Am I Worth It? Loneliness, Self-Esteem & Locus of Control: Correlates of Meaning-in-Life

Katie O'Neal, Mark Vosvick, Ph.D., Mandy Alene Logan, & Chwee-Lye Chng, Ph.D.

University of North Texas

INTRODUCTION

❖ Finding meaning-in-life for people living with HIV (PLWH) can be viewed as a type of self-actualization where stress is placed on meeting one's full potential (Fryback & Reinert, 1999). Meaning-in-life research holds some promise uniting the many ways in which psychologists attempt to understand the events, states, traits, and institutions that define and determine human happiness (Steger, 2009).
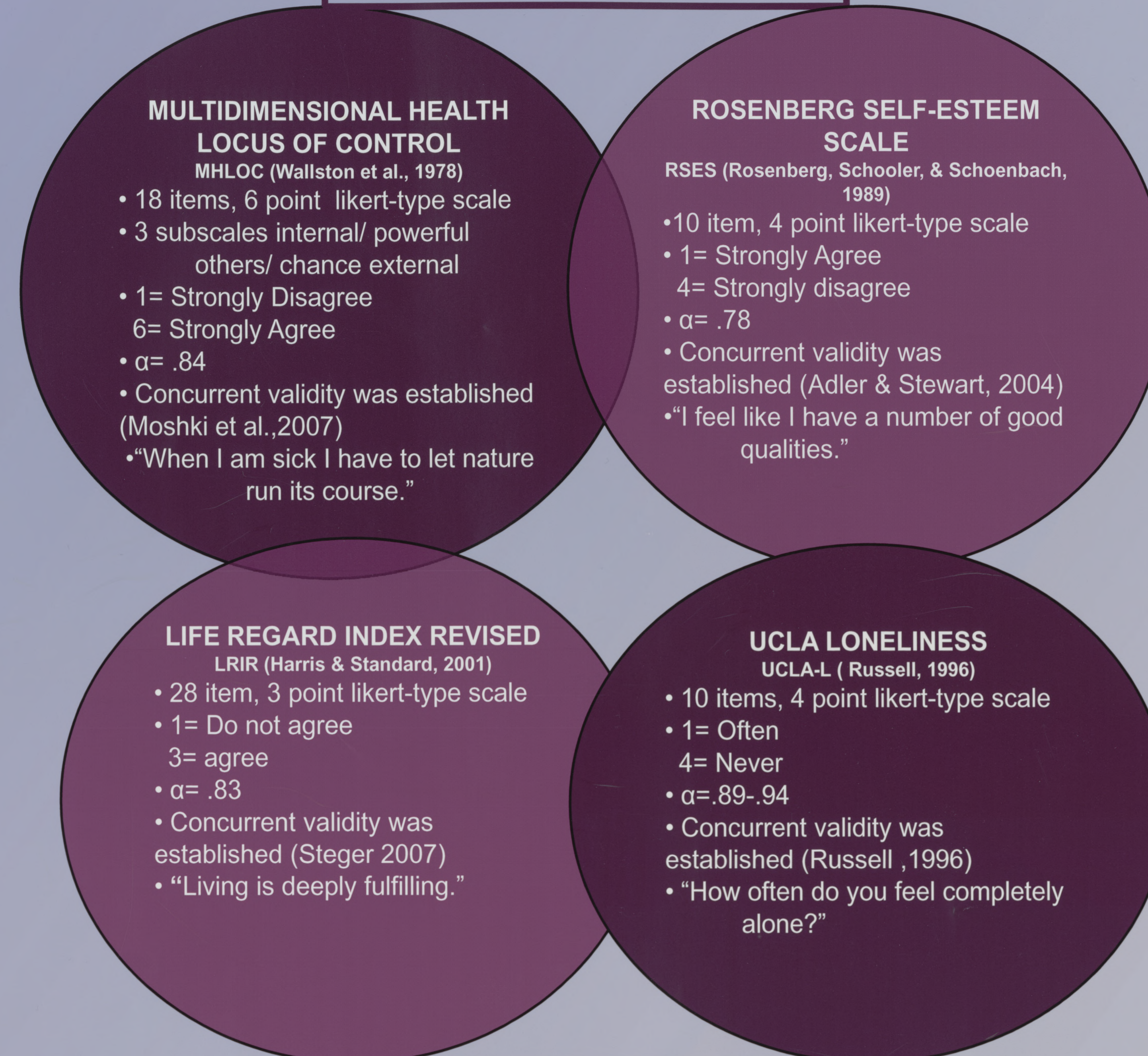
❖ Peplau & Perlman (1982) define loneliness as the painful feeling that happens when one's social relationships seem to be less pleasing than what is desired. An AIDS diagnosis can diminish social support from family, friends and others (Cherry& Smith, 1993).

❖ Locus of control refers to the degree to which individuals feel that outcomes are caused by their own actions (internal) or outside forces (external; Hares, 1976). Locus of control based on chance is the belief that fate, luck, or chance determines one's health status (Wallston, 1989). In the context of HIV the locus of control orientation can negatively influence the physiological course of HIV infection (Olley et al., 2004).

❖ Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall positive evaluation of the self (Cast, 2002). In adulthood, individuals may occupy powerful positions that may increase self-esteem (Dannefer, 1984). Crocker and Wolfe (2001) argued that healthy adult development involves learning to look inside for sources of high self-esteem.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Abraham Maslow (1968; 1971)

Meaning-in-life
↑
LOCUS OF CONTROL CHANCE
↓
Self-Esteem
↑
Loneliness
↓
Basic needs (Air , food, shelter etc.)

Abraham Maslow (1968; 1971) thought of meaning as an intrinsic emergent *property within the person*. His theory is composed of levels and each level need is dependent on the ones below it. The lowest levels must be achieved before preceding on to the next level.

HYPOTHESES

❖ Self-esteem will be significantly positively correlated with meaning-in-life.
❖ Loneliness will be significantly negatively correlated with meaning-in-life
❖ External locus of control will be significantly negatively correlated with meaning-in-life.
❖ Self-esteem, locus of control and loneliness will account for a significant amount of variance in meaning-in-life.

METHOD

Measures

MULTIDIMENSIONAL HEALTH LOCUS OF CONTROL
MHLOC (Wallston et al., 1978)
• 18 items, 6 point likert-type scale
• 3 subscales internal/ powerful others/ chance external
• 1= Strongly Disagree
  6= Strongly Agree
• α= .84
• Concurrent validity was established (Moshki et al.,2007)
• "When I am sick I have to let nature run its course."

ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE
RSES (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989)
• 10 item, 4 point likert-type scale
• 1= Strongly Agree
  4= Strongly disagree
• α= .78
• Concurrent validity was established (Adler & Stewart, 2004)
• "I feel like I have a number of good qualities."

LIFE REGARD INDEX REVISED
LRIR (Harris & Standard, 2001)
• 28 item, 3 point likert-type scale
• 1= Do not agree
  3= agree
• α= .83
• Concurrent validity was established (Steger 2007)
• "Living is deeply fulfilling."

UCLA LONELINESS
UCLA-L (Russell, 1996)
• 10 items, 4 point likert-type scale
• 1= Often
  4= Never
• α=.89-.94
• Concurrent validity was established (Russell ,1996)
• "How often do you feel completely alone?"

Procedures

This study draws on previous intervention research that conceptualizes forgiveness as an effective coping strategy for health-related problems, but now applies it to HIV+ populations. Participants had to be at least 18 years old, HIV-positive and fluent in English to complete the survey. Participants were recruited from various events in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. Participants also received monetary incentives for their participation in the study. IRB approval was received and we received informed consent from all participants.

Participant Characteristics

	M	SD	Range	
AGE	47.4	8.27	24-66	N=73

		Frequency	(%)
GENDER	Female	35	47.9%
ETHNICITY	African Americans	45	61.6%
	European Americans	24	32.9%
	Other	4	5.5%
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heterosexual	41	56.1%
	Homosexual	28	38.4%
	Bisexual	4	5.5%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Unemployed	52	71.2%
	Employed earn < 20,000	58	79.5%
	Received government Asst.	47	64.4%

RESULTS

Univariate

	Mean	SD	Possible Range	Actual Range	α
UCLA-L	25.9	8.3	10-40	10-40	.95
LOC-Chance	21.0	8.2	6-36	6-36	.83
RSES	22.5	3.9	11-44	22-34	.78
LRIR	65.3	13.0	32-84	32-84	.92

Bivariate

	Gender	Age	Education	UCLA-L	LOC-Chance	RSES	LRIR
Gender	-						
Age	.01	-					
Education	-.21	-.16	-				
UCLA-L	-.21	-.21	.04	-			
LOC-Chance	.01	-.18	-.27*	.27*	-		
RSES	.21	.21	.10	-.49**	-.34**	-	
LRIR	.25*	.08	-.13	-.57**	-.25*	.70**	-

*p<.05   **p<.01

Multivariate

Criterion Variable= Meaning-in-life

	β	t	Tolerance	VIF
Age	-.25	-1.93	.86	1.16
Gender	.62	.29	.88	1.14
Education	-1.15	-3.13**	.85	1.17
UCLA-L	-.64	-3.21**	.73	1.37
LOC-Chance	-.08	-.60	.77	1.30
RSES	1.20	5.93**	.63	1.58

(adjusted R^2=.58, $F(6,63)$= 17.12, p<.001)

DISCUSSION

❖ As hypothesized loneliness was negatively correlated with meaning-in-life. Self-esteem was positively correlated with meaning-in-life. While locus of control based on chance was negatively correlated with meaning-in-life.

❖ Age also showed positive correlation with meaning-in-life. These findings are supported by Steger (2009) who found that individuals at later life stages reported more meaning in life than those at earlier life stages. Wong's (2000) theory states that meaning remains an important resource for later in life.

❖ Self-esteem was most highly correlated with meaning-in-life. Frankl stated (1969) that many theorists including Maslow and Erickson reported a positive relationship between meaning-in-life and self-esteem. To achieve meaning an individual must have high self-esteem and possesses a control over life (Battista & Almond 1973).

❖ Clinical implications should focus on developing a positive therapy for personal and self-development for the patient. Clinicians can also use this evidence by creating an intervention with patients to overcome negative emotions and fulfill their needs.
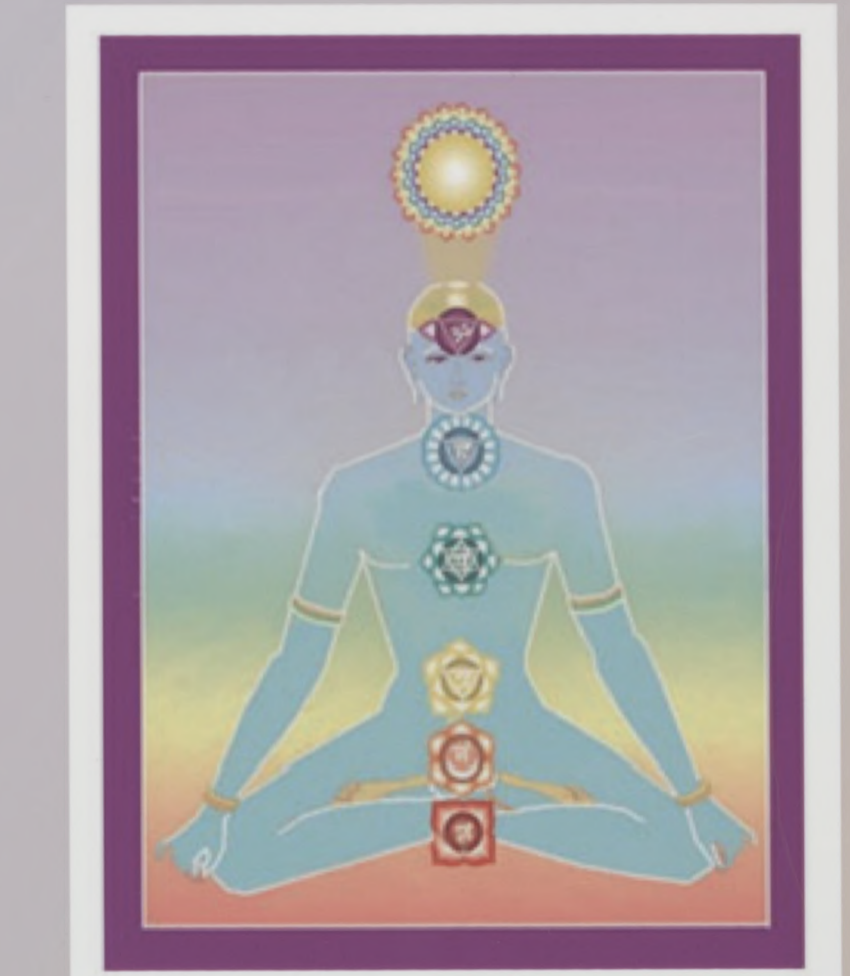
Limitations

This study's correlational design does not permit causal interferences to be drawn. The use of self report data introduces the possibility of respondent bias. Also our recruitment of participants from AIDS service organizations in the Dallas/Fort Worth area limits generalizability. This study is important to both clinicians and researchers because our findings show that individuals with HIV can have a positive meaning-in-life.
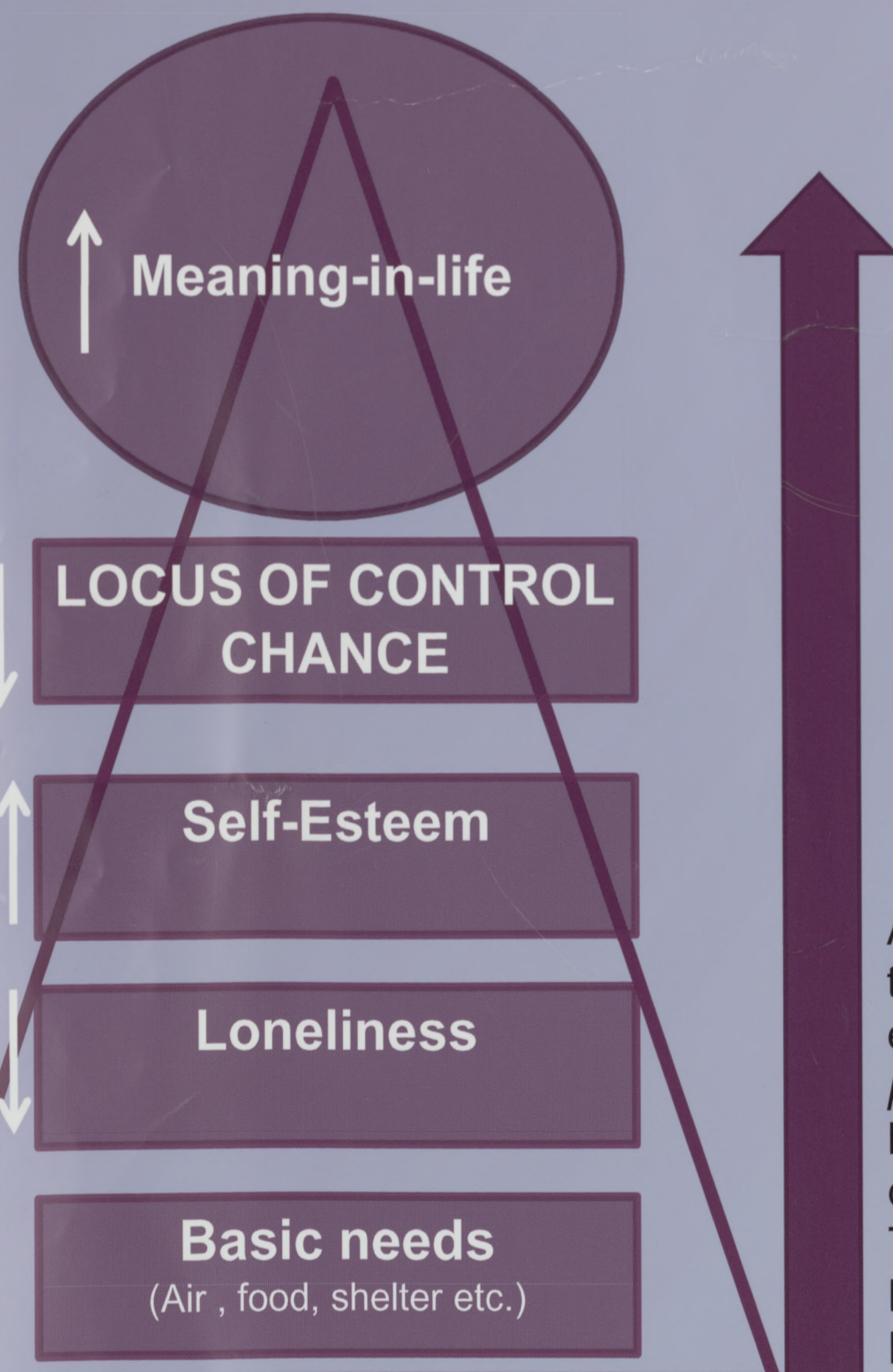
Future Research

Our study offers a glimpse into the complexity of existence for PLWH and provides possible venues through which clinicians can help HIV-positive clients find meaning in their lives. Additionally, our findings point the way to future research that examines how meaning-in-life may contribute to improved quality of life and decreases in mental health problems such as depression resulting from an HIV/AIDS diagnosis.

REFERENCES

Please refer to handout.