per se. Existential authenticity lies somewhere between optimism and defensive pessimism, because it does not rely as heavily on a cognitive element, the evaluation of the likelihood of positive outcomes, but more on the individual's resolve to make an effort to make things better than they are. What circumstances are "better" may not actually be very positive, still, considering Sartre's (1996b) notion that limiting forces will always try to impinge on one's being, and in a more extreme instance, Frankl's experiences in Nazi concentration camps (1962).

Locus of control and self-efficacy. Hand-in-hand with believing in positive future outcomes is one's belief in his/her ability to perform the actions necessary to bring it about. Research on one's locus of control suggests that a sense of where one's agency lies matters in this context. According to the seminal work of Rotter (1966), those with an internalized locus of control are more likely to view themselves as in charge of their own fate, agentic, as one who has sole power to effect change, whereas an externalized locus of control places agency upon outside forces which are overpowering, confusing, and somewhat chaotic. One's locus is not a personality trait, per se (although it is frequently studied as one), but more of a belief or "generalized expectancy" that guides one's interpretation of events (Rotter, 1966). Researchers have traditionally found that internalized locus of control is more favorable, and that externalized locus engenders the similar kind of helplessness seen in dispositional pessimists. Perhaps not

surprisingly, internalized locus of control has been linked to positive outcomes, such as life satisfaction, work satisfaction, and better problem focused coping (Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010). On the other hand, externalized locus of control has been linked to a number of negative outcomes, such as lower well-being (Larson, 1989), depression (Benassi, Sweeney, & Dufour, 1988; Hahn, 2000), anxiety (Kilpatrick, Dubin, & Marcotte, 1974), and poor coping (Krause & Stryker, 1984). In addition, externalized locus of control has been linked to juvenile delinquency (Parrott & Strongman, 1984) and lower academic achievement (Findley & Cooper, 1983). On the other hand, a recent meta-analysis has suggested people have become more *externalized* in locus of control over the last forty years, indicating that individuals feel less in control of their own lives and more at the mercy of external forces (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). Authors note that, to some degree, new generations might have been the recipients of cultural influences which asserted values consistent with externalized locus (e.g., economic struggles, societal endorsement of cynical and mistrustful attitudes), but also caution that this phenomenon could contribute into a broad-reaching downward spiral of societal helplessness, poor adjustment to stress, and lack of achievement. Another suggestion was made by Mudrack (1990), in which environments that are hostile to internalized locus of control might differentially reward or support the use of deceit and manipulation to achieve goals rather than persistence and hard work.

A similar construct, self-efficacy, emerged out of Albert Bandura's (1977) research on expectation of success, and has to do with one's beliefs in whether or not they can accomplish not simply one task, but veritably any task with which they are faced (Maddux, Sherer, & Rogers,

1982). Thus, self-efficacy here will be referred to as a generalized tendency, rather than a situation-specific one, although situational self-efficacy is a also a well-studied phenomenon.

Bandura (1977) suggested that self-efficacy was instrumental in bringing about behavioral change, because it gives rise to the decision to change, and self-efficacy is associated with a greater degree of effort and persistence than possessing knowledge of how to perform tasks, or even one's own past performance on tasks. Unsurprisingly, self-efficacy correlates positively with internalized locus of control (Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs, & Rogers, 1982). Meta-analyses have also found self-efficacy to be a powerful indicator of greater health-promoting lifestyles (Gillis, 1993), better health outcomes and behaviors in general (Holden, 1991), as well as superior performance in academics and persistence (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), sports (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000), and work (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). On the other hand, individuals who lack self-efficacy tend to approach tasks more cautiously, tend to view themselves as rather inept, have greater self-doubt about their qualification, training, or knowhow (Bandura, 1977).

"Control" variables have perennially received interest in psychology—Skinner (1996) identified over 100 constructs dealing with control, for example. Accordingly, there is no current consensus among as to whether these variables, together, hint to the presence of a higher order construct (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), and it has been noted that there is a relative paucity of multivariate research examining individual traits' unique contribution to common variance (Holden, 1991). However, researchers are becoming aware of these dispositions and orientations that seem to promote fulfillment, even fulfillment in the face

of adversity. Certain stances, such as self-efficacy, internalized locus of control, hardiness, optimism, and others, all seem to direct a person to engage tasks, persist, and then eventually meet success. These dispositions seem to induct a person into a feedback loop of expectation and achieving a desired result, in a broaden-and-build fashion(Frederickson, 2001). Thus, even small successes are potentially far-reaching in the long term. However, although self-efficacy and locus of control involve the tools necessary to succeed and manage crisis (Bandura, 1977), they do not necessarily equip people to grapple with larger existential questions, such as death, loneliness, meaninglessness, and freedom. There are situations in life, albeit perhaps rarer ones, where one cannot generally be in control of his/her life or believe in one's ability to accomplish tasks. Viktor Frankl, an existentialist psychologist and Holocaust survivor, recounts many such instances in the concentration camp setting (1962). For Frankl, one's personal attitudes about persistence were certainly important, but equally important—if not more so—were one's subjective reasons for enduring and finding meaning amidst the suffering.

Authenticity. Some people are able to persist in the face of severe challenges because they possess an anchor: a clear, authentic sense of themselves, who they are, and how they fit into the big picture. Literature on of authenticity has become more common recently because of the positive psychological movement, but has roots that reach back to early psychodynamic theorists and humanistic psychologists. If a person is deemed authentic, lay persons often are referring to persisting characteristics of a person that uniquely tie him/her to a category to which he/she exemplifies. It is also said a person can be authentic when he/she genuinely expresses his/her point of view, and does not waver. Recent research by Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis,

and Joseph (2008) takes the concept further, integrating a number of perspectives on authenticity and offering a tripartite theory, wherein authenticity is a function of one's orientation to the following: self-alienation or self-awareness, accepting external influences (conformity) or internal ones, and authentic-living (being consistent with one's own principles). The principle of self-knowledge derives from the work of Karen Horney (1951), in which she posited that individuals can only become authentic when they learn to embrace their own faults which become visible when the self is compared to others. Failure to do this alienates the self and fosters misguided, negative impulses to protect the self.

Additionally, while it is acceptable to allow an appropriate degree of external influence, entities such as crowds or institutions should not hold undue sway over an authentic person (Schmid, 2005), but rather he/she should have a personal mode of being that expresses command of his/her domain. Considering the stigma associated with some categories, resisting the crowd for the sake of authenticity takes courage (Rogers, 1959). Importantly, however, it has been found that people who are more authentic are more satisfied in life (Wood et al. 2008) and have been shown to be more career-decided across multiple indices (White & Tracy, 2011). Furthermore, people who are more authentic in relationships have higher relationship quality (Lopez & Rice, 2006) and people who live authentically behave less aggressively in unfair exchanges (Pinto, Maltby, Wood, & Day, 2012). Consistent with these findings, a recent investigation ((Maltby, Wood, Day, & Pinto, 2012) found associations between authenticity and honesty-humility (Lee & Ashton, 2008), a broad trait characterized by sincerity, modesty, and fairness.

More recent humanistic work has examined distressed individuals empirically, to see whether actualized, authentic character reaps benefits as the existentialist theorists might suggest (e.g., Yalom, 1980; May, 1981). Links have been found between low authenticity and negative outcomes, such as more severe PTSD symptoms (Ehlers, Maercker, & Boos, 2000) and less hope in children (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996). Further, it has been empirically found that greater authenticity is related to greater self-esteem, as well as better subjective and psychological well-being (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). This body of work suggests that authenticity implies engagement in one's own being, whereas lack of authenticity is associated with largely negative outcomes.

Authentic people are those who stand by their personal principles, and so it may be that when turmoil arises, whatever their lot, they are secure in the knowledge of themselves, making it less likely to experience intense distress or lash out. Authenticity differs somewhat from other constructs, like locus of control and optimism and self-efficacy. It possesses a more self-reflective quality, an unquestioning and deliberate awareness of oneself. It bears noting that authentic people are not in denial of their own weaknesses and limitations (Horney, 1951); indeed, in order to buffer off distress, they do not need to be in a state of mastery over a task, have control over a situation, or even expect good things to come about. They merely need to be themselves.

However, to clarify, being authentic is not necessarily existentially authentic. Authenticity has been systematically defined as having to do with having a sure sense of oneself and being free of the control of others (Wood et al., 2008), and one could be very authentic in

denying existential tenets like accepting mortality and valuing choice. Therefore, the current construct takes an extra refining step making it applicable to a particular subset of authentic individuals who are defined by existential character. The constructs are similar, however, in that both authenticity and EA imply an ability to be resilient, stable, and anchored in oneself during troubled times, rather than becoming scattered.

Self-Actualization. The middle 20th Century marked the rise of humanistic psychologists who were deeply concerned with individuals meeting their full potential. Although not all were steeped in existential philosophy, many emphasized the positive aspects of existentialism, such as accepting personal responsibility for one's choices, and living fully, placing less emphasis on death and human finiteness. Indeed, several theorists converged on emphasizing the importance of people striving to meet all their inner potentials, the process of self-actualization. Notably, Carl Rogers (1961) wrote about a need "to express and activate all the capacities of the organism" (p. 350-351). Abraham Maslow also conceived an actualizing person, who was creative, outwardly-focused, accepting of illness, stress, and challenge, and always finding a means to grow from his/her experiences (1954; 1968).

However, bringing one's deep inner potentials to bear might be a very difficult and confusing process. A number of notable individuals began to work extensively with this type of issue. Rogers (1959), for example, instructed people to embracing parts of themselves they once discarded due to fear of societal rejection. In his theory, people are socialized to respond to conditions of worth which are externally imposed upon them. In essence, conditions of worth devalue individual talents or abilities that do not add socially desired value, such as only offering

praising significant others when they exhibit top performance, or discouraging behaviors that might be seen as aberrant. A small boy could show an amazing talent for dance, for instance but be shunned by peers and parents for not aligning with certain rigid views of traditionally masculine behavior. To the extent that people make these aspects of themselves less accessible, they become less capable of living a full existence, as they disallow themselves from enjoying the possible interactions or opportunities for growth that their talents entail. Another method for reaching actualization was the Gestalt therapy of Fritz Perls (1947). Perls was steeped in existential phenomenology, and proposed that in their attempt to understand the world and themselves, people rely too heavily on abstract principles and preexisting attitudes instead of the everyday concrete experiences they face (direct experience).

Ordinarily, using abstract principles as guides might not be problematic, but in some cases people could experience existential struggle as a result of being bound by previous learning or persevering beliefs or dogma. Many people needed to be retrained to experience the world naively and subjectively (Idhe, 1977; Wertheimer, 1945), through their own lens, rather than with an adopted abstract method provided by others. For instance, one could be taught relatively simple lessons, such as "time is money," that become ingrained so deeply as to become a hindrance to living fully—one might cease to enjoy idle time or believe in any real benefit of relaxation. Through setting aside unhelpful abstractive processes, Perls work suggests that people can learn to unleash their inner creativity and gain closure in unfinished business (Zinker, 1977).

It has been suggested that a person actualizes when he/she becomes aware of his or her

capabilities and potentials and ceases to rely on external approval from others for satisfaction (Mahrer, 1978). It has been suggested that one's potentials, or images of selves people could become, are always conceptually distinct from the ideals that others might impose upon us (Rogers, 1959) or the motivation to react against personal deficiencies (Maslow, 1970). However, having potential still might amount to little unless it is acted upon, which necessitates diligent, hard work, discipline, and personal insight (Mahrer, 1978). Mahrer suggests that one's deeper potentials are not, by default, "integrated" into a person's daily experiences, but have to be drawn out, making self-actualization a difficult state to obtain. Further, although increasing self-awareness and developing potentials are acts that anyone can perform, there are still individual differences that might dictate who is able to self-actualize. For instance, it is supposed that individuals with more psychological problems have difficulty reaching an integrated, actualized state (Mahrer, 1978; Yalom, 1980), as well as individuals with lower self-esteem, as well as unhealthy self-concepts (Fitts, 1971).

Generally, the weak points of the humanistic perspective concern the relative lack of empirical studies from humanistic psychologists and systematic validation of its abstract concepts. However, humanistic psychologists nevertheless made advances in measurement of self-actualization. The most extensively used index of self-actualization is the Personal Orientation Inventory, developed by Everett Shostrom (1964), which gauges one's tendencies to self-actualize. Shostrom (1964) recruited clinicians to provide descriptors of self-actualized and non-self-actualized individuals. Clinicians reported that the actualized individual is "active, busy, involved, participant, energetic, motivated, concerned, hard-working, constructive,

productive, creative, enterprising…." whereas the *non*-self-actualizing individual might be described as "bigoted, biased, puritanical, rigid, compulsive, frustrated, blocked, seeking, unfulfilled, empty, unsatisfied, cold, frigid, frightened, fearful, constricted, inhibited…." (p. 214-215). It would appear that the actualizing individual lives in a drastically different world than the non-actualizing one. There is an *authentic* character to the former, whereas the latter appears inert and alienated.

The validity of the POI has been shown in many contexts. For instance, relative to the normal population, low scores on the POI have been found in felons, even when asked to simulate "good" adjustment (Fisher & Silverstein, 1969). Higher POI scores have also been found to correlate positively with rational thinking scores on the Rational Behavior Inventory (Shorkey & Reyes, 1978). Higher scores on the POI are related to lower self-reported loneliness (Moore & Sermat, 1974). Additionally, campus political demonstrators have been found to score higher on the POI than non-demonstrators (Freeman & Brubaker, 1971). The POI has also been studied with regard to hardiness (Campbell, Amerikaner, Swank, & Vincent, 1989), quality of moral judgments (Lucas & Tsujimoto, 1978), transcendental meditation (Seeman, Nidich, & Banta, 1972), purpose in life among agency-supported caregivers (Rhoades & McFarland, 2000), and physical self-efficacy (Ryckman, Robbins, Thornton, Gold, & Kuehnel, 1985). Challenges to the validity of the POI are also notable. Some articles have cited its reliability as dubious at best (Ray, 1984; Weiss, 1987) and have suggested it is only relevant with clinical populations (Hattie, 1986). Perhaps because of such claims, use of the POI, along with other measures of self-actualization, have fallen out of favor.

The theories of self-actualization, however, live on in current research. In academics and in the workplace, there is a great deal of interest in determining the intrinsic factors that govern motivation to excel and persist (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kenrick, Griskevicious, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010). Maslow's original hierarchy of needs (1943) , in particular is still commonplace. The original theory holds that self-actualization is a function of meeting one's lower level, instinctual needs and one's drives to belong and affiliate in order to access higher order needs such as truth, justice, and transcendence. Maslow (1971) later called these high tier needs being values, or *B-values*, which many people never achieve. Individuals who do manage to achieve them are widely recognized as creative, innovative, and effective. Maslow's theory was and continues to be widely criticized for its lack of empirical support (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Newer theories continue to draw from his ideas, however (e.g., Heylighen, 1992; Kenrick et al., 2010).

Researchers have had great difficulty identifying and measuring self-actualization construct. They seem to agree that it is a highly engaged state where one is intrinsically enabled to perform well and persist, and seems to be devoid of negativity. Many theorists have suggested specific ways to unlock this state, such as embracing lost parts of the self, remodeling how one experiences the world, and paying attention to what needs he/she is meeting and ignoring. These suggestions occur in the absence of substantial empirical evidence, however. Thus, the relationship of actualization to EA is speculative, although logically EA would be contained within self-actualization. EA, which in theory deals with accepting existential conditions of the world and readjusting to challenges to bring about amelioration, would be aptly described as an

attempt to realize one's deeper potentials and become all that one can be, rather than becoming entrenched in negativity, helplessness, and stagnation.

Social Psychological Approaches to Existentialism and Meaning. In recent years, interest in existential psychology has been primarily carried by social psychological research, which often deals with how people construct and enact meaning to navigate and function in the everyday world. This area of research has sought to determine the primary functions that our meanings serve, but also implies that meaninglessness is a highly undesirable condition.

Meaning, a nebulous term, evades proper definition in the literature (Battista & Almond, 1973), but for the sake of offering a clarifying guide, it typically refers to some mental configuration people use to understand relationships between objects, events, and relationships (Baumeister, 1991). It is known to be important in stressful life events and in instances where it is challenged, disrupted, or violated, and so meaning-making is vitally important (for an integrative review, see Park, 2010; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Many works reviewed in Park (*ibid*) converge on a set of points about meaning making. People possess globally-orienting sets of meanings, which are subject to review and change when confronted with situational stimuli disconfirming the global-level meaning. The threat of disconfirmation of one's life meanings causes some degree of distress, which initiates a process of exploring alternatives and expanding current meanings to adjust. Finally, if readjustment is successful, a person is better able to handle the distressing event. In sum, people can learn to accommodate and adjust to existential crises, like those described in Yalom (1980), and find renewed sense of meaningfulness and ameliorated distress. One major implication of readjustment is that people's

life meanings are always in revision, even if they remain sensibly constant, and that the most crucial time in meaning development is at the level of crisis.

Much research on personal meaning in existential psychology has emerged out of the Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). In this line of work, Greenberg and colleagues have repeatedly tested the mortality salience hypothesis (MS), that people experience fearfulness at the prospect of their ultimate demise, but since the culture provides a belief system that defies mortality, people often will come to align themselves more strongly with the sociocultural values they or their in-group holds strongly. Further, this appears to be a robust phenomenon confirmed across many studies, which has led to the TMT to become the dominant theory in this area (see review by Greenberg, Solomon, & Arndt, 2008). The theory tends to depict a broad, general reaction to mortality, the inevitability of death. To explain differences in individuals' response to death anxiety, authors have often looked to the presence of greater self-esteem (Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & McGregor, 1997; Hayes, Schimel, & Williams, 2008), although more recently, researchers have considered the notion of an *existing self* which becomes primed and makes it possible to experience threats of an existential nature (Arndt, Cook, & Routledge, 2004; van Tilburg & Igou, 2011), although no research could be located that tests this idea.

The TMT is not the only social psychological theory to examine the ways people deal with existentially-themed questions. Another recent development has been the Meaning Maintenance Model (MMM; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), which holds that humans are powerfully motivated to create and maintain life meaning so they can meet their needs to esteem

the self, resolve ambiguous situations, and affiliate with other individuals or groups. In response to being confronted with meaninglessness, uncertainty, or anomalous situations individuals tend to respond in ways that suggest a search for or revision of meaning (for a review, see Proulx, & Heine, 2007). Recent work has shown that people are reactive against meaninglessness even at an automatic level of processes, below what is considered conscious awareness in subliminal priming presentations (Van Tongeren & Green, 2010). The MMM also accounts for subjectivity in individuals' meaning, and according to Tullet, Teper, and Inzlicht (2011), people might enact different ameliorative strategies in the face of threatened meaning, depending on how they mentally represent threats. For instance, meaning threats construed in concrete terms (e.g., a negative comment about a prideful person's physical appearance) might lead more readily to a person seeking out a direct means to remove the threat (e.g., plastic surgery), whereas threats construed in abstract terms (e.g., possibility that an aging man might be perceived as sexually unattractive) might be dealt with more indirectly (e.g., buying an expensive sports car). It is not known whether one strategy is more effective than the other at restoring meaning, but it is notable that there is variability in strategies. The MMM merely describes a compensatory tendency to bolster one's life meaning in other areas when meaning in one area is threatened.

One's personal readjustments to existential difficulties might be very important to consider, and there is likely to be variability in individuals' method of removing the condition of meaninglessness. This *fluid compensation* (Proulx & Heine, 2007) of personal meaning is fairly compatible with what the existential theorists would have suggested in terms of a "will to meaning" (Frankl, 1962), that people must retain meaningfulness in their lives, and they will

draw upon numerous strategies to remove threats to meaning, whether symbolically or actually.

Social psychological research has advanced our understandings of how people process existentially-relevant threats. People might be quite sensitive and reactive to these threats, and tend to align more strongly with core values to assuage their anxiety or reduce uncertainty (van den Bos, 2009). Meaning making literature tells us that humans are attuned to sensing meaning in general, and they attempt to revise meaning for themselves, when needed. An individual difference like EA would describe the likelihood of a person managing meaning effectively. In a meaning-challenging situation, one has the opportunity to liberally revise his/her life meanings to assuage threats, but not all are equally willing to make such revisions.

Chapter 3: On the Character of Existential-ness

Evidently, meaning making attempts can be quite common, and they often arise when we face turmoil. However, people are not equally likely to seek out, process, or resolve existential questions. While it might be the case that many puzzle over and try to make sense of their predicaments following highly stressful situations, such as an accident, a bereavement of a spouse or a child, or a cancer diagnosis, it is sometimes surprisingly often that individuals report not being able to make sense of or make meaning from such encounters (Park, 2010). Some individuals simply appear more ready to take on and deal with these issues as they arise, suggesting that there might be important individual differences at work.

Indeed, many researchers over the decades have found compelling evidence for reliable existentially-relevant individual differences, and there are many existentially-relevant psychometric instruments available that are purported to measure them. Self-actualization is one such variable, and it has been studied extensively. Adapted to a meaning-making perspective, self-actualization is a state that occurs when a person has constructed a meaning set that views the self as capable of meeting all its potential, but accepting of its limits, and resistant to artificial, external governance (as by others or institutions). This conceptualization entails a sense of personal efficacy and an authentic identity in the existential person. It also implies an internalized locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Perhaps the actualized individual is better equipped with meaning readjustment strategies in the face of threats.

The literature is also replete with measures assessing the extent to which persons have a sense of life purpose, presence of life meaning, and search for life meaning, constructs which

might equate to better coping or readjustment in the face of an existential challenge. The sheer quantity of these instruments has led to a somewhat fragmented picture of meaningfulness, however. When individuals express greater meaning in life (defined either as possession of meaning or ongoing search for meaning), they tend to have less fear, sadness, and depression (Steger et al., 2006), have more integrated personalities (Florian & Snowden, 1989), are found more interpersonally desirable as friends and conversation partners, especially when of moderate or lower physical attractiveness (Stillman, Lambert, Fincham, & Baumeister, 2011), have greater levels of empathy and lower dogmatism (Van Pachterbeke, Keller, & Saroglou, 2012), are more intrinsically religious and attend services weekly (Francis & Hills, 2008), have greater social support networks and better marital adjustment (Scheier et al., 2006), enjoy work more (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000), and be happier and less depressed (Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993; Längle, Orgler, & Kundi, 2003; Scheier et al., 2006). Expressing less meaning in life has been found to correlate with need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973), as well as suicidal ideation and substance abuse (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986). Of course, agreement has not been reached among researchers how best to conceptualize the nature of meaning or its primary functions, but findings all seem to suggest that having a purpose, need for, or possession of meaning is associated with better general well-being.

The extant measures of meaningfulness need to be improved upon, however. One notable limitation of present measures is that they have not adequately incorporated the central aspects of existential meaning. Past measures are oriented toward self-beliefs or attitudes about meaning in life and tend to be detached from the experience of personal distress and negative life

events, which the early existentialists and recent work suggest serves as the foundation for meaning making. Perhaps this is in part due to the increase in negatively-connoted items' covariance with trait neuroticism (Clark & Watson, 1995). However, in order to arrive at a trait level understanding of existential-ness that expands upon meaning, actualization, and purpose measures, a tool must be developed that deals with the attainment of meaning, as well as the revision and application of meaning, for which meaning-challenging and negative life conditions are a catalyst.

Existentialism and authenticity could function jointly to bring about effective meaning management. Existentialism is a stance of that values the acceptance of life challenges, and choosing a configuration of meanings that will lead to effective readjustment, while authenticity deals with persisting and diligently enacting this stance, especially in the face of adversity. Although there is overlap in these domains, there are important distinctions between the two. It could be the case that one consistently subscribes to existential thought in principle but fails to put it into practice (inauthentic; e.g., a philosophical dilettante), or that a person is quite authentic about being non-affiliated with existential values (non-existential; a religious absolutist). A combined form, existential authenticity, would describe someone who is committed to existential values in principle and practice, in order that he or she can better deal with real-life challenges to meaning.

Chapter 4: A Proposal for Existential Authenticity

A number of overlapping variables have been introduced, as well as discussed in terms of where their overlap is imperfect. Some constructs deal more readily with one's subjective meanings as they relate to the coping process, such as optimism, posttraumatic growth, and to some extent, authenticity. However, hardy individuals, those high in self-efficacy, and internals (locus of control) might manage crises well, but these constructs do not primarily focus on coping or arriving at overarching subjective meaning, but rather attempts to thrive and succeed. Hardiness, self-efficacy, and locus of control appear to deal more with persistence described as having constructive self beliefs, without comment as to the nature of such beliefs. The meaning-making literature asserts that having life meaning, purpose, or being engaged in living translates to better well-being. (This is not unlike the other constructs reviewed in this paper, and it should become apparent that a similar set of benefits accompanies the exemplars of each construct, be it an optimist, or someone particularly high in hardiness, or someone who effectively-manages mortality salience, or a fully self-actualized individual.)

The meaning-making literature is the first body of work that systematically studies existential concerns, specifically death and meaninglessness, but it is by no means complete. It is suggested that one should revise his/her meaning or subdue anxiety about death in order to bring about well-being, but studies have not examined whether individual differences play a significant role in this area. For example, some more pragmatic individuals might be particularly flexible in terms of being willing to revise their deeper life meanings to achieve well-being or a state of thriving. What of those who are more dogmatic, less willing to make broad-spanning

changes to life meaning, but still possess life meaning? While hardiness, optimism, and other constructs may inform the answer to such a question, self-actualization literature also makes a clear statement as to how one's beliefs should be structured to promote well-being, though but there is relatively scant empirical literature to back its claims.

Existential authenticity provides an alternative perspective. First, EA deals exclusively with the coping process. Indeed, there would be no basis for understanding existential authenticity in the absence of challenges to health, community, freedom, and meaning (Yalom, 1980). EA implies a commitment to resolve one's subjective life meanings or adjusting to life challenges in such a way as to make a pressing situation better. EA is not tied primarily to any one coping method, such as problem- or emotion-focused coping (Antonovsky, 1979), but is broader in scope and more pragmatically open to methods that stem from an individual's situation, history, and individual preferences—a person can be high in EA whether he/she learns to dance in the rain or simply buys an umbrella. Additionally, EA deals with persisting and arriving at life meanings conducive to life engagement and satisfaction. An existentially authentic person should be generally more involved in the pursuits that matter most to him/her, and should logically derive greater pleasure from his/her situation.

Logically, existential authenticity meets the criteria of a personality trait (as described in McAdams, 1996), although there has been no research to date that examines this possibility. One’s existential authenticity would be situationally invariant, in that individuals who might be characterized as existentially authentic often stay that way. An existentially authentic person would not value personal free choice in one context, but then claim that a superior has ultimate

authority in another. He/She would not subscribe to the idea that one is responsible for his/her own happiness and decide to pursue a dream career, but abandon the search when prospects looked dim. Additionally, over the lifespan, it is supposed that individuals' levels of existential authenticity endure, as opposed to degrading or fluctuating widely. One who is good at supplying life meaning should remain adept throughout life, whereas those who lack such capacity tend to remain in an existential poverty.

Given the research that has been reviewed thus far, it probable that that there is between-persons variability in the extent to which individuals understand, think about, and act upon existential values, and that this variability can be effectively measured with a new trait-level construct, existential authenticity. Therefore, considering the perspectives presented, it is appropriate at this point to propose a system of measurement for existential authenticity and take initial steps toward its validation.

Chapter 5: Existential Authenticity—A Construct Definition

Perhaps discouragingly often, existential topics are dismissed as wishy-washy, touchy-feely, and ultimately impractical (Halling, 1995; Miars, 2002). However, they are actually of great consequence. Existential philosophers for decades have promoted the value of choice, and the importance of living authentically. More recently, though, researchers have begun to investigate the ways that existential concerns permeate modern life, such as in feelings of solitude and aloneness (Dvir, Weiner, & Kupermintz, 2012), the distress of major illness (Kissane, 2012), coping with retirement (Osborne, 2012), and reacting to traumatic circumstances like combat (Grubbs, 2012). The attendant literature contains increasingly more reference to individuals' life meanings and coping with challenging situations across a variety of scenarios.

Oddly, however, although existential topics are important now as much as ever, most contemporary life pursuits (e.g., work, family life, academics, job recruitment) still do not involve an assessment of one's existential well-being at any step of the process. It is unknown why this is the case. It could be that people believe that subjective existential concerns are so idiosyncratic that such variables cannot be subjected to empirical inquiry. All the same, the literature alludes to many important aspects of existential well-being that can be accurately assessed with good reliability. However, measurement schemes are far from perfect and it remains the case that many extant scales measuring these constructs do not adequately address the content area. For example, scales measuring meaning in life currently largely ignore the influence of life challenges on meaning in life, even though theory suggests that meaning in life

becomes most salient when it is challenged (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). Moreover, there are surprisingly few meaningfulness measures that take into account the *search* for meaning, in addition to its presence (Steger et al., 2006). Many scales at an item level also lack linguistic precision, confounding the items with influences from other constructs. For instance, it has been suggested that including items with negatively emotional content will cause the items to covary with neuroticism (Watson & Clark, 1995). Several past measures of meaning in life are vulnerable to affective confounds, including the widely used Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Moholick, 1964), as well as the Life Regard Index (Battista & Almond, 1973). Better measurement is needed.

Accordingly, the current study developed a scale to measure existential authenticity, assess its reliability, and examine its construct validity. Regarding the latter, it must be determined if the construct meaningfully relates to a pattern of expected results as could be hypothesized from the extant literature (Fiske, 2002). To this end, the empirical relationships between existential authenticity and logically related constructs and criteria were assessed.

Several preliminary questions must be addressed concerning the EA construct. First, how would existentialism contribute something novel that other meaning-related constructs are missing? That is, before delving into what an EA scale shares with other well-established characteristics like self-efficacy and locus of control, I first addressed the question of how it uniquely addresses the issue of life meaning. EA is defined as a tendency to accept one's human condition as challenging, to actively and liberally cope with, reframe, or readjust to circumstantial demands in a way that ameliorates one's situation. It provides a more

comprehensive picture of dealing with and reacting to life challenges than what meaning in life, life engagement, or mere adherence to existential values describe alone. Having a degree of meaning in life might say relatively little about how a person copes, unless it is explicitly stated in that meaning. A person may say "I have a clear sense of purpose in my life"—which is an indicator of having a meaningful existence (Steger et al., 2006)—but this personally held meaning might not be effective in actively coping with a poor economic or social situation, for instance. Simply having meaning present does not address what a person does to grapple with those realities or try to make them better. Life engagement, on the other hand, is a construct that describes purposeful living, but also one's participation in personally valued activities. Engagement adds another level to meaningfulness, but still does not take meaning management to the applied level of a specifically challenging situation. Unless one's valued activities—those pursuits which add to one's purposefulness—explicitly emerge in response to a life challenge, little can be known about how engagement improves one's life experience. Additionally, adherence to existential values does not necessarily imply active meaning management. Although high identification with existentialism might signify that a person is mentally cognizant of an idealistic landscape that could govern a meaningful life, it is quite different to apply it actively, and in the face of actual life challenges.

In the preparation of the current review, no other personality constructs were encountered that assess both meaning in life and the acceptance of a challenging world. The existentialists were clear: this world is harsh, and attempting to escape that reality brings only more problems. Furthermore, previous research has often separately examined the search for life meaning and the

presence of life meaning (Steger et al., 2006), whereas EA accounts for both. However, because meaning management is linked to addressing pressing challenges in the world, if one possesses high levels of EA, it can be inferred that he/she does not only possess or search for meaning in life, but is actively applying it as well.

Additionally, one ultimate theoretical outcome of EA is of significant import. Simply put, if a person is capable of accepting life's challenges and dealing with them in the interest of making things better, that person should be more satisfied with life overall. Called an overarching or ultimate criterion of human experience (Andrews, 1974), life satisfaction captures how satisfied a person is with his or her social contacts, money, health, and occupation, *inter alia*.

Pilot Study and Development of Initial Existential Authenticity Items

A pilot study using a 26-item pool of questionnaire items measuring individuals' existential leanings was administered in late 2010 to 60 individuals from the community and from the university (both undergraduates and graduates). This scale was informed by the existential thought of Frankl, May, Kierkegaard, and Sartre. Items were devised by considering the markers in contemporary life that could indicate a existential belief being put into action. For instance, strong agreement with the item "Learning about the world often fills me with a sense of fulfillment" might indicate a choice to appreciate the world. "People who are very different from me can still enhance my understanding of life" could allude to a tendency not to limit sources of meaning in one's life. Together, these indicants signal readiness to choose existentially adaptive

stances in life. Acceptable internal reliability was obtained for an 8-item subset of the overall pool (alpha .84), but ultimately most of the items were jettisoned due to poor factor loadings, lack of resemblance to the intended theoretical construct, and conceptual overlap with larger constructs, such as openness to new experience and emotional stability. Afterward, new items were devised in the interest of measuring a refined construct, Existential Authenticity (EA), or the extent to which an individual possesses, incorporates, and supplies meaning in life in order to deal with life's challenges.

As in the pilot, items were designed to observe the tenets of existential philosophers, and take into account that frustrations and distress can serve as a potent catalyst for meaning management. For instance, the item "I believe that whenever suffering occurs in my life, it can be reduced if I am persistent and don't give up," and others were derived from the axiom of Nietzsche that an individual with a why can bear almost any how, as well as his notion of the "superhuman" (originally, Übermensch; Nietzsche, 1883/2005) who by grit and will to overcome adversity comes to effect a better world for himself/herself. The item "At critical points in my life, I have found that the best course for me to take is not one based on the values of other people, but on one based on my own personal values" and others emerged from the work of Camus and Sartre, who stressed personal responsibility and independence. The item "On the whole, I believe in adapting to the conditions of the present rather than focusing on the way things used to work in days gone by" is drawn from Frankl's account of concentration camp experiences (1962). A high total score is hypothesized to correspond to individuals who are aware of and accepting of life's boundary conditions, but who are capable of acting in ways that

allow them to experience their desires and enjoy greater well-being. A lower total score on these items is presumed to be a function of existential *in*authenticity, descriptive of individuals who prefer to deny world conditions such as suffering or meaninglessness, and who are less likely to perform the work necessary to arrive at readjustment, re-interpretation of circumstances, or effective coping.

Scale items were measured in a Likert-type format, where endorsing 1 indicates total disagreement with a statement, whereas 5 indicates total agreement. Most of the items were developed using the following conceptual strategy: 1) a hypothetical challenging or negative condition is proposed, followed by 2) a personal act of resilience, reinterpretation, or readjustment, and 3) a final amelioration of the situation or arrival at a state of well-being. The items were devised such that they should not unduly discriminate between adults in the general population. The initial form of the inventory was relatively brief and included 20 items, presented in Table 1 and in Appendix C.

Based on what is known from the literature, the following hypotheses were advanced:

Hypothesis 1: The Existential Authenticity Scale should demonstrate acceptable internal consistency.

Hypothesis 2: In this preliminary investigation, EA should show convergent validity with extant measures of presence and search for meaning in life, time spent in personally meaningful activities, and existential attitudes.

2a: EA should correlate positively with scores on the Life Engagement Test (Scheier et al., 2006). A person high in EA would be expected to spend

more time in pursuits that he/she deems personally meaningful, especially in the face of challenges. Additionally, a person high in EA would likely report greater purposefulness in life.

2b: EA should correlate positively with scores on the Meaning in Life Test (Steger et al., 2006). People who are existentially authentic should report higher meaningfulness in life as well as greater willingness to search for meaning. EA is not about settling with a singular set of meanings forever, it implies flexibility and an adapting attitude, the intent to deal with life challenges with that which is found personally meaningful.

2c: EA should correlate positively with the Existentialism subscale of the Ross Educational Philosophical Inventory (Ziomek, Smith, & Menne, 1976). Because EA was originally a concept derived from existential writings, and because each item of the EA scale reflects one or more key tenets of existentialism, it should be the case that EA has overlap with a scale that is more specialized for measuring existential attitudes.

Method

Participants

Participants included 103 undergraduate students from an introductory psychology course, who received course credit for participation. Participants were required to be 18 years or older in order to participate, but there were no exclusionary criteria based on race, religion, or gender.

Procedure

The study was conducted as an online questionnaire. Participants logged in and were presented an informed consent agreement (Appendix A). Once informed consent was obtained, participants filled out the measures of the study, and were thanked and dismissed.

Measures

Participants were prompted to fill out their age range and gender.

Life Engagement Test. The LET is a test of one's purpose in life and efforts made to involve oneself in personally valued activities, measured with six items measuring personal agreement on a Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"). Across eight samples, the scale has shown acceptable (.72) to good (.87) reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity (Scheier et al. 2006). Reliability in the current sample was .85. Scale items are presented in Appendix D.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire. This 10-item measure of 1) the presence of and 2) search for meaning in life. It is measured on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 ("absolutely untrue") to 7 ("absolutely true"). Presence and search factors have stood separate in previous literature and have good reliability estimates (.87, search; .82, presence). The scale has shown good convergent and discriminant validity in past literature (Steger et al. 2006). In the current sample, alpha was recorded at .91 for the presence scale, and .89 for the search scale. Items are presented in Appendix E.

Ross Educational Philosophical Inventory. The REPI has been used in educational backgrounds to gauge individual's belief in various philosophical and epistemological positions

(Ross, 1970). The Existence subscale of this inventory was used, specifically, to gauge participants' stance on existential values, such as the value of choices, commitment, and action. The internal consistency of the Existentialism items is at the lower limits of acceptability in the original sample (.68), and was slightly lower in the current sample (.64), possibly due to the instrument's unusual item wordings. Items are presented in Appendix F.

Life satisfaction. Resource Associate's nine-item life satisfaction scale was employed to gauge the pleasure individuals derive from all aspects of living (e.g., finances, social life, future prospects). The scale is endorsed on a five point Likert scale, from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The scale has been used in past proprietary research. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78. See Appendix G for items.

Results

Reliability analyses were conducted on the total 20 items of the EAS. Cronbach's alpha for the original items was .79. As recommended by Edwards (1970), items with low corrected item-total correlations (below .30) were eliminated to increase the overall alpha of the scale. A summary of the item-total correlations as well as the valid percent of responses (strongly disagree to strongly agree) are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Examination of the corrected inter-item correlations suggests that several items should be dropped including Items 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17. Elimination of these items accordingly raised the scale's alpha to .81, a marginal increase, but enough to reach the acceptable range for such coefficients. Thus, the first hypothesis was supported. The revised scale's item-total correlations are presented in Table 4.

In review, perhaps Items 8 and 13 (“I agree with the proverb, 'Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars'” and “I don’t think people can lead meaningful lives until they take responsibility for their actions”) were too abstract, compared to other items. Item 12 (“I strongly believe in the importance of living in the here-and-now, rather than just working toward a future happiness”) likely was confusing in that many participants would value working towards future goals. Item 11 (“While some hardships in life cannot be changed, I strive to disregard them and focus on things I can change to improve my quality of life”) might have called to mind instances where people truly wish to focus on changing their hardships, rather than disregarding them. Additionally, Items 16 (“Sometimes the only way to make a valid personal choice is to go against the wishes of other people”) and 17 (“At critical points in my life, I have found that the best course for me to take is not one based on the values of other people, but on one based on my own personal values”) might have tested participants' sense of individual autonomy more than existential authenticity. Participants might be thinking of cases where they believe they should accept the influence of others.

Correlations with other constructs. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of the study measures. As expected, the EAS correlated significantly and positively with both the meaning in life as well as the existentialism scale, as demonstrated by moderate positive correlation with the Life Engagement Test ($r = .54$, $p < .01$), a positive correlation with the Meaning in Life Questionnaire ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), and a positive correlation with the Existentialism subscale of the REPI ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). Importantly, neither life engagement ($r = .13$, $p = .20$) nor meaning in life ($r = .03$, $p = .74$) correlated with the Existentialism (REPI)

measure, indicating an association unique to the EAS. Additionally, EA was positively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). Thus, the EAS is explaining part of the variance that is overlapping between existentialism and the two meaning management constructs. All correlations are presented in Table 6.

General Discussion

The initial EA scale underwent several revisions in the course of this study. Pared down from a pool of 20 items, the final 14-item EA scale represent a core construct that deals with a dispositional tendency to accept that the world is challenging, as well as a tendency to meet those challenges with resilience and adaptive coping. Additionally, there is some initial evidence provided by this study that EA stands apart from other measures of meaningfulness and existentialism. The pattern of correlations was such that EA was related to meaning in life and existential beliefs, as well as life engagement and life satisfaction, whereas the metrics for meaning in life and life engagement were unrelated to existential beliefs. Additionally, existential beliefs are unrelated to life satisfaction, engagement, and meaning in life. It can be said, then, that EA straddles the space between simply possessing existential beliefs, or subscribing to an existential philosophy and having meaning in life and being engaged in living. All of this is in line with what is intended by the definition of EA: to be authentic, but in an existentially themed way, whereby existential principles guide one's actions and lead to life satisfaction.

While the obtained correlations between EA and life engagement was fairly high, they

only share about 29% common variance and are conceptually dissimilar in important ways. Life engagement items describe one's general attitudes about having valued activities and a meaningful life. It is unknown how highly engaged individuals might act in a time of crisis or turmoil, and their access to valued activities is compromised or meaning in life is threatened. EA, on the other hand, is understood as a personality construct that is explicitly applicable to those conditions. That is, in times of challenge, a person remains aware of his/her ability to persist, rethink the situation, and even enact new life meanings as needed. One interpretation of the moderately high EA-engagement correlation is that that when one is very existentially authentic, he/she is necessarily more engaged in living. In this scenario, it makes more sense to treat life engagement as a separate outcome variable rather than as a predictor of life satisfaction as the current study implies. Indeed, life satisfaction, while a promising outcome, does not specifically address questions of meaningfulness, per se, and life engagement would be an important construct for informing the current discussion of EA.

To build upon this study, EA should be correlated with well-established constructs that deal less explicitly with meaning management and existentialism. Additionally, it should be determined whether EA contributes any unique variance in the prediction of life satisfaction or life engagement, or if these outcomes are better predicted by other variables. EA should also be studied outside a college student population to increase the external validity of scale results, and begin to examine whether EA is a stable trait across the lifespan or if it might change due to maturation.

Chapter 6: Expansion Study

The EAS has shown some preliminary convergent and divergent validity with other measures concerned with meaning in life and existentialism. The next step for demonstrating the construct validity of the EAS involves correlating it with other logically-related measures. While it is essential to know that EA is related to how meaningful one perceives life to be, as well as whether one derives meaning from valued activities and subscribes to an existential philosophical worldview, it tells us only a limited empirical picture of the structure of EA. Several questions are left unanswered. How flexibly does an individual who is high in EA apply existential values to his/her life? In other words, it would be informative to see whether a high EA individual is necessarily a rigid, hard-line existentialist (high existentiality), or if the he/she tend to choose what existential values to enact (low existentiality). EA is based on existential tenets, so it would be expected that stronger existential beliefs would be associated with EA. It is also theorized that a person who is high in EA believes in his/her ability to adapt and persist through hardship. Would it follow that he/she tends to believe in his/her efficacy in general? Conceptually, EA involves a self-reflective capacity to control one's own attitude and see oneself as equal to the hardships with which he/she is presented, even if those challenges are novel or severe. Further, when an individual encounters hardship, which is a more central feature of EA: internalized or externalized locus of control? Internalized locus shares with EA a tendency to interpret the self as an agent, rather than circumstance or influences beyond control; thus, it should be the case that EA is a characteristic associated with an internalized locus. These three variables are proposed for inclusion in the nomological network of EA.

Additionally, it is important to investigate how EA maps out on a global-level scheme of personality. Several speculations were made in the literature review as to how EA might relate to the traits of the Big Five model, but given that there is scant evidence to base true hypotheses upon, investigation must be considered exploratory.

The criterion related validity of the EA is also of interest. As in the previous study, individuals higher in EA are expected to be more satisfied with their lives in general. Additionally, they should appear more engaged in their lives, devoting time to activities that are valued and finding their activities personally meaningful. Given the relevant literature on existentialism and meaning making, it is expected that the EA scale should demonstrate incremental validity in the prediction of life satisfaction and life engagement over and above other measures of existential attitude and meaning in life, such as the POI Existentiality subscale and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. Thus, simply agreeing with existential tenets might make a person more satisfied with life or engaged in living, and so might simply having a system of meaning in life; however, neither of these variables fully account for EA, which implies resilience and flexibility.

Proceeding with what is known from the literature, the following hypotheses and research questions were advanced:

Hypothesis 1: EA will be positively correlated with self-efficacy. Existential theorists have held that efficacious, can-do attitudes often come along with the actualizing mindset. Individuals high in EA would necessarily be cognizant of things they could do to

address life challenges and improve their situations, whereas low EA individuals might simply crumble under challenging situations or seek escape from them.

Hypothesis 2: EA will also positively correlated with internalized locus of control, since EA is based on the existential notions that one must accept responsibility for his/her own choices rather than allowing artificial external forces to rule. EA is a construct in which the high pole implies person-centered agency, rather than the situation.

Hypothesis 3: EA should be positively associated with scores on the Existentiality subscale of the POI. This makes sense, because the Existentiality scale and the EA scale have in common that they measure the application of existential values.

Hypothesis 4: EA should be positively correlated with age. At first glance, this might appear contrary to the claim that EA is a personality trait, and should be stable across the lifespan. It also seems to conflict with similar research on meaning in life, where it has been found that young and elderly individuals do not differ (Van Ranst and Marcoen, 1997). However, since EA is theorized to be expressed alongside life challenges, it is hypothesized that that younger individuals, simply by having fewer experiences with challenging situations than older individuals, do not necessarily exhibit their "true" dispositional level of EA. Thus, younger individuals might, if followed, come to exhibit higher levels of EA as they become older.

Hypothesis 5: EA should show incremental validity over and above the other existentially-

relevant constructs (internalized locus of control, general self-efficacy, meaning in life, and existentiality) in the prediction of A) life satisfaction and B) life engagement on the LET. Theoretically, EA involves components that lead to life engagement and satisfaction, which are not accounted for in meaning in life, locus of control, self-efficacy, or existentiality. These components include flexibility and willful adaptation, which make it possible for a person to mitigate challenging circumstances and better one's situation. A person high in EA can derive more satisfaction from a situation, but also find more to appreciate in it, leading to life engagement.

Additionally, as an initial exploratory study, I examined how EA relates to global personality traits of the Big Five (conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and extraversion; De Raad, 2000).

Methods

Participants

A total of 200 participants were recruited for this study. No exclusionary criteria were used regarding race, gender, or religion. Participants were required to be 18 years old or older, however.

Procedure

Participants were collected online using Amazon's Mechanical Turk interface (http://www.mturk.com). Informed consent was given (Appendix B), and participants were

given a two-hour window to complete all the study's measures. No personally identifiable information was collected. MTurk screening options were used to remove the data of all participants who were determined to have sped through the survey, or who had an unacceptably site low approval rating (below 80% positive approval). Participants were given a small monetary reward for completing the survey packet, the level of which was made to compete with rates of other survey projects that could be chosen. At the end of the packet, participants were thanked and dismissed.

The validity of this approach has been challenged, but past research has indicated that the quality of data collected using this approach is comparable to data captured using in-person procedures (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

Methods

Participants filled out measures on gender, age, and highest attained education level. Again, this study utilized the Meaning in Life Questionnaire, as well as the life satisfaction scale and the Life Engagement Test—albeit this time, used as an outcome measure. Additionally, the scales below were administered.

Locus of Control. Rotter's (1966) 29-item Locus of Control inventory was used in the current study. It has been widely used in past research, and uses a forced-choice format to assess whether individuals perceive that they, themselves, are in control of life events (internalized locus) or else external forces assume control (externalized). Points were tallied for each "internal" response to a question, such that higher scores would represent a greater internalized orientation. Items of this scale are presented in Appendix H.

Self-Efficacy. The New Generalized Self-Efficacy scale (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001) was used to measure persons' estimates of their general ability to perform and succeed at tasks. This 8-item scale was chosen specifically due to its novelty, high reliability, and construct validity, relative to other self-efficacy scales (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). Answer format is Likert-type, with higher scores indicating greater self-efficacy. Cronbach's alpha was .90 in the current sample. See Appendix I.

Existentiality. Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory (1964) has been extensively used in the measurement of self-actualization, or a person's tendency to reach all deeper potentials. Part of this scale, the Existentiality scale, has to do with how rigidly a person applies the values of existentialism to his/her life. Like the Locus of Control inventory, answer format on the POI is forced-choice, with higher scores indicate more consistent application of existential values. Coefficient alpha was .68 in this sample.

Global personality. The Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) is a brief and a widely used measure of individuals' enduring, situationally invariant characteristics. In the current sample, the Cronbach's alphas for each subscale were as follows: .90 for Extraversion, .83 for Agreeableness, .86 for Conscientiousness, .90 for Neuroticism, and .85 for Openness. Appendix J contains items of the BFI.

Results

The reliability of the EA scale in the current sample was .87. Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations for all study measures.

Several notable significant positive bivariate correlations emerged from analyses. As expected, EA was strongly positively correlated with generalized self-efficacy ($r = .68$, $p < .01$). Additionally, EA was positively correlated with internalized locus of control ($r = .30$, $p < .01$). However, EA was unrelated to Existentiality on the POI ($r = -.07$, $p = .35$), nor was there evidence to support the hypothesis that EA is positively correlated with age ($r = -.04$, $p = .61$). Additionally, EA was, as in the previous study, found to be moderately positively associated with meaning in life ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), as well as life satisfaction ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) and life engagement ($r = .56$, $p < .01$). Contrary to this study's hypothesis, however, EA was unrelated to age ($r = -.04$, $p = .61$). Correlations are presented in Table 8.

To investigate potential incremental validity of EA over other existentially relevant constructs, two hierarchical regression models were tested. In each, Block 1 variables consisted of individuals' scores for Locus of control, NGSE, MLQ, and Existentiality, and EA scores were entered in Block 2.

The hypothesis that EA would uniquely predict over and above the other predictors was partially supported. The block of variables including meaning in life, existentiality, self-efficacy, and locus of control accounted for 28% of the total variance in life satisfaction. EA only accounted for 1% unique variance in life satisfaction ($p = .10$). Additionally, whereas the full model was significant ($F_{5, 192} = 14.88$, $p < .01$), EA failed to predict life satisfaction significantly when controlling for the other variables ($\beta = .20$, $p = .10$). On the other hand, generalized self-efficacy ($\beta = .46$, $p < .01$) was a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Existentiality ($\beta = .52$, $p = .09$), locus of control ($\beta = .29$, $p = .37$), and meaning in life ($\beta = .02$, $p = .70$) were non-

significant in the full model. See Table 9 for a summary of unstandardized betas, R, R^2, and R^2 changes.

The block of variables comprised of meaning in life, existentiality, self-efficacy, and locus of control accounted for 36% of the total variance in life engagement on the LET. In addition, EA contributed an extra 4% unique variance in life engagement ($p < .01$). The full model was significant ($F_{5, 192} = 23.67$, $p < .01$), and explained a total 40% of the variance in life engagement. Greater EA uniquely, significantly predicted greater life engagement ($\beta = .42$, $p < .01$), as did generalized self-efficacy ($\beta = .49$, $p < .01$), but not existentiality ($\beta = .29$, $p = .35$), locus of control ($\beta = .06$, $p = .87$), or meaning in life ($\beta = .08$, $p = .18$). Interestingly, meaning in life was significant in the first block, but not after EA was introduced, indicating that EA absorbed all of the variance explained by MLQ scores. See Table 10 for a summary of unstandardized betas, R, R^2, and R^2 changes.

Additionally, correlations between EA and traits of the Big Five model were examined. EA was moderately positively associated with Extraversion ($r = .42$, $p < .01$) and negatively associated with Neuroticism ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$). Moderate to weak positive associations were found between EA and Agreeableness ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), Conscientiousness ($r = .36$, $p < .01$), and Openness ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). These correlations are summarized in Table 11.

Chapter 7: General Discussion

This followup study found promising evidence for the validity of the EA scale as a potentially useful and non-redundant measure of existentially-themed resourcefulness and adaptability in the presence of challenging life situations.

In this study, which used a demographically broad internet sample, it was found that EA correlated positively with life satisfaction as well as life engagement. In support of two of the study's hypotheses, EA showed convergent validity with other measures, namely positive correlations with internalized locus of control, generalized self-efficacy. However, contrary to what was predicted, EA did not correlate with the Existentiality subscale of the POI, but this is assumed to be due to confusing test items in the Existentiality subscale, which led to poor reliability and lack of agreement with other related measures. Existentiality was uncorrelated with almost all measures, except for a weak negative correlation with the MLQ, whereas EA was significantly associated with all other measures, including an impressive positive association with generalized self-efficacy.

EA was unrelated to age of participants. This runs contrary to the maturational hypothesis, which would hold that younger participants would express lower EA, by way of not having experienced the same frequency or magnitude of life challenges as older individuals. To clarify, it is still theorized that EA is a personality trait that is constant across the lifespan, but it was investigated whether this trait is equally expressed over different units of the lifespan. Given that the internet sample ranged from 18 to over 60 years of age, it is unlikely that any range restriction occurred in participant age. Indeed, in response to the maturational hypothesis,

the null finding in the current data suggests that individuals 18 years and older are challenged enough in life to elicit EA characteristics and thus should express similar levels of EA.

Additionally, EA showed incremental validity over and above MLQ, NGSE, locus of control, and Existentiality in the prediction of life engagement but not life satisfaction. It could be that self-efficacy is conceptually more central than EA. However, an alternative interpretation could be that EA deals explicitly with challenging life situations, which could make many types of satisfaction less likely. A person in crisis might be quite dissatisfied, but as Frankl (1962) suggested, making meaning of suffering makes trials bearable and makes persistence possible. Perhaps this phenomenon that explains EA's overriding influence on life engagement and mediating effect on meaning in life. A person adaptively, flexibly confronts a life challenge in such a way that he/she finds enhanced meaning in life, and then becomes more engaged in living. The test of incremental validity indicates that EA spans across meaning in life, existentialism, efficacy, and internalized agency, and still more, providing evidence that EA is a non-redundant predictor of life engagement.

Interestingly, EA was significantly associated with all of the Big Five traits (positively with Conscientiousness, Openness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness, and negatively with Neuroticism). This points toward the potentially large nomothetic span and broad nomological network (Messick, 1989) for EA and suggests that it is not subsumable under any one of Big Five traits. Thus, it can be safely said that EA is not synonymous with emotional stability (low neuroticism) The pattern of correlations exhibited by EA is different than those exhibited by neuroticism, and additionally, the variance shared between EA and neuroticism is only 22%,

meaning 86% variance remains unshared.

Interpreting from the Big Five correlations obtained in this study, the high EA individual can be described as hard-working, enterprising, unconventional, friendly, outgoing, personable, and emotionally stable. These descriptors sound very much akin to those describing an "actualized/actualizing" person, discussed in Shostrom (1964) and earlier in this paper. This is expected, however, because EA is a component of the actualization process that expressly deals with individuals' responses to challenging life situations. When trouble looms, a high EA individual would not sink into hopelessness or blindly react out of habit, but instead would begin a deliberate evaluation process to identify possible courses of action and maintains enough ideological flexibility to enact an adaptive one.

However, this is a cause for concern for the low-scorers. Are they simply damned by disposition to lead meaningless, dreary lives? Hopefully not. Although this paper has exclusively considered EA to be a global level disposition, it is possible that EA possesses both state and trait qualities, much like the dual model of anxiety proposed by Spielberger (1985). Perhaps state-level EA represents a coachable, trainable orientation to be adaptable and ready to respond to life challenges. Precedent for "trainability" of such orientations has been explored with regard other constructs, such as optimism (Seligman, 1991).

Limitations and Future Directions

Both studies were cross-sectional, comprised of self-report measures. No social desirability scales were administered to control for the influence of participant posturing or

"faking good." Thus, it is a valid criticism that many of the scores obtained on the EAS were potentially confounded. Certainly, it might be expected that participants would feel psychological pressure not to appear as though their lives are meaningless and stagnant. Additionally, it would be desirable to study EA longitudinally, so that potential causal directions could be determined in relation to other variables, such as self-efficacy and meaning in life.

The current project was also limited with regard to the array of instruments to which the EA scale was compared. In some cases, this made sense. For instance, it would not have been feasible to study posttraumatic growth, as the sample collected was not a specialized trauma sample. However, it would behoove future studies to consider comparing the EA scale to scales of optimism and hardiness, benefit-finding, authenticity, sense of identity, and self-actualization, as well as alienation, loneliness, and anomie. The nomological borders of EA can still be mapped out further.

Additionally, it would be useful to include more objective outcomes in future studies. While useful, life satisfaction and life engagement are in a sense attitudinal self-reflection measures. EA could potentially be considered in studies predicting GPA, job performance, student retention, suicidality, and rehabilitation from addictions, drugs, and alcohol. Furthermore, studies might inspect the validity of observer report measures of EA, which could aid in mitigating social desirability constraints.

Conclusion

The current studies provide initial evidence for EA as a personality trait. This seems

paradoxical in a sense, because the existential tenets on which the EA scale was based hold that choices are more important than one's heritage, history, or disposition, and yet it is being proposed that it is precisely one's disposition that makes choices about one's existential well-being more likely. To clarify, however, it is not being said that disposition trumps choice; it is simply being suggested that there are individuals in the population who are more inclined to assume positions of adaptive flexibility in the face of existential trouble. All people still have the ability to make choices, but some are more willing than others to do what it takes to make challenging situations better, subjectively. Mitigation might involve reframing how a situation is thought about or rearranging one's priorities, which could be quite unsettling in the case that one's meanings are deeply ingrained, long-standing, or cherished. What makes it possible to adapt so liberally is an understanding that the world is inherently challenging, and existential difficulties are always looming—death, isolation, loss of freedom, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980).

As suggested in the current studies, living in a way that forgets or denies these conditions —in other words, low EA—is related to poorer life satisfaction, life engagement, less meaning in life, lower self-efficacy, and an externalized locus of control. This is consonant with the suggestions of the existential philosophers. Heidegger (1962) referred to the condition of forgetting death as an inauthentic mode of being; he was not alone in this line of thinking. Nietzsche (1967) presented a slave morality, and Kierkegaard (1983) an aesthetic personality that leads to despair. The existentialists also pointed out salient risks in becoming too absorbed in these aspects. When modern people overly rely on transient and hedonistic states to assuage the

anxiety of the world's challenges, it ultimately leads to a host of ills: disillusionment, hopelessness, fanaticism, escapism. Personality theory suggests that there are individuals who will gravitate in this direction by influence of their traits, but there are several contexts in which knowledge of EA could be potentially beneficial, including therapeutic and counseling contexts.

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Appendices

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for the items of the Existential Authenticity Scale*

	M	*SD*	*N*	Missing
Item 01	4.09	.81	103	0
Item 02	4.22	.67	102	1
Item 03	3.85	.9	103	0
Item 04	4.09	.79	103	0
Item 05	3.88	.81	102	1
Item 06	4.06	.79	101	2
Item 07	3.69	.93	102	1
Item 08	3.69	.95	103	0
Item 09	3.72	.78	102	1
Item 10	3.94	.86	103	0
Item 11	3.99	.75	103	0
Item 12	3.31	1.01	102	1
Item 13	3.8	.78	103	0
Item 14	4.15	.93	103	0
Item 15	3.96	.84	103	0
Item 16	3.88	.78	103	0
Item 17	4.08	.67	102	1
Item 18	4.04	.82	103	0
Item 19	3.77	.74	102	1
Item 20	3.78	.85	103	0

Table 2. *Original Existential Authenticity Scale items with valid percent of responses to each item (N=103)*

EA item	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%
1. I believe that whenever suffering occurs in my life, it can be reduced if I am persistent and don't give up.	1	4.9	7.8	57.3	29.1
2. Life is filled with danger and temptation, but I can still live in a way that is meaningful and productive for me.	0	2	7.8	56.9	33.3
3. Even though it is hard to find meaning in the world, I can usually find purpose for my life through careful thought and deliberate action.	1.9	6.8	16.5	53.4	21.4
4. Although there may be major obstacles and limitations facing me, I can always find ways to achieve happiness and fulfillment.	1	3.9	9.7	56.3	29.1
5. Even though there are times in my life when I encounter loneliness, I can always do something to improve my social situation.	1	6.9	12.7	61.8	17.6
6. Although life can seem pointless at times because the world is so fleeting and impermanent, I can still make personal choices that have lasting consequences enhance my quality of life.	1	4	9.9	58.4	26.7
7. Life can be a "tough row to hoe," but I am always able to see my circumstances in a positive light.	2	10.8	19.6	52	15.7
8. I agree with the proverb, "Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars."	1	11.7	24.3	43.7	19.4
9. I might have to put my deepest wishes on hold for long periods of time, but I can adopt a mental posture which enables me to stay the course.	0	7.8	24.5	55.9	11.8
10. Though some of my life goals seem far off and hard to reach, I tend to focus on things in the here–and-now so that one day I can attain them.	1	7.8	10.7	57.3	23.3
11. While some hardships in life cannot be changed, I strive to disregard them and focus on things I can change to improve my quality of life.	1	3.9	10.7	64.1	20.4

Table 2 (Continued)

EA item	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%
12. I strongly believe in the importance of living in the here-and-now, rather than just working toward a future happiness.	2	23.5	26.5	37.3	10.8
13. I don't think people can lead meaningful lives until they take responsibility for their actions.	0	7.8	19.4	58.3	14.6
14. In the end, only I can determine what's important in my life.	0	10.7	4.9	43.7	40.8
15. I believe it's more important to achieve purpose in life by creating my own meaning rather than adopting what others have found to be meaningful.	1	1.9	25.2	43.7	28.2
16. Sometimes the only way to make a valid personal choice is to go against the wishes of other people.	0	6.8	16.5	58.3	18.4
17. At critical points in my life, I have found that the best course for me to take is not one based on the values of other people, but on one based on my own personal values.	0	2	12.7	60.8	24.5
18. Even if terrible things were to happen to me, I would ultimately still be responsible for what I chose to do with my life.	0	6.8	10.7	54.4	28.2
19. Often, I find that it is only by making difficult choices that I can resolve uncertainty and take a meaningful course of action.	0	6.9	20.6	60.8	11.8
20. On the whole, I believe in adapting to the conditions of the present rather than focusing on the way things used to work in days gone by.	1	7.8	20.4	54.4	16.5

Table 3. *Original item-total statistics for the Existential Authenticity Scale*

EA item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	.431	.781
2	.323	.787
3	.499	.776
4	.514	.776
5	.421	.781
6	.516	.776
7	.437	.780
8	.277	.791
9	.408	.782
10	.374	.784
11	.296	.789
12	.195	.797
13	.159	.796
14	.389	.783
15	.383	.784
16	.085	.800
17	.286	.789
18	.400	.783
19	.418	.782
20	.373	.784

Table 4. *Revised item-total statistics for the Existential Authenticity Scale*

EA Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	.498	.788
2	.313	.801
3	.532	.784
4	.613	.779
5	.508	.787
6	.555	.784
7	.491	.788
9	.406	.795
10	.317	.802
14	.354	.800
15	.300	.803
18	.337	.800
19	.334	.800
20	.430	.793

Table 5. *Descriptive statistics for variables in Study 1*

	M	*SD*	*N*
Existential Authenticity	3.93	.44	97
Life Engagement	3.83	.7	101
Meaning in Life	4.9	.81	101
Existentialism	3.72	.45	101
Life Engagement	3.83	.7	101
Life Satisfaction	3.47	.64	100

Table 6. *Intercorrelations of Existential Authenticity, meaning management constructs, and existential beliefs in Study 1*

	Existential Authenticity	Meaning in Life Questionnaire	Existentialism subscale (REPI)	Life Engagement	Life Satisfaction
Existential Authenticity	1	.34**	.33**	.54**	.34**
Meaning in Life Questionnaire	.34**	1	.03	.41**	.25*
Existentialism subscale (REPI)	.33**	.03	1	.13	.05
Life Engagement	.54**	.41**	.13	1	.50**
Life Satisfaction	.34**	.25*	.05	.50**	1

$N = 95$ for EA, 101 for all other measures

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Table 7. *Descriptive statistics for measured variables in Study 2*

	M	*SD*	*N*
EA	3.89	.52	185
Locus of Control	.4	.15	200
MLQ	4.7	.91	200
NGSE	3.92	.62	200
Existentiality (POI)	.57	.15	200
Life engagement	3.78	.8	200
Life satisfaction	3.32	.72	200
Extraversion	2.94	.9	200
Agreeableness	3.7	.65	200
Conscientiousness	3.76	.67	200
Neuroticism	2.87	.88	200
Openness	3.79	.63	200
Age	35.88	12.51	200

Abbreviations:

MLQ – Meaning in Life Questionnaire, NGSE – New Generalized Self-Efficacy, POI – Personal Orientation Inventory

Table 8. *Intercorrelations of studied variables with Existential Authenticity in Study 2*

	EA	MLQ	NGSE	Existentiality	Locus of Control	Life Engagement	Life satisfaction	Age
EA	1	.40**	.68**	-.07	.30**	.56**	.44**	-.04
MLQ	.40**	1	.33**	-.16*	.19**	.33**	.21**	-.08
NGSE	.68**	.33**	1	-.08	.37**	.61**	.53**	-.08
Existentiality	-.07	-.16*	-.08	1	-.03	-.01	.04	.14*
Locus of Control	.30**	.19**	.37**	-.030	1	.24**	.26**	.03
Life Engagement	.56**	.33**	.61**	-.014	.24**	1	.58**	-.02
Life Satisfaction	.44**	.21**	.53**	.04	.26**	.58**	1	-.07
Age	-.04	-.08	-.08	.14*	.03	-.02	-.07	1

N = 185 for EA, 200 for all other measures

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Abbreviations:

MLQ – Meaning in Life Questionnaire, NGSE – New Generalized Self-Efficacy, POI – Personal Orientation Inventory

Table 9. *Hierarchical regression in the prediction of life satisfaction*

Step		*B*	*std. error*	*t*	*p*	*R*	R^2	$R^2 \Delta$	sig $R^2 \Delta$
1	MLQ	.05	.05	.87	.39	.53	.28	.28	.01
	NGSE	.57	.08	6.86	0				
	Locus of Control	.32	.32	1	.32				
	Existentiality	.54	.31	1.77	.08				
2	MLQ	.02	.05	.39	.7	.54	.29	.01	.1
	NGSE	.46	.1	4.45	0				
	Locus of Control	.29	.32	.91	.37				
	Existentiality	.52	.3	1.71	.09				
	EA	.2	.12	1.67	.1				

Table 10. *Hierarchical regression in the prediction of life engagement*

Step		*B*	*std. error*	*t*	*p*	*R*	R^2	$R^2 \Delta$	sig $R^2 \Delta$
1	MLQ	.12	.06.	2.25	.03	.6	.36	.36	.01
	NGSE	.7	.09	8.09	0				
	Locus of Control	.12	.33	.37	.71				
	Existentiality	.34	.32	1.05	.3				
2	MLQ	.08	.06	1.34	.18	.63	.4	.04	.01
	NGSE	.49	.11	4.56	0				
	Locus of Control	.06	.32	.17	.87				
	Existentiality	.29	.31	.94	.35				
	EA	.42	.13	3.32	0				

Table 11. *Correlations of Existential Authenticity with Big Five personality traits*

	EA	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
EA	1	.42**	.26**	.36**	-.47**	.27**
Extraversion	.42**	1	.26**	.26**	-.50**	.29**
Agreeableness	.26**	.26**	1	.25**	-.38**	.15*
Conscientiousness	.36**	.26**	.25**	1	-.46**	.19**
Neuroticism	-.47**	-.50**	-.38**	-.46**	1	-.16*
Openness	.27**	.29**	.15*	.19**	-.16*	1

$N = 185$ for EA, 200 for all other measures

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Table 12. *Correlations of Existential Authenticity with all other variables*

	EA	LET	LS	MLQ	Existentiality	LOC	NGSE	Age	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
EA		.56**	.44**	.40**	-.07	.3**	.68**	-.04	.42**	.26**	.36**	-.47**	.27**
LET	.56**		.58**	.33**	-.01	.24**	.61**	-.02	.49**	.38**	.42**	-.48**	.38**
LS	.44**	.58**		.21**	.04	.26**	.53**	-.07	.48**	.25**	.34**	-.62**	.09
MLQ	.40**	.33**	.21**		-.16*	.19**	.33**	-.08	.28**	.29**	.10	-.16*	.27**
Existentiality	-.07	-.01	.04	-.16*		-.03	-.08	.14*	-.04	-.24**	-.21**	-.04	.11
LOC	.30**	.24**	.26**	.19**	-.03		.37**	.03	.24**	.20**	.15*	-.33**	-.02
NGSE	.68**	.61**	.53**	.33**	-.08	.37**		-.08	.50**	.27**	.51**	-.56**	.40**
Age	-.04	-.02	-.07	-.08	.14*	.03	-.08		.04	-.03	.22**	-.01	.06
Extraversion	.42**	.49**	.48**	.28**	-.04	.24**	.50**	.04		.26**	.26**	-.50**	.29**
Agreeableness	.26**	.38**	.25**	.29**	-.24**	.20**	.27**	-.03	.26**		.25**	-.38**	.15*
Conscientiousness	.36**	.42**	.34**	.10	-.21**	.15*	.51**	.22**	.26**	.25**		-.46**	.19**
Neuroticism	-.47**	-.48**	-.62**	-.16*	-.04	-.33**	-.56**	-.01	-.50**	-.38**	-.46**		-.16*
Openness	.27**	.38**	.09	.27**	.11	-.02	.40**	.06	.29**	.15*	.19**	-.16*	

N = 185 for EA, 200 for all other measures

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Abbreviations:

LET – Life Engagement Test, LS – Life Satisfaction, MLQ – Meaning in Life Questionnaire, LOC – Locus of Control, NGSE – New Generalized Self-Efficacy

Appendix A. Informed Consent Agreement for Study 1

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study involving psychological surveys. Our goal in this study is to examine the properties of various psychological instruments measuring attitudes and personal characteristics.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The surveys in this study comprise a packet that should take approximately one hour to complete. If you choose to participate, please fill it out honestly and carefully.

RISKS

Risks for participation are minimal. Responses we collect from you will be completely confidential, and data will be stored in an encrypted database that will only be accessed by study personnel.

BENEFITS

Participation in this study might help you gain greater insight into your personal characteristics and those of others in general. Additionally, it will further efforts in psychological research pertaining to the characteristics being studied.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

COMPENSATION

Participants will receive course credit in return for completing this study. There is no penalty for withdrawing from the study, but full credit will not be awarded in those cases.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or

other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge (list PI name and phone number).

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Patrick Carmody, at 408 Austin Peay Bldg., or e-mail pcarmody@utk.edu. Alternatively, you may contact John Lounsbury at jlounsbu@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Appendix B. Informed Consent Agreement for Study 2

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study involving psychological surveys. Our goal in this study is to examine the properties of various psychological instruments measuring attitudes and personal characteristics.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

The surveys should take approximately two hours to complete. If you choose to participate, please fill them out honestly and carefully.

RISKS

Risks for participation are minimal. Responses we collect will be completely confidential, and data will be stored in an encrypted database that will only be accessed by study personnel.

BENEFITS

Participation in this study might help you gain greater insight into your personal characteristics and those of others in general. Additionally, it will further efforts in psychological research pertaining to the characteristics being studied.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

COMPENSATION

Participants will receive the designated monetary payment in return for completing this study. There is no penalty for not completing the HIT, but payment will not be given for incomplete or low quality responses (e.g., randomly checking answers).

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher at e-mail pcarmody@utk.edu.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Appendix C. Test Item Pool for the Existential Authenticity Scale

1. I believe that whenever suffering occurs in my life, it can be reduced if I am persistent and don't give up.
2. Life is filled with danger and temptation, but I can still live in a way that is meaningful and productive for me.
3. Even though it is hard to find meaning in the world, I can usually find purpose for my life through careful thought and deliberate action.
4. Although there may be major obstacles and limitations facing me, I can always find ways to achieve happiness and fulfillment.
5. Even though there are times in my life when I encounter loneliness, I can always do something to improve my social situation.
6. Although life can seem pointless at times because the world is so fleeting and impermanent, I can still make personal choices that have lasting consequences enhance my quality of life.
7. Life can be a "tough row to hoe," but I am always able to see my circumstances in a positive light.
8. I agree with the proverb, "Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars."
9. I might have to put my deepest wishes on hold for long periods of time, but I can adopt a mental posture which enables me to stay the course.
10. Though some of my life goals seem far off and hard to reach, I tend to focus on things in the here–and-now so that one day I can attain them.

11. While some hardships in life cannot be changed, I strive to disregard them and focus on things I can change to improve my quality of life.
12. I strongly believe in the importance of living in the here-and-now, rather than just working toward a future happiness.
13. I don't think people can lead meaningful lives until they take responsibility for their actions.
14. In the end, only I can determine what's important in my life.
15. I believe it's more important to achieve purpose in life by creating my own meaning rather than adopting what others have found to be meaningful.
16. Sometimes the only way to make a valid personal choice is to go against the wishes of other people.
17. At critical points in my life, I have found that the best course for me to take is not one based on the values of other people, but on one based on my own personal values.
18. Even if terrible things were to happen to me, I would ultimately still be responsible for what I chose to do with my life.
19. Often, I find that it is only by making difficult choices that I can resolve uncertainty and take a meaningful course of action.
20. On the whole, I believe in adapting to the conditions of the present rather than focusing on the way things used to work in days gone by.

Appendix D. Items of the Life Engagement Test (LET)

1. There is not enough purpose in my life. (-)
2. To me, the things I do are all worthwhile.
3. Most of what I do seems trivial and unimportant to me. (-)
4. I value my activities a lot.
5. I don't care very much about the things I do. (-)
6. I have lots of reasons for living.

Appendix E. Items of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

1. I understand my life's meaning.
2. I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
3. I am always looking to find my life's purpose.
4. My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. My life has no clear purpose. (-)
10. I am searching for meaning in my life.

Appendix F. Items of the Existentialism scale (Ross Educational Philosophical Inventory)

1. Knowledge is a means of cultivation of the self.
2. Personal values can only develop in an environment where man is free to see the consequences of his actions.
3. The essence of reality is choice.
4. Man is nothing until he acts.
5. Man is the sum of his actions.
6. Education is a process of stimulating students to search themselves for their self.
7. Reality occurs when man chooses to confront a situation, makes a commitment.
8. The existence of reality lies in man himself.

Appendix G. Items of the Life Satisfaction scale

1. I am in good health.
2. I am happy with the number and quality of my friendships.
3. I am satisfied by the amount of free time I have to spend.
4. I am happy with my love life (including relationship with girlfriend or boyfriend, spouse, etc.)
5. I am satisfied with my prospects for the future.
6. I am unhappy with my finances and overall money situation. (-)
7. I wish I had a more satisfying social life. (-)
8. I am satisfied with how much fun I am having.
9. I am satisfied with my life as a whole.

Appendix H. Items of the Locus of Control Inventory

1. a. Children get into trouble because their parents punish them too much.

   b. The trouble with most children nowadays is that their parents are too easy with them.

2. a. Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.

   b. People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.

3. a. One of the major reasons why we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics.

   b. There will always be wars, no matter how hard people try to prevent them.

4. a. In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.

   b. Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.

5. a. The idea that teachers are unfair to students is nonsense.

   b. Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings.

6. a. Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.

   b. Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.

7. a. No matter how hard you try some people just don't like you.

   b. People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others.

8. a. Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality.

   b. It is one's experiences in life which determine what they're like.

9. a. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.

   b. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.

10. a. In the case of the well prepared student there is rarely if ever such a thing as an unfair test.

    b. Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying in really useless.

11. a. Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.

    b. Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.

12. a. The average citizen can have an influence in government decisions.

    b. This world is run by the few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it.

13. a. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.

    b. It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.

14. a. There are certain people who are just no good.

    b. There is some good in everybody.

15. a. In my case getting what I want has ttle or nothing to do with luck.

    b. Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.

16. a. Who gets to be the boss often depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first.

b. Getting people to do the right thing depends upon ability, luck has little or nothing to do with it.

17. a. As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand, nor control.

    b. By taking an active part in political and social affairs the people can control world events.

18. a. Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.

    b. There really is no such thing as "luck."

19. a. One should always be willing to admit mistakes.

    b. It is usually best to cover up one's mistakes.

20. a. It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you.

    b. How many friends you have depends upon how nice a person you are.

21. a. In the long run the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.

    b. Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.

22. a. With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption.

    b. It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.

23. a. Sometimes I can't understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give.

    b. There is a direct connection between how hard 1 study and the grades I get.

24. a. A good leader expects people to decide for themselves what they should do.

    b. A good leader makes it clear to everybody what their jobs are.

25. a. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.

    b. It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.

26. a. People are lonely because they don't try to be friendly.

    b. There's not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you.

27. a. There is too much emphasis on athletics in high school.

    b. Team sports are an excellent way to build character.

28. a. What happens to me is my own doing.

    b. Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.

29. a. Most of the time I can't understand why politicians behave the way they do.

    b. In the long run the people are responsible for bad government on a national as well as on a local level.

Appendix I. Items of the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE)

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.
2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.
3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.
4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.
7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.
8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.

Appendix J. Items of the Big Five Inventory

Stem: I am someone who…

1. _____ Is talkative
2. _____ Tends to find fault with others
3. _____ Does a thorough job
4. _____ Is depressed, blue
5. _____ Is original, comes up with new ideas
6. _____ Is reserved
7. _____ Is helpful and unselfish with others
8. _____ Can be somewhat careless
9. _____ Is relaxed, handles stress well.
10. _____ Is curious about many different things
11. _____ Is full of energy
12. _____ Starts quarrels with others
13. _____ Is a reliable worker
14. _____ Can be tense
15. _____ Is ingenious, a deep thinker
16. _____ Generates a lot of enthusiasm
17. _____ Has a forgiving nature
18. _____ Tends to be disorganized
19. _____ Worries a lot

20. _____ Has an active imagination
21. _____ Tends to be quiet
22. _____ Is generally trusting
23. _____ Tends to be lazy
24. _____ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
25. _____ Is inventive
26. _____ Has an assertive personality
27. _____ Can be cold and aloof
28. _____ Perseveres until the task is finished
29. _____ Can be moody
30. _____ Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
31. _____ Is sometimes shy, inhibited
32. _____ Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
33. _____ Does things efficiently
34. _____ Remains calm in tense situations
35. _____ Prefers work that is routine
36. _____ Is outgoing, sociable
37. _____ Is sometimes rude to others
38. _____ Makes plans and follows through with them
39. _____ Gets nervous easily
40. _____ Likes to reflect, play with ideas

41. _____ Has few artistic interests

42. _____ Likes to cooperate with others

43. _____ Is easily distracted

44. _____ Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

Vita

Patrick Carmody was born in Richlands, VA, the middle child of three. He attended Richlands Elementary and continued to Richlands High Scool in the same town. After graduating, he pursued a religion and psychology double major at Emory & Henry College for four years, graduating in May 2006. While there, he studied under Drs. Chris Qualls, Celeste Gaia, and Kimberly Reed, who challenged him and exposed him to a wide array of career possibilities in psychology. After taking particular interest in health psychology, he then attended The University of Tennessee's Experimental Psychology program, the *alma mater* of his advisor, Kim Reed. He accepted several teaching assistantships as well as a research placement at B&W Y-12 in Oak Ridge, TN. He completed his Master of Arts degree in August of 2010, defended his dissertation in December of 2012, and graduated with a PhD in May 2013.