Age Differences in Volunteering Experiences: An Examination of Generativity and Meaning in Life

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine differences in volunteering experiences between middle-aged and older aged persons participating in the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Erik Erikson’s (1959/1994) concept of generativity is applied in order to test hypotheses pertaining to age-related associations between a pre-existing community volunteer role and meaning, self-esteem and meaning as well as sense of belonging and meaning. Data were utilized from the Older Olympic Volunteer Project which contained a dataset on aspects of volunteering experiences before and after an intensive and episodic volunteering event among 282 middle-aged and older adults. It was found that the association between a pre-existing community volunteer role and meaning in life was significant only for older adults, the association between self-esteem and meaning in life was discovered to be stronger for middle age adults, whereas the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life was found to be more robust among older adults. The results are discussed with respect to the concept of generativity and meaning in life.

Keywords: Meaning in life; self-esteem; sense of belonging; volunteerism; generativity; older adults
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the late Viktor Frankl. Without his body of work I never would have been able to conceptualize meaning in life in this rich of detail. His books also served as a roadmap into the world of philosophy of metaphysics and existentialism including Plato, Aristotle, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Sartre. Of all of these works, I will never forget how Plato’s “being and becoming” principle and Schopenhauer’s “will and representation” principle helped to simplify my thinking. Instead of viewing the world through a prism of other people’s ideas, conceptualizations and theories; these basic principles helped me to shed some of these conceptualizations for ones of my own creation that helped guide the writing of this thesis.
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Dr. Wister has a way of instructing his students that respects their autonomy and caters to their interests, so they rarely realize how greatly their skills are being developed. Looking back on my time working for him and studying under him, I am shocked to see how far I have come. There is no doubt in my mind that my current interest in solving problems and discovering novel information by way of applying statistical techniques is a direct result of the guidance from this highly respected social demographer. Furthermore, I have a feeling that my time as his supervisee will be remembered as the most interesting time of my life. I also want to extend thanks to the other members of my committee – Dr. Barbara Mitchell and Dr. Andrew Sixsmith.

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“By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true” (Frankl, 1959/1985, p. 134).
Table of Contents

Approval .......................................................................................................................... ii
Partial Copyright Licence ............................................................................................... iii
Abstract ........................................................................................................................ iv
Dedication ........................................................................................................................ v
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... vi
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ viii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... xi
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1. Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
Background on Volunteering Among Older Adults ......................................................... 3
  Prevalence and Participation Rates of Older Volunteers ......................................... 3
  Factors Affecting Volunteerism among Older Persons ...................................... 5
    Predictors of Volunteering ................................................................................. 5
    Gender ................................................................................................................. 5
    Marital Status .................................................................................................... 6
    Physical Health Status ....................................................................................... 6
    Education Level .................................................................................................. 7
    Work Status ........................................................................................................ 7
  The Effects of Volunteerism among Older Persons ......................................... 8
    Volunteering and Mortality ................................................................................ 8
    Volunteering and Psychological Well-being ..................................................... 9

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Models .......................................................... 11
Conceptualizing Meaning in Life ............................................................................... 11
  Meaning as Comprehensibility ........................................................................... 12
  Meaning as Significance ...................................................................................... 13
Individual and Social Sources of Meaning in Life .................................................... 15
Meaning in Life and Volunteering ......................................................................... 17
  Differentiating Social Meaning from Individual Meaning ................................ 17
    Social Meaning and Volunteering: Belonging and Meaning in Life in
      Older Age ....................................................................................................... 19
    Individual Meaning and Volunteering: Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life
      at Midlife ........................................................................................................ 21
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 3. Methodology .............................................................................................. 25
Design and Sample ....................................................................................................... 25
Measurement ............................................................................................................... 27
Dependent Variable .................................................................................................... 29
Independent Variables ............................................................................................... 29
  Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Community Volunteering Role and
    Meaning in Life by Age Group ....................................................................... 29
Previous Volunteer Experience ...................................................... 29
Phase 2: Meaning in Life, Belonging and Self-Esteem Analyses by Age
Group ....................................................................................... 30
Self-Esteem .................................................................................. 30
Sense of Belonging ....................................................................... 30
Covariates ...................................................................................... 30
   Gender ....................................................................................... 31
   Marital Status ........................................................................... 31
   Perceived Health ........................................................................ 31
   Education Level ........................................................................ 31
   Work Status .............................................................................. 32

Chapter 4. Analysis and Results .................................................... 33
Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Volunteering Role
   Hypothesis .................................................................................. 34
   Results ........................................................................................ 34
   Descriptive Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations by Age 34
   Bivariate Correlation Comparison by Age .................................. 35
Phase 2: Intensive Olympic Volunteering Experience
   Hypotheses .................................................................................. 38
   Results ........................................................................................ 39
   Descriptive Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations by Age 39
   Linear Regression Modeling ...................................................... 40
      Associations between Sense of Belonging and Meaning in Life 42
      Associations between Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life ........... 43
      Covariates .............................................................................. 44

Chapter 5. Discussion .................................................................... 45
Interpretation of Results ............................................................... 47
   Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Volunteering Role ................. 48
   Phase 2: The Effects of an Intensive Olympic Volunteering Experience 50
      Hypothesis 1: Increased Social Meaning for Older Adults ....... 50
      Hypothesis 2: Increased Independent Meaning for Middle-Aged Adults 53
Meaning and Generativity Revisited ............................................ 54
Limitations .................................................................................... 55
Future Studies ............................................................................. 57
   Meaning in Life throughout the Life Course ............................ 57
   Volunteerism, Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being ........ 58
   The Individual and Social Meaning Typology .......................... 58
Summary and Conclusions ............................................................. 59

Appendix 62
2010 Older Volunteer Project Questionnaire #1 .................................. 63
List of Tables

Table 1. Volunteer Rates in Canada by Age in 2007 (Hall et al., 2009) .................. 4
Table 2. Average Annual Volunteer Hours in Canada by Age in 2007 (Hall et al., 2009) .............................................................. 4
Table 3. Typology of Individual and Social Sources of Meaning in Life.................. 16
Table 4. Sample Demographic Characteristics by Age Group ............................ 26
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Covariates .................................................. 32
Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Prior Volunteerism and Meaning in Life .......... 35
Table 7. Bivariate Correlations of Prior Volunteerism and Meaning in Life ........ 36
Table 8. Descriptive Comparisons of Means and Standard Deviations by Age .... 40
Table 9. Linear Regression Modeling of Meaning in Life Reporting
    Standardized Beta Coefficients and Variances ...................................... 41
List of Figures

Figure 1. Tri-Venn Diagram Differentiating Social from Individual Meaning .............. 18
Figure 2. Associations between Sense of Belonging and Meaning in Life .................. 42
Figure 3. Associations between Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life ............................ 43
Chapter 1.

Introduction

Volunteering is defined as “unpaid work that benefits others to whom one owes no obligation” (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008, p. 400), and is a worldwide phenomenon that is more prevalent than what was thought in the past (Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Handy, Brodeur, & Cnaan, 2006). Nearly half of Canadians and Americans volunteer for nonprofit and charitable organizations (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009; Independent Sector, 2002). Furthermore, volunteering in Canada is on the increase; from 2004 to 2007 the total number of volunteer hours increased by 4%, while the total number of volunteers during the same time period increased by 5.7% (Hall et al., 2009).

It has been found that the total volunteer rate is highest among young adults who often volunteer due to individualistic motivations such as gaining career-related experience (Okun & Schultz, 2003). In spite of this, it is middle-aged and older adults aged 45 years or older who dedicate by far the highest average annual amount of volunteer hours in Canada (Hall et al., 2009). From young adults, through middle age and into older age the motivation to volunteer has been found to differ across the life course.

One major theoretical concept linked to volunteering is generativity (Fisher & Collier, 1988; Larkin & Mahler, 2005; Narushima, 2005; Scott & Feng, 2003; Snyder & Clary, 2004; Son & Wilson, 2011; Theurer & Wister, 2010), which psychologist Erik
Erikson defined as “the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1959/1994, p. 103). Generativity first becomes important in midlife, and peaks throughout older age. Erikson’s theory suggests that child-rearing among middle-aged adults is a primary vehicle for generative activity. However, the generativity concept also suggests that older adults engage in other altruistic activities in order to improve society for upcoming generations, which may include their own children. Evidence of this is how an AARP study of civic involvement and volunteering discovered that “helping others” was the most frequent reason for volunteering among older adults (Guterbock & Fries, 1997).

Volunteering has also been shown to reap other benefits as well. For example, it is related to an increased sense of meaning in life (Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003). It has also been found to act as a protective factor against negative affectivity that can result from a lack of meaning and purpose due to role losses linked to aging (Bradley, 2000; Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Newman, Vasudev, & Onawola, 1985). Other studies have indicated that it can enhance sense of belonging and social capital, which is linked to enhanced levels of subjective well-being among older adults (Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Theurer & Wister, 2010).

Given the differential benefits of volunteering; one question that arises is whether or not volunteering is experienced differently among middle-aged and older people. In particular, are the meaningful aspects of the volunteering experience different for persons at different stages of their life cycle? More specifically, are the individual aspects of volunteering more meaningful for middle-aged adults, and the social aspects of volunteering more meaningful for older adults?
To date, the literature in this area is sparse. While meaning in life and volunteering has been investigated from a qualitative perspective (Bradley, 2000) and has been included in literature reviews (e.g. Emmons, 2003), to date quantitative research into the phenomenon of volunteering and meaning in life among older adults is rare. The purpose of this study is to investigate the differential effects of volunteering on meaning in life among middle-age and older volunteers. If volunteers of different ages are found to derive different sources of meaning from their volunteer experiences, it will have implications for motivating and recruiting volunteers of different ages, as well as extending our understanding of this phenomenon.

**Background on Volunteering Among Older Adults**

This section provides a background of volunteering patterns among older adults. Not only are there distinct prevalence and participation rates with older volunteers, but other important factors also emerge that are associated with volunteering patterns across the lifespan. These predictors of volunteering are summarized briefly in order to provide a backdrop to the current thesis.

**Prevalence and Participation Rates of Older Volunteers**

At first glance, the voluntary participation of older adults in Canada is seemingly unimpressive. In 2007 the average volunteer rates for those aged 55 to 64 was 40% and for those 65 years of age or older it was 36% (Hall et al., 2009). These percentages are both below the total average volunteer rate of 46% for all Canadians aged 15 years or older. However, this pattern does not extend to the amount of volunteer hours performed by older adults. For Canadians aged 55 to 64 and 65 years or older, the
average annual volunteer hours in 2007 was 205 and 218 hours respectively, well above the total average amount of annual volunteer hours of 166 (Hall et al., 2009).

Table 1. Volunteer Rates in Canada by Age in 2007 (Hall et al., 2009)

![Bar chart showing volunteer rates in Canada by age in 2007.]

Table 2. Average Annual Volunteer Hours in Canada by Age in 2007 (Hall et al., 2009)

![Bar chart showing average annual volunteer hours in Canada by age in 2007.]
Factors Affecting Volunteerism among Older Persons

The high amount of volunteering hours performed by this generation of older adults aged 65 years or older can be largely explained by early and normative retirement combined with improved socioeconomic status, health status and mortality rates (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008). Conversely, barriers to volunteering among older adults include a negative perception of volunteerism and a fear of encountering ageism (Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007) as well as a lack of time and a lack of interest (Sundeen, Raskoff, & Garcia, 2007). However, the most crippling barrier to engaging in voluntary activity is ill physical health (Li & Ferraro, 2005; Sundeen et al., 2007).

Aside from these contributing and inhibiting factors regarding the level of voluntary engagement of older adults, a number of other factors affect volunteerism among older persons. Of these, important factors include gender, religious, education, work status differences. These socio-demographic factors each play important and distinct roles in the level of voluntary engagement among older adults.

Predictors of Volunteering

There is a significant literature that identifies various factors associated with volunteering over the life course, and among older adults in particular. This section covers some of the major ones, in order to identify potential factors that will be incorporated into the study.

Gender

On the whole, volunteerism throughout the life course is often found to be performed equally by both males and females (Hall et al., 2009; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). However, among older adults volunteering has been found to be most often undertaken
by females. For example, a nationally representative sample of older adults in the United States revealed that older women had 15.8 greater odds of volunteering than older men (Manning, 2010).

There is also a gender difference in the type of volunteering work that is performed by individuals throughout the life course. It has been found that women are more likely to be involved in volunteering positions such as caring for children and older adults, food preparation and sorting donations (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). Conversely, men are more likely to be found volunteering in leadership roles such as coaching and committee work (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007).

**Marital Status**

The relationship between marital status and volunteerism is mixed. Some have reported that married individuals are more likely to volunteer than single people (Sundeen, 1990), while others have found no difference (Mesch, Rooney, Steinberg, & Denton, 2006). Although the results are varied, it has also been suggested that being married can act as a hindrance to volunteerism among older adults (see Wilson, 2000).

**Physical Health Status**

Longitudinal studies have shown that volunteers report better physical health in old age (e.g. Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Luoh & Herzog, 2002; Moen, Dempster-McLain & Williams, 1992; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Stephan, 1991; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Van Willigen, 2000), have better functional mobility (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Moen et al., 1992) and also have a lower risk of mortality than non-volunteers (e.g. Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Musick et al., 1999, Rogers, 1996; Sabin, 1993). It has been noted that selection effects could possibly influence this relationship; since functionally mobile and physically
healthy older adults are more likely to volunteer in the first place (Wilson, 2000). Overall, however, these selection effects do not detract from findings that suggest that volunteering has a positive effect on the health of individuals who continue to volunteer over time.

**Education Level**

Education level is one of the most consistent predictors of volunteerism (McPherson & Rotolo, 1996; Mesch et al., 2006; Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994). It has been suggested that this is the case because education improves levels of empathy and also increases the awareness of civic issues (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Rosenthal, Feiring, & Lewis, 1998). This connection is particularly salient among political volunteering and AIDS related volunteering, but not when it comes to informal community volunteering positions (Omoto & Snyder, 1993).

**Work Status**

It has been reported that those work in a full-time capacity are less likely to engage in voluntary activity (Vaillancourt, 1994). This is especially relevant when comparing full-time workers to part-time workers, however, homemakers and the unemployed have been found to have the lowest rates of volunteerism (Stubbings & Humble, 1984 in Wilson, 2000). Instead it has been suggested that social integration – and not work status – is the factor that determines voluntary activity among retired older adults as well as younger adults that are eligible to participate in the work force (Wilson, 2000).
The Effects of Volunteerism among Older Persons

Since this thesis attempts to examine the differential effect of a volunteer experience on meaning in life for middle and older age groups, it is important to cover literature on the social and psychological consequences of volunteering.

Volunteerism has been shown to have a number of positive effects on older persons. These positive outcomes are often measured in terms of the effects of volunteering on the physical and mental health of older adults. Much of the volunteering literature on physical health focuses on the effect volunteerism has on mortality rates. Conversely, the volunteering literature on mental health often investigates the effect that volunteerism has on psychological well-being.

Volunteering and Mortality

There are a number of studies that report lower morbidity and longer survival of volunteers, as compared to non-volunteers (e.g. Konrath, Fuhrel-Forbis, Lou, & Brown, 2012; Lee, Steinman, & Tan, 2011; Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Musick et al., 1999; Okun, August, Rook, & Newsom, 2010). However, many of these studies do not control for the volunteer’s initial health status and also do not consider the self-selection processes inherent in volunteer work (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008). After all, unhealthy individuals are less likely to volunteer and volunteers who become ill are less likely to continue to volunteer.

Two American longitudinal studies of note do not suffer from these methodological shortcomings as they both controlled for initial health status: The Asset and Health Dynamics among the Oldest Old (AHEAD) study and the Longitudinal Study of Aging. The AHEAD study analyzed the health and mortality of 4,860 older adult
volunteers and discovered that individuals who engaged in a minimum of 100 hours of voluntary activity annually were less likely to report poor health (Luoh & Herzog, 2002). Furthermore, two years later their mortality rates were significantly lower than non-volunteers. This finding on reduced mortality rates of volunteers was also replicated in the Longitudinal Study of Aging, which found that the combination of religious participation, social interaction with family and friends as well as volunteering had the largest effect (Harris & Thoresen, 2005).

**Volunteering and Psychological Well-being**

Most of the literature on the psychological benefits of volunteering among older adults focuses on the positive association between voluntary activity and subjective well-being (e.g. Theurer & Wister, 2010). Currently, a minimum of 15 different cross-sectional studies have provided evidence of this relationship (see Okun, Rios, Crawford & Levy, 2011 for a review) However, since relationships discovered in cross-sectional studies cannot explain directionality, this has led to recommendations for more longitudinal studies investigating this relationship. These studies – albeit fewer in number – have provided compelling evidence that volunteering affects well-being over time (Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Hao, 2008; Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007; Van Willigen, 2000).

However, a number of other variables related to volunteering could be moderating or mediating the relationship between volunteering and well-being, since volunteering has been found to be correlated with other variables that are associated with subjective well-being. More specifically, volunteering has been associated with constructs found to be moderately and strongly correlated with subjective well-being, including meaning in life (Driskell, Lyon, & Embry, 2008; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso,

Rather than focusing on improved subjective well-being as an outcome of volunteering among older adults, this investigation is unique in that it centers on meaning in life and its associations with two factors: the individual construct of self-esteem and the social and generative construct of sense of belonging. While it is understood that meaning in life and subjective well-being may be overlapping concepts, the present study will focus on the former, given that meaning in life is closely connected to generativity and is important in its own right.
Chapter 2.

Theoretical and Conceptual Models

Conceptualizing Meaning in Life

Before the relationships between volunteering experiences and meaning in life can be examined, it is necessary to examine the conceptual aspects underlying meaning in life. First and foremost, meaning in life is a complex concept that may influence people in different ways. Second, two distinct conceptualizations of meaning have been found to exist. The first is centered on meaning in its comprehensibility aspect, and the second is on meaning in its significance aspect (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Janoff-Bulman & Franz, 1997; Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004; Klinger, 1998). Meaning as comprehensibility and meaning as significance are important because they may help to understand why people may derive different aspects of meaning from volunteering experiences at different points in their life course.

It has been found that meaning as comprehensibility precedes meaning as significance in instances where meaning in life has been eroded (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004; Davis et al., 1998). However, while these two conceptualizations of meaning have been found to be highly associated, they are still independent constructs that are associated with different factors related to meaning such as buffering against negative affect (Davis et al., 1998). Furthermore, it has been suggested that two entirely
different psychological processes underlie these conceptualizations of meaning (Davis et al., 1998), both of which have relevance for age related volunteer experiences. For example, younger adults who are entering the workforce often volunteer for reasons related to meaning as comprehensibility, such as understanding how to behave in work-like environments (Okun & Schultz, 2003). Conversely, adults at other stages of the life course have been found to be more likely to volunteer for reasons related to meaning as significance, because the volunteer experience itself is valued and perceived as being personally fulfilling (Okun & Schultz, 2003).

Figure 1. The Two Conceptualizations of Meaning

Meaning as Comprehensibility

Meaning as comprehensibility is the broadest definition of meaning, as it refers to how individuals make sense of their world through cognitive systems of expected relations (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). One purpose of these cognitive systems is to allow an individual to perceive the world as comprehensible, just, controllable and non-random as opposed to meaningless, random and uncontrollable (Heider, 1958; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Lerner, 1980). Once individuals comprehend a certain situation,
they are better equipped to evaluate what is personally significant in that particular situation.

**Meaning as Significance**

Meaning as significance, on the other hand, refers to how individuals create a fulfilling life of value and worth (Davis et al., 1998; Janoff-Bulman & McPherson Frantz, 1997; Klinger, 1998). Meaning as comprehensibility lays the foundation necessary for meaning as significance by providing a framework for understanding oneself and one’s values in relation to the world (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004). This allows for an individual to pursue subjectively valued goals – or purposes – in order to create a personally meaningful existence (Frankl, 1955/1986; 1969/1988). Notable authors that define meaning in this manner include Viktor Frankl (1955/1986; 1969/1988), James Crumbaugh and Leonard Maholick (1964), as well as Michael Steger (2006). Most meaning in life literature – including this thesis – refers to meaning in its significance aspect rather than in its comprehensibility aspect.

**Meaning in Life and Motives for Volunteering by Age**

A volunteer role can contribute to a sense of meaning in life in a number of ways. Furthermore, how meaning in life relates to volunteering can be determined based on the differing motivations to volunteer throughout the life course. For instance, younger volunteers have been found to volunteer more for reasons related to comprehensibility and the achievement of career-related purposes (Okun & Schultz, 2003). These career-related purposes are likely why younger volunteers have higher volunteer rates than older adults, but contribute less volunteering hours per year (Hall et al., 2009). Once younger volunteers gain experience and comprehend the nature of voluntary and paid
work roles, the initial volunteering role is often shed in favour of the ultimate purpose of volunteering, the achievement of paid employment.

While younger adults are often found to volunteer for reasons of comprehensibility, individuals at other stages of the life course are often found to volunteer for reasons of significance (Okun & Schultz, 2003). For example, employed middle-aged individuals may volunteer in order to realize significant personal values that are neglected in a full-time work role. For those whose occupation provides a functional role (e.g. the extrinsic motivation of money) but is not stimulating and minimally contributes to a sense of meaning in life, volunteering for the intrinsic motivation of having fun and realizing neglected but important personal values may be two particularly desirable and fulfilling purposes (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Maslow, 1971/1993). These two individualistic motivations for volunteering are consistent with the notion that younger age – as opposed to older age – is associated with a greater likelihood of individualistic motivations for volunteering (Briggs, Peterson, & Gregory, 2010).

Although older adults may volunteer for any number of reasons, one common reason is role substitution due to occupational and social role losses in older age (Bradley, 2000; Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Newman et al., 1985). Since volunteering among older adults has been associated with purpose in life (Emmons, 2003) this may be especially important for individuals who had difficulty adjusting to retirement. In this instance the structure, routine, pre-determined goals and opportunities for achievement inherent within a chosen voluntary position may contribute to purpose in life by providing a substitution for these elements that existed in a previous occupational role.
However, a vast proportion of older adults indicate that volunteering for social reasons is of primary significance (Bradley, 2000; Chappell & Prince, 1997; Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Williams, Fries, Koppen & Prisuta, 2010). For these individuals, other purposes involved with volunteering are secondary to the opportunity to enhance levels of social capital (Theurer & Wister, 2010) and to engage in generative activity (Bradley, 2000; Van Willigen, 2000). These social and pro-social aspects make volunteering a unique pastime that is undertaken among the retired in comparison to other activities such as sports, arts and crafts.

**Individual and Social Sources of Meaning in Life**

The meaning in life literature describes a number of activities and behaviours that are sources of meaning in life. These activities and behaviours can be divided into *individually-based* and *socially-based* categories. Individual sources of meaning in life include achievement (Emmons, 2003; Wong, 1998), enjoyable work (Bonebright et al., 2000), personal development (Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981; Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kahler, 2006; Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008), the self-determined attitude that one takes toward a situation (Frankl, 1969/1988), nostalgia and reminiscence with individual content (Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, & Valenkamp; 2004; Wildschut, Sedikides, & Routledge, 2008) as well as other personally meaningful experiences (Frankl, 1969/1988). Social sources of meaning in life include relationships (Bar-Tur, Savaya, & Prager, 2001; Ebersole, 1998; Wong, 1998), social support (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009; Krause, 2007), generativity (Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003), other socially meaningful experiences as well as nostalgia and reminiscence with social content (Westerhof et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2008).
Out of all of the sources of meaning in life mentioned in the literature, generativity is one of the most relevant to social scientists when studying volunteerism among older adults because it is linked to the life course of individuals and helps to understand differential experiences associated with volunteering as people age (Theurer & Wister, 2010). It is particularly salient to the present thesis because generativity provides a basis for why different meanings can be derived from volunteering based on an individual's age. The next sections of this thesis develop the rationale for hypotheses connected to different sources of meaning for older compared to middle-aged volunteers. These sources of meaning are then linked to generativity theory.

Table 3. Typology of Individual and Social Sources of Meaning in Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Meaning in Life Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Sources of Meaning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>→ Individual Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Sources of Meaning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Social Meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meaning in Life and Volunteering

The relationship between meaning in life and volunteering has been supported in research illustrating that volunteers report higher levels of meaning in life than non-volunteers (Emmons, 2003). Yet for many older volunteers, the enhanced sense of purpose that volunteering provides may be derived from the opportunity to engage in generative activity (Bradley, 2000; Van Willigen, 2000). This is evidenced in an AARP study on volunteering which shows that the four most popular motivations for volunteering among older adults include taking responsibility for those who need help, giving back to the community, helping others and making a difference (Williams et al., 2009). Although some middle-aged volunteers also volunteer for generative reasons, this motivation is reported to a lesser extent than older adults. Instead, the motivations for volunteering among middle-aged adults are often more individualistic in nature (Briggs et al., 2010).

Thus, the sense of meaning that volunteering provides is likely to be derived from different sources for individuals. Meaning – as significance – refers to a process of creating a life of value (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004) and leads to a sense of purpose and feelings of fulfillment (Frankl, 1969/1988). Viktor Frankl posited that meaning in life could be derived from social or individual means, as one of the central aspects of his theory was that meaning in life could be discovered socially by connecting to others as well as individually by productive activity (Frankl, 1969/1988).

Differentiating Social Meaning from Individual Meaning

Voluntary activity provides opportunities for obtaining meaning in life through both social and individual means. In a social sense, meaning in life may be affected
through increased social interaction which provides the opportunity to develop new relationships (Ebersole, 1998; Wong, 1998), help others (Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003) and experience social support (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009; Krause, 2007). In an individual sense, meaning in life may be augmented via productive activity that provides the opportunity for achievement (Emmons, 2003; Wong, 1998), personal development (Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981; Steger et al., 2006; Waterman et al., 2008) and experiencing enjoyable work (Bonebright et al., 2000). The next sections further develop a rationale for why there may be different meanings associated with volunteering across these middle-age and older age groups.

Figure 1. Tri-Venn Diagram Differentiating Social from Individual Meaning
Social Meaning and Volunteering: Belonging and Meaning in Life in Older Age

Generative activities, such as volunteering, are social in nature because helping is directed towards the benefit of other citizens and communities. This pro-social aspect of volunteering is present in the motivations of older volunteers, which often reflects a generative orientation more often than a focus on improving levels of social capital. For example, it has been found that 69% of older adults volunteer in order to help others compared to 48% who indicate an interest in volunteering purely in order to meet people (Williams et al., 2010). These generative and strictly social motivations among older volunteers have also been reported in other studies exploring reasons why seniors volunteer (Chappell & Prince, 1997; Guterbock & Fries, 1997).

However, the generative function of volunteering does not diminish the importance that volunteering can play as a method for older adults to redevelop social networks that may have diminished due to age-related role losses. For example, volunteering may be a method for retired and widowed older adults to diminish social isolation and associated feelings of loneliness. An AARP study on loneliness among older adults aged 45 or older discovered that 28% of volunteers reported feelings of loneliness compared to 41% of non-volunteers (Wilson & Moulton, 2010).

While a volunteering role may help to increase the quantity of social interaction for an otherwise isolated older adult, an ideal volunteer experience would also provide quality social experiences. These social experiences of quality include positive social interactions and feelings of social acceptance which positively contribute to sense of belonging (DeWall, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Sense of belonging – or social connectedness – is viewed as a fundamental motivation that is characterized by perceived levels of affiliation and
intimate attachment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995). Sense of belonging has been found to be inversely associated with loneliness (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Baskin, Wampold, Quintana & Enright, 2010; Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Mellor et al., 2008; Mouratidis & Sideridis, 2009) and significantly related to social support (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Turner & McLaren, 2011) as well as volunteer satisfaction among older adults (Stevens, 1992). Researchers have also found that developing and maintaining close relationships – an essential component to developing a sense of belonging – is related to an increased sense of meaning in life (Bar-Tur et al., 2001).

Due to this connection between social relations and meaning in life, it is expected that an important aspect of the generative volunteering experience is meaning in life derived from sense of belonging. This aspect of meaning – termed social meaning – can be defined as the aggregate of all purposeful social phenomena that influence meaning as significance and contribute to creating a life of value (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004). There are a number of sources of social meaning: including relationships (Bar-Tur et al., 2001; Ebersole, 1998; Wong, 1998), social support (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009; Krause, 2007) and generativity (Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003). Empirically, social meaning can be measured by analyzing the association between meaning in life and sense of belonging.

It is expected that the influence of sense of belonging on meaning in life will be more important for older adult volunteers than middle-age adult volunteers. This difference is predicted because older adults have experienced more age-related social role losses (Moen et al., 1992) and also because older adults express their motivations to volunteer as being more generative and social in nature (Chappell & Prince, 1997;
Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Williams et al., 2010). This suggests that the generative and social aspects of volunteering are more meaningful for older adults as compared to middle-aged volunteers.

These generative and social aspects of meaning among older volunteers lead to two hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that: *the presence of a community volunteering role will be associated with meaning in life to a greater degree among older adults than middle-aged adults.* Second, it is hypothesized that: *social meaning – as measured by the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life – will increase to a greater degree for older adult volunteers than younger adult volunteers throughout an intensive and episodic Olympic volunteering experience.*

**Individual Meaning and Volunteering: Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life at Midlife**

Although volunteering offers generative and social rewards, volunteering also provides the opportunity for individual achievement and personal growth. For example, an AARP study reported that one of the most common reasons for volunteering is that volunteering provides the opportunity to utilize knowledge, skills and experience (Williams et al., 2010). The sense of accomplishment from one’s volunteer work may also provide an individual with a sense of pride, which is related to self-esteem (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Porter & Washington, 1989). Individualistic motivations for volunteering such as these have been found to be associated with volunteers who are of younger ages (Briggs et al., 2010).

Self-esteem refers to an overall evaluation regarding the self (James, 1890) and is associated with the self-assessment emotions of pride and shame (Brown & Marshall, 2001). Self-esteem and meaning in life are found to be strongly correlated (Steger & Frazier, 2005) and many individualistic phenomena contribute to a sense of meaning in
life. These phenomena include achievement (Emmons, 1999; Wong, 1998), enjoyable work (Bonebright et al., 2000), personal development (Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981; Steger et al., 2006; Waterman et al., 2008), the self-determined attitude that one takes toward a situation (Frankl, 1969/1988), nostalgia and reminiscence (Westerhof et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2008) as well as other personally meaningful experiences (Frankl, 1969/1988). These individualistic phenomena affect levels of individual meaning, which can be defined as the aggregate of all purposeful individualistic phenomena that influence meaning as significance and contribute to creating a life of value (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004). Empirically, individual meaning can be measured by the association between self-esteem and meaning in life.

Volunteering can offer the opportunity to experience sources of individual meaning in such areas as achievement (Emmons, 2003; Wong, 1998), personal development (Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981; Steger et al., 2006; Waterman et al., 2008) and enjoyable work (Bonebright et al., 2000). Since younger volunteers more often express being motivated for individualistic reasons (Briggs et al., 2010), it is expected that younger individuals volunteer for these reasons more often than older volunteers. This leads to the hypothesis that individual meaning – as measured by the association between self-esteem and meaning in life – will increase throughout an intensive Olympic volunteering experience to a greater degree for middle-aged volunteers than for older adult volunteers.

Summary

Much of the volunteering literature centers on how volunteers self-report higher levels of subjective well-being than non-volunteers. But volunteering is also associated
with other factors that are associated with subjective well-being including meaning in life, sense of belonging and self-esteem. Furthermore, studies that have researched reasons for volunteering have shown that increasing subjective well-being is rarely offered as a reason for volunteering (Bradley, 2000; Chappell & Prince, 1997; Williams et al., 2010).

Younger individuals are the most likely to report being motivated to volunteer for individualistic reasons (Briggs et al., 2010). Compared to their younger middle-aged counterparts, older adult volunteers more often report being motivated to volunteer based on generative and social reasons (Bradley, 2000; Chappell & Prince, 1997; Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Williams et al., 2010). Social role losses – such as retirement from the work role – may affect the importance that older adults place on volunteering as a leisure activity (Moen et al., 1992). As volunteering roles are more salient for older adults, it is expected that the meaningful aspects of the volunteering experience are different than those of younger adults.

If age differences are discovered in this analysis, then the findings of this thesis will have relevant practical implications for the acquisition, retention and motivation of community volunteers and episodic volunteers of different ages. Age differences are expected across this sample of middle-age and older adults, as predicted by Erikson’s generativity concept within the theory of psychosocial development, which has been found to be empirically sound (e.g. Barnfather & Ronis, 2000; Brown & Lowis, 2003; Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988; Domino & Affonso, 1990; Leidy & Darling-Fisher, 1995; Ochse & Plug, 1986; Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997; Wagner, Lorion, & Shipley, 1983; Whitbourne & Waterman, 1979; Whitbourne, Zuschlag, Elliot, & Waterman, 1992). This places this thesis among a small but growing
area of literature that connects volunteerism with generativity (see Fisher & Collier, 1988; Larkin & Mahler, 2005; Narushima, 2005; Scott & Feng, 2003; Snyder & Clary, 2004; Son & Wilson, 2011; Theurer & Wister, 2010).
Chapter 3.

Methodology

Design and Sample

The data utilized in this investigation have been drawn from a pre-existing dataset on volunteers that was commissioned by the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC). The author helped design and collect the data under the supervision of the primary investigator, Dr. Andrew Wister. The study was announced on a VANOC 2010 Olympic Volunteer website, and interested participants contacted the primary investigator by email. The sample was therefore self-selected, however, the level of homogeneity of the participants mitigates issues of selection bias and generalizability.

After receiving signed informed consent forms which also notified the participants about confidentiality, the author mailed a questionnaire to each participant a total of two times. There was a response rate of 100% for the first questionnaire, and 92% for the second questionnaire. The sample of volunteers was measured at a time prior to their Olympic volunteering experience, as well as at a second time between 4-8 weeks afterward. This will be referred to as time 1 and time 2.

The total sample includes 282 volunteers – 112 men and 170 women – aged 45-80 with a mean age of 60. These volunteers received specialized training from the
VANOC 2010 Olympic organization for their voluntary positions prior to the Olympic opening date of February 12, 2010. The Vancouver Olympic event itself lasted 17 days and had 2566 athletes participating from 82 countries.

Volunteering activities included but were not limited to such positions as driver, event usher, first aid attendant, and information booth attendant. Participants reported volunteering for an average of 10.3 weeks for VANOC. While volunteering for VANOC, the sample also reported volunteering for an average of 38.5 hours per week.

This sample of 282 volunteers was split into two age groups for the purpose of this thesis. The first group consisted of 143 individuals aged 45-59 with a mean age of 53.5; 67.1% are female, 95.8% are in good to excellent health, 79.7% are married or are in a common-law relationship, 93.7% have an education level above secondary school, and 65.0% are working full-time. The second group consisted of 139 individuals aged 60-80 with a mean age of 66.4. Of these, 53.2% are female, 95.0% are in good to excellent health, 74.8% are married or are in a common-law relationship, 95.7% have an education level above secondary school, and 14.4% are working full-time.

Table 4. Sample Demographic Characteristics by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Mean Age*</th>
<th>Gender (Female)**</th>
<th>Marital Status (Partnered)</th>
<th>Perceived Health (Good)</th>
<th>Education Level (&gt;Secondary)</th>
<th>Employment Status (Full-Time)***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-59 (n=143)</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ (n=139)</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=282)</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Pearson Chi-Square statistically significant age difference ($x^2 = 282.0$, df = 33, $p < .001$).
** Pearson Chi-Square statistically significant age difference ($x^2 = 5.7$, df = 1, $p < .05$).
*** Pearson Chi-Square statistically significant age difference ($x^2 = 75.3$, df = 1, $p < .001$).
The use of age 60 for the division of the sample into older and middle-aged groups was based on a decision to have fairly equally-sized age groups for the subsequent analysis. Furthermore, this distinction was also drawn because 60 was the mean age of the overall sample. Aside from age and sex differences, the only other statistically significant difference between these two groups is work-force participation. It should be noted that all of these variables will be included as covariates in the analysis based on the volunteer literature.

However, one should also take note of the highly select nature of this sample of highly educated individuals who are in very good health. The Olympic volunteering experience is atypical as compared to other longer term community volunteering positions that are more frequently available for older adults. The intensive and selective nature combined with longer hours may make many Olympic volunteering positions more comparable to paid employment than less demanding community volunteering positions.

**Measurement**

The questionnaire collected a wide set of information on the experience of Olympic volunteers. Some of the quantitative scales included burnout, sense of mastery, life satisfaction as well as positive and negative affectivity. Qualitative sections also inquired specific aspects about volunteering experience including reasons for volunteering and how the volunteer initially discovered the Olympic volunteering opportunity. See the appendix for the full questionnaire.

For this analysis scales on meaning in life, self-esteem, and sense of belonging were selected specifically for this research. Multiple item scales included the Meaning in
Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al., 2006) and Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. As this is an inquiry of meaning in life, and it will be used as the dependent variable in linear regression modelling, it is important that the measure of this construct have good validity and reliability. The MLQ has been found to have superior psychometric properties as compared to other measures of meaning in life that quantitatively measure meaning as significance (Steger et al., 2009). Sample questions incorporated in the MLQ include “I understand my life’s meaning” and “my life has a clear sense of purpose”.

The sense of belonging measure included in the study was a single item measure that asked “How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?” and proposed four definitive answers from “very weak”, “somewhat weak”, “somewhat strong” and “very strong”. This question was adopted from the 2001 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) cycle 1.1 and has been utilized in a number of Statistics Canada surveys since then (Statistics Canada, 2000).

In order to discover whether research participants had been engaging in volunteerism prior to the first time of measurement, a presence of a community volunteering role question was asked. This question inquired: “In the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, did you volunteer through another group or organization”? Individuals could respond with “yes”, “no”, “don't know” and “prefer not to answer” (see Appendix for the full questionnaire).
Dependent Variable

Both phase 1 and phase 2 utilize the presence of meaning in life variable derived from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al., 2006) as the dependent variable. Meaning in life at time 1 had 3.2% missing data and meaning in life at time 2 had 10.3% missing data. Missing data were recoded to their respective means in order to maximize cases in the analyses.

Similar to the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), the MLQ is based on the work of Viktor Frankl (1959/1984, 1969/1988). This is important when measuring meaning in life, so that meaning as significance is not incorrectly operationalized as a different construct that is also frequently cited in the psychology literature as meaning (e.g. Heine et al., 2006). This construct is meaning as comprehensibility, and it is operationalized in a subscale of Antonovsky’s (1979; 1993) Sense of Coherence Scale. For more information on the delineation between meaning as significance and meaning as comprehensibility, see Janoff-Bulman and Yopyk (2004).

Independent Variables

Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Community Volunteering Role and Meaning in Life by Age Group

Previous Volunteer Experience

The sole independent variable in this study is one that measured previous volunteer experience. Only 1.1% of respondent data was missing for this variable. Missing data were recoded to the mean.
Phase 2: Meaning in Life, Belonging and Self-Esteem Analyses by Age Group

Self-Esteem

The self-esteem variable was derived from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965), which is the most widely used measure of the concept. At time 1, 0.4% of respondent data was missing; while at time 2, 9.6% of respondent data was missing. Missing data were recoded to their respective means.

Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging variable is an ordinal variable adopted from the Canadian Community Health Survey. At time 1, 2.1% of respondent data was missing; while at time 2, 9.9% of respondent data was missing. Missing cases were recoded to their respective modes.

Covariates

In phase 2, the associations between self-esteem and meaning in life as well as sense of belonging and meaning in life were analyzed while controlling for key demographic variables. These covariates include: gender, marital status, perceived health, education level and work status. Since these were not assumed to change between time 1 and time 2, only time 1 measures were used in the subsequent analyses.
Gender

This covariate was based on the Canadian Community Health Survey question which asked: “what is your sex”? Available responses were limited to male and female. There was no missing data for this covariate.

Marital Status

Marital status was based on the Canadian Community Health Survey question which asked: “what is your current marital status”? Respondents had the option of answering: married, common-law, living with a partner, widowed, separated, divorced or single. The variable was then dichotomized into non-partnered individuals (widowed, separated, divorced and single) versus partnered individuals (married, common-law and living with a partner), due to small numbers in the non-partnered categories. Only 0.4% of data was missing for this covariate, which was recoded to the mode.

Perceived Health

This covariate was based on the Canadian Community Health Survey question which asked: “in general, would you say that your health is…” Respondents had the option of answering: poor, fair, good, very good or excellent. This was then dichotomized into poor health (poor and fair) versus good health (good, very good and excellent). Only 0.7% of data were missing for this covariate, which were recoded to the mode.

Education Level

Education level was based on a question which asked: “what is the highest level of education you have attained”? Answers ranged from: some high school; high school diploma (or equivalent); some trade, technical, or vocational college; some community college; some university; diploma or certificate from trade, technical or vocational school;
diploma or certificate from community college; bachelor or undergraduate degree; professional degree; masters; or doctorate. These were then dichotomized to secondary school or less, and more than secondary school. Only 0.4% of data for this covariate was missing, which was recoded to the mode.

**Work Status**

This covariate is based on a question which asked: “what is your current work status”? Answers ranged from: full-time, part-time, semi-retired, unemployed – looking for employment, unemployed – not looking for employment, long term disability, retired, and unpaid labour. These were then dichotomized to not working full-time and working full-time. Only 1.1% of data was missing for this covariate, which was recoded to the mode.

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Covariates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Gender (Female)</th>
<th>Marital Status (Partnered)</th>
<th>Health Status (Good)</th>
<th>Education Level (&gt;Secondary)</th>
<th>Work Status (Full-Time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-59 n=143</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ n=139</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4.

Analysis and Results

This investigation into meaning in life among middle-aged and older volunteers is divided into two separate studies. The first study analyzes the effects that the presence of a prior volunteering role within 12 months of volunteering for VANOC has on meaning in life among middle-aged and older volunteers. The second study analyzes the differential effects of an intensive Olympic volunteer experience on middle-aged and older volunteers by comparing the associations between self-esteem and meaning in life as well as sense of belonging and meaning in life before and after the Olympic volunteering event.

Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Volunteering Role

The analytic strategy of the first investigation into meaning in life among middle-aged and older volunteers has two facets. These include: 1) a descriptive comparison of means and standard deviations by age and 2) a bivariate association comparison of prior volunteering experience and meaning in life by age. Here, the associations between prior volunteerism and meaning in life at time 1 will be investigated to test the age group hypothesis. This hypothesis is that older volunteers are motivated for generative reasons more than middle-aged volunteers.
Hypothesis

Generativity provides the overarching conceptual model that explains the age-specific motivational benefits of volunteering, among middle aged and older adult volunteers. Thus, the purpose of this first study is to assess the importance that the generative activity of prior community volunteerism differentially contributes to a sense of meaning in life among these age groups. Until now, generativity has only been theoretically (Emmons, 2003) and qualitatively (Bradley, 2000) explicated as a source of meaning in life. With this in mind, the hypothesis of this first study is in line with the aspect of generativity theory which states that generativity is a concern that increases in importance from middle-age through older age. Erikson believed that it was extremely important for older adults to continue to be generative, for “…if one should withdraw altogether from generativity, from creativity, from caring for and with others entirely, this would be worse than death” (Erikson, 1982/1998). Thus, it is expected that the presence of a community volunteering role in the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC will be associated with meaning in life at time 1 to a greater degree among older adults as compared to middle-aged adults.

Results

Descriptive Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations by Age

Among the 143 individuals in the 45-59 year old age group, 78.3% volunteered in the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC. For this prior community volunteerism independent variable, the middle-aged group had a mean score of 0.8 out of a possible maximum of 1 and a possible minimum of 0, while the standard deviation was 0.4. The middle aged group reported a mean presence of meaning in life score of 27.1 out of a
possible maximum of 35 and a possible minimum of 5, with a standard deviation of 5.2 for this dependent variable.

Among the 139 individuals in the 60 years of age and older age group, 80.6% volunteered in the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC. For this independent variable, this older adult group also had a mean score of 0.8 and a standard deviation of 0.4. The older adult group reported a mean presence of meaning in life score of 27.5 with a standard deviation of 4.5 for this dependent variable.

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Prior Volunteerism and Meaning in Life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Volunteerism 12 Months Before VANOC</th>
<th>Time 1 Meaning in Life Questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-59</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=143</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=139</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bivariate Correlation Comparison by Age**

Despite relatively comparable means and standard deviations for the independent and dependent variables as seen in Table 6, the bivariate correlations were found to be quite different by age group. The Pearson correlation for the 45-59 middle-age group was found to be non-significant. In comparison, the Pearson correlation for the 60 year old and over group was found to be $r = 0.182$ and was statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). These results are listed below in Table 7.

35
Table 7. Bivariate Correlations of Prior Volunteerism and Meaning in Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>45-59 (n=143)</th>
<th>60+ (n=139)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior Volunteerism X</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.182*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning in Life</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This indicates that there is a statistically significant association between prior community volunteerism and meaning in life among volunteers aged 60 and older, but not among those aged 45-59 even though both age groups reported similar levels of prior volunteerism. This provides evidence that older adults and middle-aged adults volunteer for different motivationary reasons. More specifically, it has been suggested that this motivationary motive is generativity, which is associated with meaning in life.

Phase 2: Intensive Olympic Volunteering Experience

The analytic strategy of the second investigation into meaning in life among middle-aged and older volunteers focusses on an intensive Olympic volunteering experience. The purpose is to display that although mean levels of constructs display minimal change, the associations of these constructs are varying from time 1 to time 2. It has two phases including: 1) a descriptive comparison of means and standard deviations of key variables across the age groups and 2) linear regression modelling to test the hypotheses.

The first phase will involve a mean comparison before and after the Olympic volunteering experience for both groups of volunteers divided by age. More specifically, the standard deviations and mean levels of meaning in life, self-esteem and sense of
belonging will be explored at time one and time two, or before and after the volunteer experience. The purpose of this descriptive phase is to rationalize the analytic strategy of the linear regression phase. A preliminary descriptive analysis was conducted in a VANOC highlight report which displayed that change from time 1 to time 2 was minimal to non-existent for the meaning in life, self-esteem and sense of belonging variables.

Secondly, linear regression modelling will be utilized to investigate predictions of meaning in life for the two age groups before and after their volunteer experience, including key covariates. The sample will be split by age – into 45-59 and 60 and older groupings – in order to test the interaction effect hypotheses. The demographic variables gender, marital status, health status, education level, and work status will be included as covariates. The constructs of self-esteem and sense of belonging will be added in a separate block in order to test the two hypotheses. Self-esteem and sense of belonging were added in the same block because they are expected to have differential effects on meaning in life at the individual level, and hence it is difficult to distinguish what construct precedes the other in regards to meaning in life.

The linear regressions will be observed at time 1 and time 2 in order to compare changes in the associations between meaning in life and self-esteem as well as meaning in life and sense of belonging. This provides a richer level of analysis rather than other approaches that look at change scores of independent variables in relation to a time 2 dependent variable. Preliminary analyses conducted for a report for VANOC displayed that changes in mean levels of the constructs for self-esteem, sense of belonging and meaning in life were minimal. However, although mean levels only changed minimally, it is expected that the associations that meaning in life has with the self-esteem and sense
of belonging constructs will change significantly due to the addition of the intensive volunteering experience in between time 1 and time 2.

**Hypotheses**

Generativity provides the overarching conceptual model that explicates the age-specific benefits of volunteering as well as why middle aged and older adults volunteer. These benefits are expected to be specified by analyzing the associations across the two age groups between meaning in life and sense of belonging, and meaning in life and self-esteem. These associations will be compared using pre-post measures linked to the intensive Olympic volunteering experience.

*The first hypothesis states that from time one to time two the association between meaning in life and sense of belonging will increase more for older volunteers aged 60 or older than middle-aged volunteers.* This is expected due to generativity’s focus on the importance of community involvement, the stimulus of belonging and generativity in older age (Erikson, 1982/1998), the generativity-focussed volunteer motivations of older adults (Williams et al., 2010), the importance of the social aspect of volunteering among older adults (Musick & Wilson, 2003; Theurer & Wister, 2010), and social role losses associated with aging. Middle-aged volunteers are expected to have a weaker association because of the age-related phases of generativity theory.

The second hypothesis concerns the individual meaning of volunteering for older adults. *It is expected that the association between self-esteem and meaning in life, from time 1 to time 2, will increase more for the middle-aged volunteers than the older volunteers.* This is predicted because the motivations for volunteering among younger adults have been found to be more individualistic in nature (Briggs et al., 2010). Overall,
it is expected that volunteering will provide an opportunity for this group of volunteers to experience such independent sources of meaning in life as achievement, enjoyable work, personal development and other personally meaningful experiences. These independent sources of meaning are expected to affect independent meaning by providing the opportunity to realize values, which increases the association between self-esteem and meaning in life from time 1 to time 2 to a greater degree for middle-aged adults than older adults.

**Results**

**Descriptive Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations by Age**

The 45-59 year old age group had a total sample size of 143 individuals. The time 1 sense of belonging independent variable had a mode score of 3.0 which remained at 3.0 at time 2 (see Table 8). The standard deviations for sense of belonging were 0.9 and 0.8. The time 1 self-esteem independent variable had a mean score of 27.2 which increased very slightly to 27.9 at time 2. The standard deviations for self-esteem were 2.8 and 2.6, respectively. The time 1 presence of meaning in life dependent variable has a mean score of 27.0 which increased minimally to 28.2 at time 2. Standard deviations for meaning in life were 5.2 and 5.0.

As shown in Table 8, the total sample size was 139 individuals for the 60 years of age and older age group. The time 1 sense of belonging independent variable had a mode score of 3.0 which remained at 3.0 at time 2. The standard deviations of sense of belonging were 0.7 and 0.7, respectively, while the time 1 self-esteem independent variable had a mean score of 27.3 which increased minimally to 27.8 at time 2. The standard deviations of the self-esteem variable were 2.3 and 2.7, respectively. The time 1 presence of meaning in life dependent variable has a mean score of 27.5 which
increased very slightly to 27.8 at time 2. The standard deviation for meaning in life was 4.5 and 4.7

**Table 8. Descriptive Comparisons of Means and Standard Deviations by Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Belonging (Time 1)</th>
<th>Belonging (Time 2)</th>
<th>Self-Esteem (Time 1)</th>
<th>Self-Esteem (Time 2)</th>
<th>Meaning in Life (Time 1)</th>
<th>Meaning in Life (Time 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-59 (n=143)</td>
<td>Mean or Mode</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ (n=139)</td>
<td>Mean or Mode</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Linear Regression Modeling**

Meaning in life measured at time 1 and time 2 was used as the dependent variable. In block 1 of each model; the time 1 covariates gender, marital status, health status, education level, and work status were entered. In block 2 the independent variables sense of belonging and self-esteem were entered, which were measured at the same point in time as the meaning in life dependent variable at time 1 and time 2. This allowed for examination of the associations between the independent variables and the dependent variable over time, while controlling for the five demographic variables. This method of comparing the strength of the associations between the independent variables and dependent variables for the two age groups across the two time periods was selected because it allowed for the examination of relationship changes. Another method is to subtract time 1 from time 2 measures (change scores); however, since changes over time were small, this method would miss important changes in the
associations. The results of the four linear regression models are summarized in Table 9.

**Table 9. Linear Regression Modeling of Meaning in Life Reporting Standardized Beta Coefficients and Variances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1 Meaning in Life (Dependent Variable)</th>
<th>Time 2 Meaning in Life (Dependent Variable)</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Block 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>45-59 (n=143)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>8.970***</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>9.363***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Status</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.140</td>
<td>-0.156</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Status</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>0.522***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.178*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.266***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.468***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R Square (Variance)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1 Meaning in Life (Dependent Variable)</th>
<th>Time 2 Meaning in Life (Dependent Variable)</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Block 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60+ (n=139)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>9.368***</td>
<td>1.234</td>
<td>10.830***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Covariates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>-0.205*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>-0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Status</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Status</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>0.187*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.330***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>0.307**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.220**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R Square (Variance)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - (p < 0.05), ** - (p < 0.01), *** - (p < 0.001).
**Associations between Sense of Belonging and Meaning in Life**

When assessing change in the beta coefficients for the independent variables, we will use a **20% change rule**, whereby increases or decreases that are 20% or larger will be deemed substantially important. For the 60 years of age and older group, the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life increased from a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.19$ ($p < 0.05$) to $\beta = 0.33$ ($p < 0.001$), which is a +76.5% percentage increase after controlling for covariation. Among the 45-59 age group, the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life decreased from a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.52$ ($p < 0.001$) to $\beta = 0.18$ ($p < 0.05$), which is a percentage decrease of -65.9%. These results are graphically represented in Figure 2. Furthermore, both of these results are consistent with the hypothesis regarding social meaning – or the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life – in terms of older adult volunteers deriving more meaning from the social aspects of volunteering than middle-aged adults, including the generative aspects of the volunteering experience.

**Figure 2.** **Associations between Sense of Belonging and Meaning in Life**

![Graph showing associations between sense of belonging and meaning in life](image-url)
**Associations between Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life**

For the 45-59 age group, the association between self-esteem and meaning in life increased from a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.27$ ($p < 0.001$) to $\beta = 0.47$ ($p < 0.001$), which represents a percentage increase of +75.9% after controlling for covariates. Among the 60 years of age and older group, the association between self-esteem and meaning in life decreased from a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.31$ ($p < 0.01$) to $\beta = 0.22$ ($p < 0.01$), which represents a percentage decrease of -28.3%.

These results are graphically represented in Figure 3. Both of these results are consistent with the hypothesis regarding independent meaning – or the association between self-esteem and meaning in life – in terms of middle-aged volunteers deriving more meaning from the independent aspects of the volunteering experience as compared to older volunteers.

**Figure 3.  Associations between Self-Esteem and Meaning in Life**
Covariates

The covariates were nonsignificant for both age groups, except one. For the older adult group, male gender was found to be significantly associated with meaning in life at the \( p < 0.05 \) level to the degree of \( \beta = 0.21 \) at time 2. Although it is unclear as to why male gender and meaning in life are significantly associated to a small degree among this highly select group of older adult volunteers after the volunteering experience, there are a number of potential explanations. For instance, this cohort of older male volunteers may have found this particular type of large-scale Olympic volunteering event to be particularly satisfying. Furthermore, it is a possibility that older male volunteers perceived this volunteering experience as a role replacement for normative age related role losses to a greater degree than the older female volunteers.
Chapter 5.

Discussion

The main goal of this thesis was to extend previous work that has determined a connection between generativity and volunteering (e.g. Fisher & Collier, 1988; Larkin & Mahler, 2005; Narushima, 2005; Scott & Feng, 2003; Snyder & Clary, 2004; Son & Wilson, 2011; Theurer & Wister, 2010) through an examination of age differences among volunteers. Using the dependent variable meaning in life, a number of age-related differences in associations with key independent variables were found between middle-aged and older volunteers that confirmed the hypotheses of this thesis. First, it was found that a previous community volunteering role was associated with meaning in life among older adults but not middle-aged adults. Second, it was discovered that the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life increased considerably for older adult volunteers, but not middle age volunteers. Third, it was revealed that the association between self-esteem and meaning in life increased considerably for middle-age volunteers, but not older adult volunteers. These later two associations provide support for the differential influence of generativity on volunteering experiences over the life course.

This investigation utilized a pre-existing dataset on volunteers that was commissioned by the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC). The author assisted in the design and collection of the data under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Wister, the primary investigator of the
VANOC study. The total sample included 282 volunteers – 112 men and 170 women – aged 45-80 with a mean age of 60. The Vancouver Olympic event itself lasted 17 days and had 2566 athletes participating from 82 countries beginning on February 12, 2010.

Volunteering activities included but were not limited to such positions as driver, event usher, first aid attendant, and information booth attendant. Since the event required significant preparation and time for setting up facilities and other infrastructure, participants reported volunteering for an average of 10.3 weeks for VANOC. While volunteering for VANOC, the sample also reported volunteering for an average of 38.5 hours per week.

Theoretically and qualitatively meaning in life had been linked to volunteerism (Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003), however, there has not been an investigation that focused specifically on the quantitative effects that volunteerism has on meaning in life across the life course. A comprehensive literature review discovered that aside from these two instances that linked volunteerism with meaning in life, the psychological measures of self-esteem, sense of belonging and control were common outcome variables of interest in the volunteer literature. Together with meaning in life, self-esteem, sense of belonging and control have been proposed by Williams (1997, 2001) as the four fundamental needs.

The fundamental needs of self-esteem and sense of belonging provided the starting point for differentiating age-related differences in meaning in life associated with volunteering. Once the volunteer literature was viewed in terms of independent versus social meaning, patterns began to emerge in terms of distinct volunteering motivations and outcomes by age. Of particular importance to understanding differences in volunteering between middle-aged and older adults was the finding that younger age is
associated with individualistic volunteering motivations (Briggs et al., 2010). Combined with the finding that older adults are more likely to volunteer for generative and social reasons (Bradley, 2000; Chappell & Prince, 1997; Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Williams et al., 2010), a rationale was developed for including Erikson’s generativity concept as a guiding principle that determined the form of the two main research questions.

Erik Erikson defined generativity as “the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1959/1994, p. 103). This concept was especially relevant to this sample of middle-aged and older adult Olympic volunteers because it is one of the few developmental concepts that initially becomes important in midlife, and increases in importance in older age. While generativity outlines child-rearing as a primary vehicle for generative activity, altruistic activities that improve society for upcoming generations are considered generative as well (Erikson, 1959/1994). This investigation focuses specifically on this altruistic and non-familial aspect of generativity.

**Interpretation of Results**

The study had two phases with distinct hypotheses that examined the differential importance of generativity for volunteers at different stages of their life. The hypothesis of the first phase predicted that prior community volunteering experiences were associated with meaning in life to a greater degree among older adults than middle-aged adults. The hypotheses for the second phase centered on the prediction that middle-aged and older adults would have differential constructions of meaning in life after being exposed to an intensive and episodic Olympic volunteering experience. Middle-aged individuals were expected to report a more independent construction of meaning in life as exhibited by an increase in the association between self-esteem and meaning in life.
from time 1 to time 2. Older adults were expected to report a more social and generative construction of meaning in life as exhibited by an increase in the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life from time 1 to time 2.

**Phase 1: The Presence of a Prior Volunteering Role**

Consistent with literature that has theoretically (Emmons, 2003) and qualitatively (Bradley, 2000) linked generative behaviour with meaning in life among older adults, this phase found a quantitative association between prior community volunteering experience and presence of meaning in life. Among the older adult group, a correlation of $r = 0.18$ between prior volunteerism and meaning in life was found to be significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (two-tailed). However, among the middle-aged adult group, no statistically significant relationship was found between prior volunteerism and meaning in life.

What was interesting was that this relationship was discovered despite both age groups reporting similar mean levels of volunteerism and meaning in life. Mean levels of prior community volunteerism for middle-aged and older adults were 78.3% and 80.6%, respectively. In regards to meaning in life, mean levels of the MLQ at time 1 for middle-aged and older adults were 27.1 and 27.5, respectively.

This suggests that although levels of prior volunteer experience and meaning in life are similar among middle-aged and older adults, volunteering has a different meaning for these two age groups. There are two possible explanations for this difference. The first is that volunteering provides a sense of purpose in life for older adults who have lost important social roles that previously existed in midlife. The second
is that volunteering appeals to a sense of generativity among older adults, and not middle-aged adults.

The notion that volunteering provides a sense of purpose in life for older adults is consistent with a qualitative study that reported volunteering provided older adults with a “reason to rise” each morning (Bradley, 2000). Older age is associated with a number of social role losses, and in this sample this was apparent in work status, as 14.4% of older adults were working full-time as compared to 65.0% of middle-aged adults. In this instance, volunteerism would likely provide a sense of purpose in life among older adults who have experienced social role losses, such as retirement. It is expected that the volunteer role would provide a sense of purpose by involving responsibility along with the pursuit of valued goals through time which contributes to a sense of meaning in life (Frankl, 1959/1985; 1969/1988).

It could also be interpreted that the age difference in the meaningfulness of prior volunteer activity is the result of Erikson’s concept of generativity. This is because older adult volunteers fit the very definition of generative individuals, since they are actively “involved in the community and many of its diverse activities” (Erikson, 1982/1998, p 112). However, any volunteer could match the description of a generative individual; as Erikson’s definition of generativity focuses only on the outcome and not the intention behind generative behaviour.

Generativity alone does not consider possible individualistic or social intentions that may have motivated an individual to perform generative behaviours in the first place. In the instance of individualistic volunteering motivations, volunteerism itself may not be personally meaningful but instead could be valued for other reasons. An example of this
is how younger age is associated with individualistic volunteering motivations (Briggs et al., 2010), including volunteering for the achievement of career-related purposes (Okun & Schultz, 2003). The first implication of this is that while certain generative behaviours such as volunteerism, child-rearing, or caretaking may seem meaningful on the surface; both the degree of meaningfulness and the individualistic or social/generative intrinsic motivations behind the activity are individually determined. The second implication is that authentic generative behaviour not only benefits society and younger generations, but is undertaken for social – as opposed to individual – reasons.

**Phase 2: The Effects of an Intensive Olympic Volunteering Experience**

The differential effects that volunteering has on meaning in life in this sample of middle-aged and older adults has been demonstrated in this second phase. In the descriptive analysis, it was observed that the mean levels of the constructs of sense of belonging, self-esteem and meaning in life changed very minimally – if at all – in response to participating in an intensive Olympic volunteering event. On the surface, this comparison of changes in between time 1 and time 2 suggests that volunteering does not have a significant effect on these constructs. But if nothing significant was occurring, then why would individuals volunteer in the first place? The answer to this question necessitated an examination of changes in the associations between meaning in life, self-esteem and sense of belonging across the age groups and across the volunteering experience, rather than changes in individual constructs over time.

**Hypothesis 1: Increased Social Meaning for Older Adults**

Profound differences occurred in the associations among these variables, and indeed, the largest change from before and after the intensive Olympic volunteering
experience occurred among the older volunteers. Specifically, the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life among the 60 years and older age group changed from $\beta = 0.19$ ($p < 0.05$) at time 1, to $\beta = 0.33$ ($p < 0.001$) at time 2, for a total change of +76.5%. When compared to the 45-59 year old group, this is a considerable difference, meeting the correspondence rule set out in this thesis. For instance, the middle-aged group began with an association between sense of belonging and meaning in life of $\beta = 0.52$ ($p < 0.001$) at time 1, which changed to an association of $\beta = 0.18$ ($p < 0.05$) at time 2, for a total change of -65.9% (a change in the opposite direction). These results support the hypothesis that social meaning – or the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life – increases to a greater degree for older adult volunteers than younger adult volunteers throughout the intensive Olympic volunteer experience.

This hypothesis was derived from the concept of generativity, which posits that the demanding period of midlife whereby work and family relationships and their responsibilities and obligations may make “one may feel an urge to withdraw somewhat [in older age], only to experience a loss of the stimulus of belonging, of being needed” (Erikson, 1982/1998, p. 112). Aside from continuing to disengage and stagnate (which would not occur among this sample of specialized volunteers), the other response to this is for older adults to continue to be generative, by actively engaging with the community in order to benefit society and upcoming generations. Many middle-aged adults – on the other hand – are already engaged with their communities through workforce participation, caring for children, and perhaps caring for elderly parents.

Consistent with generativity, significantly different baseline associations for sense of belonging and meaning in life among the two age groups were found: $\beta = 0.19$ ($p < 0.05$) for the older adult group and $\beta = 0.52$ ($p < 0.001$) for the middle-age group. These
different levels of social meaning before this volunteering experience, suggest that
meaning in life is derived more from social sources for middle-aged adults than for older
adults. This is reasonable, considering that middle age adults have greater opportunities
to experience sources of social meaning including fulfilling relationships, social support,
generativity and other socially meaningful experiences than older adults due to age-
related role losses.

Social role losses experienced by older adults (Bradley, 2000; Greenfield &
Marks, 2004; Newman et al., 1985) likely provide the impetus for the fulfillment of social
meaning among older adults. One lack of social roles evident in this sample of older
adults is the significant difference in workforce participation rates, with 65.0% of the
middle-age group and only 14.4% of the older adult group currently employed in a full-
time basis. However, the line of thinking outlined in this study proposes that social role
losses experienced in older age have an effect on how meaning in life is constructed. At
baseline, levels of independent meaning are slightly higher than social meaning for older
adults. More specifically, the baseline associations for older adults among self-esteem
and meaning in life is $\beta = 0.31$ ($p < 0.01$), but only $\beta = 0.19$ ($p < 0.05$) for sense of
belonging and meaning in life. It is possible that volunteering is pursued in order to
make up for this discrepancy.

While on the surface it may seem as if voluntary activity provides older adults
with a work-replacement role and an opportunity to experience achievement; many older
adults are attracted to the opportunity to help others (Chappell & Prince, 1997;
Guterbock & Fries, 1997; Williams et al., 2010). It has been found that the four most
popular motivations for volunteering among older adults include taking responsibility for
those who need help, giving back to the community, helping others and making a
difference (Williams et al., 2010). This, among other existing literature regarding the
social and generative nature of volunteerism among older adults, is consistent with the results of this sample of older adult volunteers.

**Hypothesis 2: Increased Independent Meaning for Middle-Aged Adults**

The second hypothesis in phase 2 predicted that independent meaning – or the association between self-esteem and meaning in life – would increase throughout an intensive Olympic volunteering experience to a greater degree for middle-aged volunteers than for older adult volunteers. This hypothesis was also confirmed. The association between self-esteem and meaning in life among the 45-59 year old age group changed from $\beta = 0.27$ ($p < 0.001$) at time 1, to $\beta = 0.47$ ($p < 0.001$) at time 2, for a total change of +75.9%. Compared to the older adult group, this is a considerable difference because the 60 year and older group began with an association between self-esteem and meaning in life of $\beta = 0.31$ ($p < 0.01$) at time 1, which changed to $\beta = 0.22$ ($p < 0.01$) at time 2, for a total change of -28.3%. The 75.9% increase in independent meaning among middle-aged volunteers is also consistent with the notion that volunteering in the Olympics increased self-esteem and individual values, more than those linked to social connectedness and later stage generativity.

In addition, middle-aged adults reported baseline associations between sense of belonging and meaning in life to the degree of $\beta = 0.52$ ($p < 0.001$) and self-esteem and meaning in life to the degree of $\beta = 0.27$ ($p < 0.001$). This discrepancy between social meaning and independent meaning at baseline may be why middle-aged adults, like younger adults, are found to volunteer for individualistic reasons to a greater degree than seniors (Briggs et al., 2010). Middle-aged volunteers may value the opportunity that volunteering provides to experience sources of meaning in life including achievement (Emmons, 2003; Wong, 1998), personal development (Ebersole &
DeVogler, 1981; Steger et al., 2006; Waterman et al., 2008) and the experience of enjoyable work (Bonebright et al., 2000). These three particular sources of meaning each correspond with the values of achievement, self-direction and stimulation, respectively.

Meaning and Generativity Revisited

The meaning of generativity changes through the life course from middle to older age. In midlife, obligations and responsibilities including caring for children and sometimes elderly parents can make generativity a ubiquitous aspect of daily life. However, in older age after children have become independent and parents have deceased, Erikson (1982/1998) reminds us that a number of older adults have the option to either continue with generative activity, or to disengage from the community and stagnate.

There are two crucial differentiating aspects between older adults who choose to continue to be generative, and those who choose to withdraw and stagnate. The first is values, and the second is self-determination. Socially responsible older adults will likely continue to be attracted to realizing social values as they had in midlife through generative sources of meaning, such as volunteering. On the other hand, Erikson suggests that individuals who do not find these socially oriented values personally meaningful but have been obligated to be generative in midlife are more likely to disengage from the community. This implies that these individuals would be liable to exercise their autonomy in older age by focusing on the realization of more individually oriented values through individual sources of meaning. Thus, the generativity versus stagnation stage of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development specifically
differentiates between those who choose to construct meaning in life socially, or individually. Given that we focused on only volunteers, Erikson’s (1982/1998) propositions pertaining to stagnation or withdrawal could not be examined in this thesis, and require further study.

However, sense of belonging is a fundamental need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and Erikson reminds us that withdrawing from society can create a loss of the “stimulus of belonging, of being needed” (Erikson, 1981/1998, p 112). So, in order to make up for social role losses (Bradley, 2000; Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Newman et al., 1985), some older adults may be attracted to volunteering not to realize generative values such as benevolence or universalism, but in order to increase social capital (Theurer & Wister, 2010). In this case, the sources of meaning that would likely be more fulfilling would be social support and fulfilling relationships than the generative aspects of the volunteering experience itself.

**Limitations**

This study has a number of limitations. First, the results were derived from a pre-existing dataset that was created prior to all of the research questions of this thesis were formulated. Since the study was developed to explore differences in the experience of middle and older VANOC volunteers, not all measures were available. Second, the sample is of a small group of highly select group of individuals with above average levels of education and health, which will likely to affect the generalizability of findings. For example, 94.7% of the total sample has an education level that is greater than or equal to high school graduation and 95.4% report a health status that is greater than or equal to good health. Third, there is not an equivalent control group of non-volunteers so
volunteers are being compared on the basis of age difference and level of previous volunteer engagement only. Therefore, propositions pertaining to volunteering versus not volunteering within and between age groups could not be examined. Fourth, the belongingness measure is a single item measure taken from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), and was chosen initially along with the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale in order to compare the group to the general population. If aspects of this study were to be reproduced, the design could be improved if this CCHS ordinal belongingness measure was replaced by a different measure, such as the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Fifth, the pre-existing dataset did not contain rich qualitative data.

It should also be noted that while the fundamental needs of meaning in life, self-esteem and sense of belonging were incorporated; the fundamental need of control was not included in this study despite being measured as mastery in the questionnaire. Although it was revealed in a separate analysis that the control measure of mastery was associated with meaning in life, this relationship became nonsignificant for both age groups once self-esteem and sense of belonging were controlled for. This justifies the selection of self-esteem and sense of belonging as the two fundamental needs of interest when investigating meaning in life by way of independent and social meaning.

**Implications of Results: Volunteer Recruitment and Workforce Motivation**

These results have a number of practical implications, most notably to workforces comprised of voluntary and older workers. Managers who intend on acquiring older volunteers could tailor recruitment efforts by focusing on the social and
generative aspects of the volunteering experience. These aspects include the opportunity to make new friendships and help the community. Conversely, managers who require assistance from middle-aged volunteers would be better served by stressing the individual aspects of available volunteering positions. These aspects include the opportunity to experience achievement, personal development and enjoyable work.

Similarly, these results could have implications for motivating middle-aged and older workers that are employed in non-voluntary positions. For instance, although younger workers often respond to achievement-based pay incentives, this method of motivation may prove ineffective among older workers. Furthermore, a workforce that is largely comprised of older workers would likely benefit by encouraging employees to express generativity in their communities through volunteerism.

**Future Studies**

As volunteerism had been associated separately with generativity as well as meaning in life, the goal of this study was to extend the connection between generativity and volunteerism into the meaning in life literature. However, this literature remains a rich area for further research and development. Some of these areas include: investigating meaning in life throughout the life course, uncovering the connections between meaning in life and subjective well-being, and investigating the phenomena included in the independent and social meaning typology.

**Meaning in Life throughout the Life Course**

Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development posits that throughout the life course, different challenges and realities confront individuals. This leads to a number of
questions regarding meaning in life throughout the life course. This study showed that among this sample of volunteers that there are particular times in the life course when levels of social meaning or independent meaning appear to be different. However, this has yet to be extended to young adults and non-volunteers. Furthermore, the extent to which values and mean levels of meaning in life change throughout the life course are still relatively unknown.

**Volunteerism, Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being**

Not only has volunteerism been connected with meaning in life (see Bradley, 2000; Emmons, 2003), but volunteerism is also associated with subjective well-being (see Greenfield & Marks, 2004; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Pilkington, Windsor, & Crisp, 2012). This is interesting to consider, given that meaning in life has also been found to be strongly correlated with the subjective well-being measures of life satisfaction (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Lightsey & Boyraz, 2011; Pan, Wong, Joubert, & Chan, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Steger et al., 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2011), positive affect (e.g. Boyraz & Efstathiou, 2011; King et al., 2006; Lightsey & Boyraz, 2011), negative affect (e.g. Boyraz & Efstathiou, 2011; Pan, Wong, Joubert, & Chan, 2007), and happiness (e.g. French & Joseph, 1999; McGregor & Little, 1998; Ryff, 1989). This provides a possibility that meaning in life may play a mediating role in the relationship between volunteering and subjective well-being, which makes this an area worthy of further investigation.

**The Individual and Social Meaning Typology**

The individual and social meaning typology introduced in this thesis provides an area of future exploration. Since the meaning in life literature is underdeveloped, the
experimentally and theoretically derived sources for the independent and social
determinants of meaning still require further testing, expansion and refinement.

This testing, expansion and refinement could be undertaken in a number of
different settings. For example, the individual and social meaning typology could not
only be applied to compare differences between volunteers and non-volunteers across
the life cycle, but also could be used to better understand the effects of such phenomena
as nostalgia and reminiscence, religious attendance, the achievement of athletic goals
as well as the seniors centre participation on meaning in life. Furthermore, the
measurement of individual and social meaning could be used to better understand the
differential motivations of individuals in paid and voluntary work forces. For example, in
an aging paid or voluntary work force it may be discovered that older adults are not as
motivated by achievement-based reward systems that appeal to individual meaning as
much as younger adults.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this investigation was to explore that as a form of generative
behaviour, volunteering had a different meaning for older adults than for middle age
adults. The results supported the hypotheses in terms of the degree of differentiation
between the age groups. However, since mean levels of the variables showed
similarities between age groups and remained relatively stable across time periods,
methods had to be employed in order to discover how associations between meaning
and other key constructs was different between the two age groups.
The intention of the first phase was to demonstrate that meaning in life was associated with previous community volunteering experience to a greater degree for older adults than for middle-age adults. This hypothesis was derived from Erikson’s generativity concept as well as literature that illustrated that volunteering contributes to a sense of meaning in life among older adults by giving seniors a sense of purpose (e.g. Bradley, 2000). While the results showed that previous community volunteering experience was associated with meaning in life among older adults, it was not expected that no significant relationship would be found among the middle-age group.

The second phase had two purposes regarding the experience of an intensive Olympic volunteering experience. The first was to show that the association between sense of belonging and meaning in life – or social meaning – would increase to a greater degree among older adults than middle-aged adults. The second was to show that the association between self-esteem and meaning in life – or individual meaning – would increase to a greater degree among middle-aged adults than older adults. Both of these hypotheses were confirmed. However, an interesting and unexpected finding was that social meaning decreased for middle aged adults and individual meaning decreased for the older adults over the same time frame, with a similar level of exposure to the same intensive Olympic volunteering experience. These findings supported generativity theory, but also revealed some complexities in types of generativity that may be functioning at different points in the life courses of individuals.

Meaning in life is a rich and understudied area that has plenty of opportunities for future research, and exploring meaning in life throughout the life course is only one of those areas. For instance, the distinct individual and social sources of meaning outlined in the typology presented in this thesis could also provide a starting point for further
research. Lastly, there are plenty of connections between meaning in life and subjective well-being that have yet to be investigated.
Appendix
2010 Older Volunteer Project Questionnaire #1

PLEASE CIRCLE OR FILL IN THE CORRECT ANSWER AS ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE

Socio-Demographic Questions

If you are under the age of 45 you do not need to proceed with the questionnaire.

1. What year were you born? ______

2. What is your sex?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Prefer not to answer

3. What is your current marital status?
   a. Married
   b. Common Law
   c. Living with a partner
   d. Widowed
   e. Separated
   f. Divorced
   g. Single
   h. Don’t know
   i. Prefer not to answer

4. Are you currently living alone?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

5. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?
   a. Some high school
   b. High school diploma (or equivalent)
   c. Some trade, technical or vocational school
   d. Some community college
   e. Some university
   f. Diploma or certificate from trade, technical or vocational school
g. Diploma or certificate from community college
h. Bachelor or undergraduate degree
i. Professional degree
j. Masters
k. Earned doctorate
l. Other: __________________________________________________________
m. Don’t know
n. Prefer not to answer

6. What is your current work status?
   a. Full-time
   b. Part-time
   c. Semi-retired (retired from full-time work but continue to work part time)
   d. Unemployed - Looking for employment
   e. Unemployed - Not looking for employment
   f. Long Term Disability (not working because of a disability)
   g. Retired
   h. Unpaid labour
   i. Don’t know
   j. Prefer not to answer

7. Were you born a Canadian citizen?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t know
   d. Prefer not to answer

8. If you were not born a Canadian citizen have you or are you:
   a. Become a Canadian citizen
   b. A landed immigrant
   c. A citizen from another country (please name country):
      ____________________________
   d. Don’t know
   e. Prefer not to answer

Health and Well-being Questions

9. In general, would you say that your health is:
   a. Excellent
   b. Very Good
   c. Good
   d. Fair
   e. Poor
f. Don’t know
g. Prefer not to answer

10. Do you currently have a chronic health condition (a long-term condition that has lasted or is expected to last more than 6 months and has been diagnosed by a health professional)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t know
   d. Prefer not to answer

11. Does a long-term physical or mental condition or health problem affect the amount or the kind of activity that you are able to do?
   a. Often
   b. Sometimes
   c. Never
   d. Don’t know
   e. Prefer not to answer

12. How many days per week (on average over the past 3 months) have you engaged in moderately intense physical activity (for at least 30 minutes each time)? Moderate intensity is defined as some increase in breathing rate and heart rate, but not enough to work up a sweat, for example brisk walking, heavy housework, or yard work.
   a. 0
   b. 1
   c. 2
   d. 3
   e. 4
   f. 5
   g. 6
   h. 7
   i. Don’t know
   j. Prefer not to answer

13. How would you describe your current stress level?
   a. No stress at all
   b. A bit stressed
   c. Moderately stressed
   d. Very stressed
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer
14. Please respond to the following statement: “I can do just about anything I really set my mind to”.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree or disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
   f. Don’t know
   g. Prefer not to answer

15. Overall, how satisfied are you with your life?
   a. Very satisfied
   b. Satisfied
   c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   d. Dissatisfied
   e. Very dissatisfied
   f. Don’t know
   g. Prefer not to answer

Social Participation Questions

16. Do you belong to any groups or participate in group activities such as a social club, a hobby group, religious services or meetings?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t know
   d. Prefer not to answer

17. If yes, approximately how many hours per month do you engage in these activities (total hours)? __________

18. How often do you see any friends or family members outside of your household?
   a. Every day
   b. At least once a week
   c. At least once a month
   d. Less than once a month
   e. Not at all
   f. Don’t know
   g. Prefer not to answer
19. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?
   a. Very strong
   b. Somewhat strong
   c. Somewhat weak
   d. Very weak
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer

Volunteer Experience Questions

20. In the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, did you volunteer through a group or organization?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Don’t know
   d. Prefer not to answer

21. In the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, did you volunteer in another capacity that was not for a family/friend, group or organization?
   a. Yes- please specify: ____________________________________________
   b. No
   c. Don’t know
   d. Prefer not to answer

22. If you volunteered in the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, approximately how many hours per month did you volunteer and for how many months? _______ hours _______ months

23. If you volunteered in the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, did you do any of the following? Mark all that apply (yes; no; don’t know; prefer not to answer).
   a. Canvass/collect donations, fundraise or sell tickets _______
   b. Organize or supervise activities or events for an organization _______
   c. Consulting or administrative work or were you an unpaid member of a board or committee for an organization _______
   d. Anything else not already mentioned

I). ________________________________________________________________

II). _______________________________________________________________

III). _______________________________________________________________
24. In the 12 months prior to volunteering for VANOC, did you enjoy the duties that you performed?
   a. Very much
   b. Somewhat
   c. Not very much
   d. Not at all
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer

25. Do you think that your volunteer position at VANOC adequately utilizes your skills?
   a. Yes (please explain):
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
   b. No (please explain):
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
      ______________________________________________________
   c. Prefer not to answer

26. How did you find out about volunteering for VANOC?
   a. Print (i.e. poster, newspaper, brochure, etc.)
   b. Television
   c. Internet
   d. Word of mouth
   e. Other ________________________________________________
   f. Don’t know
   g. Prefer not to answer

27. Why did you decide to volunteer for VANOC?
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
Altruism and Patriotism Questions

28. How would you describe your motivation to help others?
   a. Highly motivated
   b. Somewhat motivated
   c. Not very motivated
   d. Not at all motivated
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer

29. How would you describe the satisfaction you get out of helping others?
   a. Very satisfying
   b. Somewhat satisfying
   c. Not very satisfying
   d. Not at all satisfying
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer

30. How would you describe your patriotism* for Canada (*the love for or devotion towards one’s country)?
   a. Very strong
   b. Somewhat strong
   c. Moderate
   d. Weak
   e. Don’t know
   f. Prefer not to answer
Please answer the following questions about your volunteer work using the scale below:

How often

<table>
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<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never.</td>
<td>A few times a year or less</td>
<td>Once a month or less</td>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>Every day</td>
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</table>

33.___________ I feel emotionally drained from my work.

34.___________ I feel used up at the end of the workday.

35.___________ I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.

36.___________ Working all day is really a strain for me.

37.___________ I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my work.

38.___________ I feel burned out from my work.

39.___________ I feel I am making an effective contribution to what this organization does.

40.___________ I have become less interested in my work since I started this job.

41.___________ I have become less enthusiastic about my work.

42.___________ In my opinion, I am good at my job.

43.___________ I feel exhilarated when I accomplish something at work.

44.___________ I have accomplished many worthwhile things at this job.

45.___________ I just want to do my job and not be bothered.

46.___________ I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes to anything
47. __________ I doubt the significance of my work.

48. __________ At my work, I feel confident that I am effective at getting things done.

**Please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.**

49. You feel that you have a number of good qualities.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

50. You feel that you’re a person of worth at least equal to others.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

51. You are able to do things as well as most other people.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

52. You take a positive attitude toward yourself.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

53. On the whole you are satisfied with yourself.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
54. All in all, you’re inclined to feel like a failure
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

Please answer YES or NO to the following questions.

During the past few weeks, did you ever feel:

55. Particularly excited or interested in something?______

56. Did you ever feel so restless that you couldn’t sit long in a chair?______

57. Proud because someone complimented you on something you had done?______

58. Very lonely or remote from other people?______

59. Pleased about having accomplished something?______

60. Bored?______

61. On top of the world?______

62. Depressed or very unhappy?______

63. That things were going your way?______

64. Upset because someone criticized you?______
Please take a moment to think about what makes your life and existence feel important and significant to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below and circle only one number for each question:

Absolutely | Mostly | Somewhat | Can't Say | Somewhat | Mostly | Absolutely
False | False | False | True or False | True | True | True

65. I understand my life's meaning.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

66. I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

67. I am always looking to find my life's purpose.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

68. My life has a clear sense of purpose.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

69. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

70. I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Absolutely False</th>
<th>Mostly False</th>
<th>Somewhat False</th>
<th>Can't Say True or False</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Mostly True</th>
<th>Absolutely True</th>
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</table>

71. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

72. I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

73. My life has no clear purpose.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

74. I am searching for meaning in my life.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

75. Are you a paid volunteer for VANOC?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Don't know

Thank you for participating in this study. Please add any comments about the questionnaire below so that we can improve it for the full study.
References


and Hong Kong. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 41(9), 740-750.


