Psychology Department Colloquium

Life is Pretty Meaningful: The Commonplace Experience of Meaning in Life

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Abstract

Searching, creating, constructing, and making: These are the verbs that psychologists typically associate with the human experience of meaning. Meaning is something the human meaning-maker creates. I present the case for a different set of verbs in the experience of meaning: Seeing, recognizing, and noticing. The breadth of the human experience of meaning demonstrates that meaning, sometimes, happens to us, in the absence of conscious reflection or constructive processes. Rooted in basic processes of associative learning and perception, such meaning can be understood as occurring via intuitive processes facilitated by positive mood. I will argue that one reason the experience of meaning is adaptive is because it provides information about the reliability of signals in the environment, connecting the person to the environment in important ways. I present studies providing empirical support for these ideas, demonstrating that judgments of meaning in life are enhanced through subtle exposure to the “sense” that exists in the world.

September 27, 2012 4 pm
Refreshments served at 3:45
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