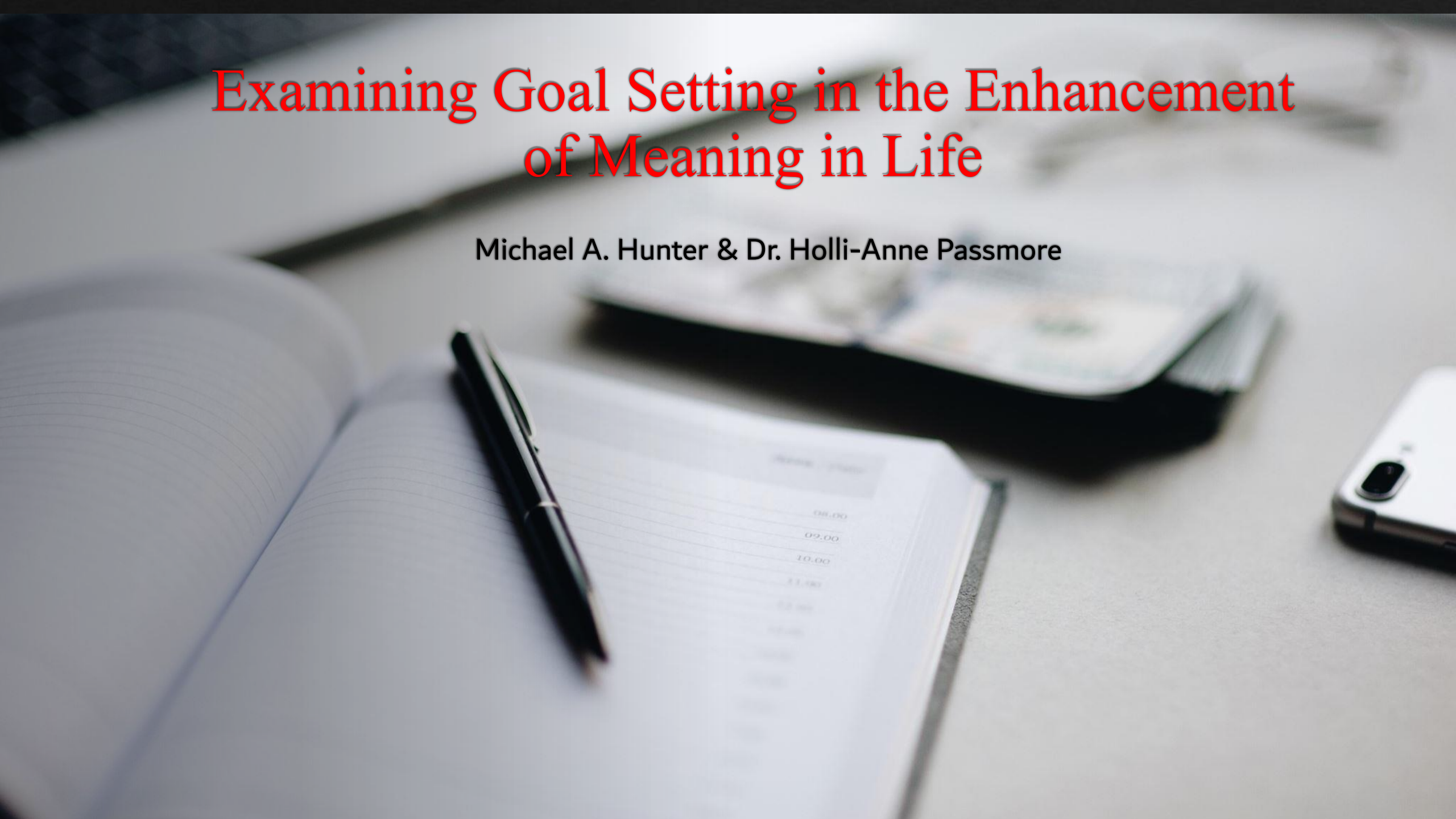



Examining Goal Setting in the Enhancement of Meaning in Life

Michael A. Hunter & Dr. Holli-Anne Passmore



Meaning is essential
to healthy human
functioning.



Three aspects of meaning in life



Purpose: the motivational aspect



Coherence: the cognitive aspect



Significance/mattering: the
emotional aspect

Three distinct outlooks

Significance: It is important to feel as if your efforts, experiences and general behaviour are contributing to something you find significant and worth engaging with.

Coherence: To feel like the world works in an orderly fashion, and that the world makes sense in some fundamental way.

Purpose: It is important to have a broad direction in life, often composed of multiple missions and purposeful endeavors.

◆ There is a notable theoretical overlap between goal setting principles and meaning in life.

Four principles of effective goal-setting



1) Helps produce specific and clear goals



2) Helps people avoid conflicts between distinct goals



3) Encourages the user to honestly assess whether their goals are practical and attainable



4) Walks participants through the creation of “if-then” strategies to overcome the obstacles they will face

Purpose

- ◆ Purpose specifically involves having future-oriented goals and a direction in life (Martela & Steger, 2016)
- ◆ Exposing participants to a writing exercise that was explicitly developed to facilitate the articulation of one's future goals should augment one's sense of purpose, both acutely and across significant periods of time.

Coherence

- ◆ The constructed framework the individual uses to interpret their own behaviour and predict how the world will respond to their behaviour.
- ◆ Careful articulation of one's goals is like to leave the participant with a more objective and refined coherence framework than they formerly held.

Significance

- ◆ “The value-laden evaluation of one’s life as a whole regarding how important, worthwhile, and inherently valuable it feels” (Martela & Steger, 2015; pg. 525)
- ◆ Goal-setting facilitates reflection upon what one finds valuable, and defines how they can bring that value into the world through the pursuit of their goals

Addressing the research gap

- ◆ We administered a previously validated goal-setting intervention and examined its influence on meaning in life.

Our study

3-part study that was completed online,
over the course of 2 weeks.

Participants received SONA credits as compensation.

Participants

$N = 187$ undergraduates

Part 1- Baseline Measures

Propensity for personal growth

Meaning in life

Well being

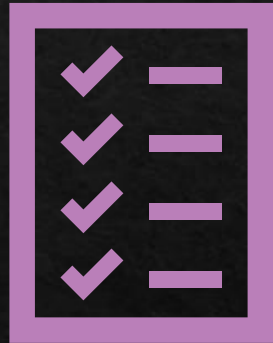
Self competency

Part 2 – Goal setting exercise

Randomly assigned into two groups:

- 1) Self-authoring goal setting exercise ($N = 86$)
- 2) Active placebo condition ($N = 101$)

Part 3



Post measures



Qualitative questions

Qualitative Questions

Did you change your behaviour
AS A RESULT of completing the
Self-Authoring Writing Exercise
in Part 2? Yes or No

If Yes, please tell us about what
behaviours you changed the
past week as a result of
completing the self-authoring
writing exercises in Part 2.

What did you learn or gain from
participating in this study?

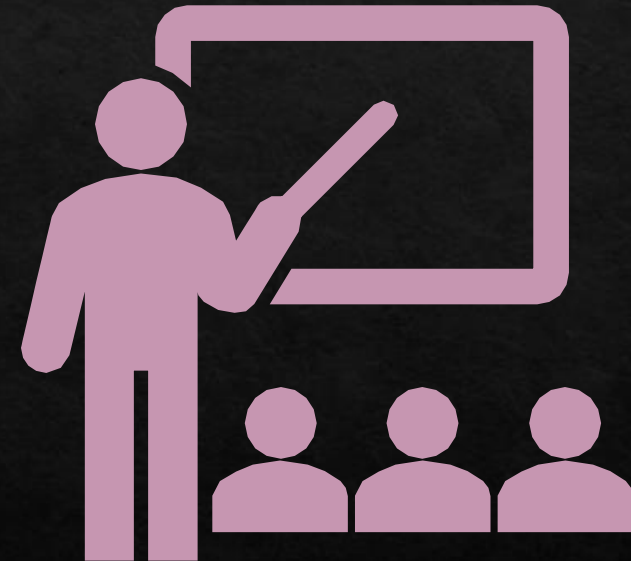
Qualitative Responses

Students overwhelmingly responded positively to the study. Out of 86 participants, 83 wrote a relatively detailed description about something they had gained from the study.

As one student put it... “I actually enjoyed this study.”

Students wrote things like...

- ◆ “I am confident in who I am as a person and the person I will be in the future because of my actions today.”
- ◆ “This week I was able to study more because I had read over my goals in life and my university degree is one of them. As a result, I did very well on my midterm.”
- ◆ “I know that in this short amount of time I have made a lot of positive changes in my life that have overall improved my mental health and have made me feel like I am working towards my goals.”
- ◆ “I think it was a good reminder of why I am in school and how much my goals mean to me, and that I have the power to make decisions every day that will be useful to me for the next day.”



Some students
explicitly
mentioned
meaning or
purpose in their
reponses

- ◆ “I unconsciously saw more meaning in my activities/behaviours/decisions (which I am realizing now)”
- ◆ “I have better sense of purpose of my life”
- ◆ I learned that it is never too late to find your purpose/mission in life, and that all my feeling and emotions are valid”

Potential implications

- ◆ Professors or administration could make this type of exercise more available to students, perhaps part of a regular class.
- ◆ We are currently running a follow-up study to see if the intervention was still impacting participants; that is, if they have continued to be inspired to grow especially during these unprecedented times.

Thank you!

- ◆ Thank you to Holli-Anne – the best mentor and friend a person could ask for.
- ◆ Thanks, Paul Davies, for allowing us to continue with directed studies under Holli-Anne's supervision.
- ◆ Thanks for the Meaning crew for being so cool.

