

PURPOSE IN LIFE AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

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The present study was designed to examine the relationship between participation in campus and community organizations and a sense of meaning and purpose in life among college students. Purpose in life is considered a crucial factor in mental health, while its absence is frequently found in neurosis, according to the existential viewpoint (5, 6).

Crumbaugh and Maholick (2, 3, 4) have shown that this factor can be measured by their Purpose-in-Life Test (PIL). Scores on the PIL have placed individuals accurately into patient and non-patient categories and predicted socio-economic status.

It seemed logical that persons suffering from existential frustration would withdraw from interaction with others. Thus it was hypothesized that PIL scores would be positively related to participation in formal organizations.

Since on personality tests of high face validity *Ss* tend to fake answers to appear socially desirable (1), it was further hypothesized that *Ss* who believed that they would be evaluated by a person of high status on the basis of their scores, would score higher than *Ss* who believed they would remain anonymous in a study conducted by a graduate student.

METHOD

Subjects. The *Ss* were 122 students (60 males and 62 females) in an introductory psychology course, mostly juniors and seniors (78%), representing 33 major fields of concentration.

Materials. The materials consisted of a personal data sheet, the PIL, and a social participation check list. The PIL consists of 20 statements, each to be responded to by indicating personal agreement or disagreement on a 7-point scale. The check list enumerated alphabetically 124 university-sponsored clubs and organizations, and 28 community groups, with space for additional listings. *Ss* are asked to check any organization in which they are active members.

Procedure. Both, experimenter and classroom instructor, were present to administer the test. No verbal instructions were given beyond, "to read the directions on the test booklet and to begin working." The written directions informed all *Ss* that the test consisted of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Half of the *Ss* were informed furthermore that their professor was interested in their personal performance (personal involvement set). The other half were informed that a graduate student was conducting the study, who was interested only in group performance (personal detachment set). No questions

were permitted following the distribution of the test material. There was no time limit. At the following class meeting the experimenter explained the purpose of the study and obtained reactions from the *Ss*.

Before scoring the PILs, these were separated into 4 categories according to instructional set of the *S*, and number of organizations checked, 0-1 representing low, 2+ representing high organizational participation, the median being at 2. Actually, 0 organizations were checked by 21%; 1 by 27%; 2, by 16%; while the remaining 36% checked 3-8 organizations.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows PIL means and SDs for the 4 categories described above. Under instructions of personal detachment, low and high participation in organizations was equally distributed, with 31 *Ss*

TABLE 1. PIL PERFORMANCE BY PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONAL RESPONSE SET

Instructional response set	Participation in organizations					
	low (0-1)			high (2-8)		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
detachment	31	100.45	13.94	31	106.10	19.75
involvement	28	97.39	13.60	32	108.47	15.11

in each cell. But under instructions of personal involvement only 28 *Ss* were low social participants and 32 were high in participation, a slight difference in accordance with the social desirability hypothesis. To make the number of *Ss* equal for each cell, for further analysis, the three larger cells were reduced to 28 each by discarding 10 *Ss* randomly.

For the 28 *Ss* in each cell (not shown in Table 1) the mean PIL scores were under conditions of personal involvement 97.39 and 112.54 for "low" and "high" organizational participation respectively. Mean PIL scores under conditions of detachment were 98.21 and 108.71 for "low" and "high" organizational participation.

A fixed-effects, two-way analysis of variance was used to test the significance of the differences found.

The hypothesis that *Ss* who scored high on the PIL would belong to a greater number of organizations than low-scoring *Ss* was clearly confirmed ($F = 22.27; p < .001$).

The hypothesis that *Ss* taking the PIL in a set of personal involvement will score higher than *Ss* taking it in a set of personal detachment, was not supported ($F = 0.73, p > .05$). The par-

ticularly low F ratios of the instructional sets ($F = .30$) and interaction effects ($F = .73$) indicate that the sample tested may not have been completely random. The use of an accidental sample in the present study would account for this fact.

A further analysis of the data showed that regardless of instructions, women had significantly higher PIL scores than men ($\chi^2 = 7.18; p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that students who participate in at least two organizations have significantly higher PIL scores than those who belong to only one or none. However, the research design did not take into account the fact that an individual may have a high PIL and belong to a single organization to which he is wholly committed. Although this is an important consideration, the results of this study were not confounded since significant differences were obtained despite the fact that some individuals with high PIL were grouped with students in the low participation category.

Individuals in the high PIL group have been characterized as having more meaning and direction, better defined goals and objectives as well as greater self-confidence than S s in the low PIL category. Low purpose in life, however, does not necessarily mean that the individual has a disfunctional mode of responding (5). Rather, such performance may indicate that the individual is questioning his value system and this analysis may be a prerequisite for changing that belief system. Means obtained for high and low participation groups, correspond to reported norms (3), and fall within the range of scores obtained by a college population.

Contrary to the prediction of the second hypothesis, S s did not try to make themselves appear more socially desirable when instructions stated that they were being tested by their own professor as opposed to an anonymous graduate student. Failure to find support for the second hypothesis was interpreted as evidence for the validity of the instrument even when used under presumably different motivational sets.

Because of the restricted cell frequencies, observed sex differences which showed more women scored above the median PIL score than men could not be included in the analysis of variance. Crumbaugh and Maholick (3) report significant sex differences favoring women in all categories tested except college students,

where no differences were found. Based on these findings sex was omitted from the present study as an independent variable.

SUMMARY

The Purpose in Life test (PIL) was given to 122 college undergraduates under two differing response sets, and with the request that they check on a list the organizations to which they belong. The hypothesis that students who have high scores on the PIL would participate in a greater number of organizations than students scoring low on the PIL, was supported ($p < .001$). Failure to find evidence for a second hypothesis which predicted *Ss* tested by their professor, interested in their individual scores, would obtain higher PIL scores than *Ss* tested by an outside experimenter interested only in the group performance, was interpreted as support for the validity of the PIL measure. Significantly more women than men scored above the median PIL score ($p < .01$). Results were discussed in comparison with earlier findings of Crumbaugh and Maholick, authors of the PIL instrument.

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