

Exploring the motivations, satisfactions, and well-being of agricultural intentional community residents

Jess M. Lasoff-Santos^{a*} and Raymond K. De Young^b
University of Michigan

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Abstract

Intentional communities have long provided an alternative living solution for those wanting to live with a group of others who share their values. Intentional community residents throughout the U.S. were surveyed to discover their intrinsic satisfactions and motivations, and community features they envision in their futures, as well as to investigate their psychological well-being and if they experience or search for personal meaning. Of the 204 U.S. communities identified with a gardening or agricultural focus, 83 agreed to be surveyed, garnering 259 responses. It was found that engage-

ment in local food systems elicits intrinsic satisfaction in the areas of *community food* (such as growing and sharing food with neighbors) and *participation* (such as contributing to a larger goal or purpose). However, local food system engagement does not strongly increase psychological well-being, suggesting that those living in agricultural communities may have their well-being supported in other lifestyle areas. Recommendations for communication and recruitment are then addressed: it is important to emphasize communitarian and social values when advertising intentional communities to interested parties. Secondary values, such as environmentalism, and the intrinsic satisfaction associated with *participation* can also be successfully used in communication, especially when paired with future-oriented envisioning of their communities.

^{a*} *Corresponding author:* Jess M. Lasoff-Santos, Environmental Psychology Lab, University of Michigan; 440 Church Street; Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA; jasanto@umich.edu

Jess M. Lasoff-Santos is now a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan.

^b Raymond K. De Young, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Environmental Psychology Lab, University of Michigan; 440 Church Street; Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA; rdeyoung@umich.edu

Keywords

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Introduction

Intentional communities provide unique living solutions for individuals seeking to live with others who share their ideals. While many definitions exist, intentional communities may be broadly defined in this way:

[A] group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings...these groups [place] a high priority on fostering a sense of community—a feeling of belonging and mutual support that is increasingly hard to find in mainstream Western society. (Kozeny, 1995, p. 1)

Various iterations of intentional communities have existed during most of human history, with the earliest recorded about 525 BCE (Metcalfe, 2012). These communities have occurred throughout much of American history as well, with their popularity rising during periods of cultural and social instability (Brown, 2002). Although modern intentional communities are distinct, many value the importance of social connections and environmental sustainability. While commonalities exist between intentional communities, there are also many different types, such as cooperatives, cohousing, and communes (Kozeny, 1995), as well as ecovillages (Litfin, 2012) and religious communities, e.g., kibbutzim (Anson et al., 1991). The communities may differ in terms of their governance structures, types of housing, social or cultural norms, or ecological and spiritual commitments. Some intentional communities seek to improve the psychological well-being of their residents through participating in civic agriculture, e.g., Sylvan NeighborWood near Chelsea, Michigan. Civic agriculture may be broadly defined as “a locally-based agricultural and food production system that is tightly linked to a community’s social and economic development” (Lyson, 2000, p. 42). Civic agriculture contributes to community cohesion, development, and empowerment through individ-

uals’ participation in community supported agriculture programs, farmers markets, and food cooperatives, as well as providing opportunities for social and cultural events (Obach & Tobin, 2014; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004, Veen et al., 2015). This suggests that sustainable agricultural communities may also contribute sociological benefits to the larger community.

This research was conducted to investigate psychological aspects of the residents of intentional communities throughout the United States, specifically those that feature agricultural or gardening components on their land. Surveys studied resident intrinsic satisfactions, their envisioned ideal futures, psychological well-being, and meaning in life. The research was designed to test the relationships between these concepts in an exploratory manner, which traditionally does not use hypotheses as the building blocks of the study. However, these concepts have not yet been studied within this population, creating an exciting opportunity to better understand this understudied group.

The concept *intrinsic satisfactions* refers to the feelings of satisfaction that are felt by someone when they are internally motivated to engage in a behavior (De Young, 1996). Studying the intrinsic satisfactions of community residents will help intentional community developers to better understand what motivates their future residents and what activities elicit the most satisfaction, and allow developers to organize their community structures to most benefit their residents. In general, individuals are intrinsically motivated to pursue behaviors that increase their competence and use fewer resources (De Young, 1996; Howell, 2013; Sheldon et al., 2011). However, it is important to understand the specific motivations that drive those who live in intentional communities so as to provide opportunities for them to emotionally prosper (De Young, 2012).

Envisioning is the process of cultivating an individual and community vision for the future; this process has been argued to be essential to building a sustainable society (Meadows, 1994, 2012). Envisioning naturally occurs while intentional communities are in development as well as individually when residents decide to join the community. In both instances, individuals alone and collectively

take time to envision a desired future, which they work toward within the community. As this process has not been extensively empirically studied, it will be important to document and analyze what current residents of intentional communities envision when they imagine the qualities of the communities in which they are living in an ideal future. This information will better allow developers to plan for and eventually provide such qualities in their communities.

In addition, there is considerable theoretical support for the idea that a sustainable agricultural community can support *psychological well-being*. For example, the practices of gardening and small-scale agriculture have numerous psychological benefits, including well-being, such as reduced stress and increased mood (e.g., Lovell et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2016). As these activities would be common in an agricultural community, they could well support the well-being of their residents. More directly, however, intentional communities also create positive psychological benefits in their residents, such as improved well-being (Hall, 2015), restored attentional capacity (Ouellette et al., 2005), and greater connection to the community and nature (Kirby, 2003; Sanguinetti, 2014). Unfortunately, there has not yet been documented research linking intentional community living and meaning in life. However, there has been a noted connection between well-being and meaning in life (King et al., 2006; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005), suggesting that intentional community residents may experience a heightened sense of existential meaning as well.

The lack of empirical research studying this specific topic presents an opportunity for an exploratory study. This research helps shed light on the psychological needs of intentional community residents while supporting the endeavors of those who are developing new or current communities. The results of this research may inform future recruitment, marketing, or communication strategies developed by intentional communities, as well as physical and social planning within communities. It may also be used by those working in gardening or agricultural not-for-profit organizations whose members or volunteers are actively involved in local food systems.

Methods

A U.S. nationwide survey was conducted from January to July 2018 to study the psychological qualities of those who currently live in agricultural intentional communities, including their intrinsic satisfactions, visions of future community life, psychological well-being, and the meaning they search for and experience in their lives. Communities were identified in the *Fellowship for Intentional Community* database (www.ic.org) by administering an online search using the keywords “agriculture” and “farm.” An additional search was completed for communities which identified “garden” as a common facility in their community profile pages. The search identified 214 communities; ten were excluded based on their closing or not fulfilling the search criteria (e.g., therapeutic communities of residents with intellectual disabilities). In addition, two Ann Arbor, Michigan communities, Sunward Cohousing and Great Oak Cohousing, were added to the sample due to the researchers’ familiarity with them and the fact that they fulfilled the study’s eligibility requirements. Of these 206 communities, 83 agreed to participate in the study. Community representatives were asked to email survey links to the community listserv or interested members, which yielded 259 responses. Generally, responses were evenly distributed among each community.

The survey included previously validated as well as new sets of questionnaire items. Previously developed scales included 16 items of the Intrinsic Satisfaction scale (De Young, 2000), 18 items of the Ryff Measure of Psychological Well-Being (Clarke et al., 2001), and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006). Newly developed sets of questions included additions to the Intrinsic Satisfaction scale and a scale measuring envisioned features of future community life. Additional questions inquired about respondent support for intentional communities, experience living in them, involvement in local food advocacy organizations, the ways in which they support and engage in local food systems, and demographic information. When appropriate, the survey instrument used a five-point Likert scale, with a response of five indicating the highest endorsement of the item.

Independent variables include meaning in life,

envisioned community features, experience in intentional community living, and demographic information. Dependent variables include intrinsic satisfactions and psychological well-being. Depending on the context, engagement in local food systems (*Food Engagement*) serves as either an independent or dependent variable.

The first set of statistical tests utilized factor analysis, a test that uncovers patterns in how the sample thought about and answered the survey questions (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The purpose of the factor analyses is to reveal how survey respondents perceived and categorized the primary questionnaire items, including intrinsic satisfactions, envisioned community features, psychological well-being, and meaning in life. Each analysis identified a series of categories, which were then tested using Cronbach's alpha, a test that measures the consistency between a group of survey items (Cronbach, 1951). In other words, Cronbach's alpha measures the extent to which the group of items would receive similar scores if a new sample retook the survey. As this is an exploratory study, a minimum alpha of .60 for each category was accepted for initial analysis. Secondary regression-based analysis required a minimum alpha of .70 for each category. Finally, the pairwise comparison of means for each set of categories was conducted using the T-test, which compares the means of two samples for significant difference.

Stepwise regression analysis then determined which independent variables most contribute to changes in the tested dependent variables. Stepwise analysis was chosen because of the research's exploratory nature, given that the variables' relationships are still largely unknown to researchers.

The responses to the questions about *Food Engagement* were averaged into a new variable which was used in the stepwise regression analysis (Table 1). This set of questionnaire items measured engagement through purchasing produce from farms, volunteering on or visiting farms, buying community supported agriculture (CSA) shares, or attending events held on farms (e.g., farm dinners).

Table 1. Questions Included in the Food Engagement Variable

Food Engagement
I support local food systems by...
... Purchasing local food products
... Volunteering on farms
... Buying CSA shares
... Visiting farms
... Attending farm dinners or other events
... Other: _____

Results

Survey Data: Demographic Information and Categories Extracted

Sample Demographics¹

The majority of the respondents were 55-64 years old (27.3%; $n = 59$), followed closely by those 65-74 (24.1%, $n = 52$). The average age bracket of the sample was 45-54 ($M = 4.41$, $N = 216$).

The sample was well-educated. Most respondents attained a master's degree or equivalent (36%; $n = 77$), followed by those who graduated with a bachelor's degree (25.7%; $n = 55$). The average education level was at the bachelor's degree level, bordering on completing some graduate or professional schoolwork ($M = 5.7$, $N = 214$).

Most respondents reported an income of less than US\$15,000 per year (19.9%, $n = 41$). The second most common income category was between US\$50,000 and US\$74,999 (17.5%; $n = 36$). The average income was between US\$35,000 and US\$49,999 ($M = 4.32$, $N = 206$).

The race and ethnicity of the sample was homogenous. 92% of the sample identified as white ($n = 195$) and 4.7% selected "Other" ($n = 10$; $N = 212$). Only 2.9% of the sample identified as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ethnicity ($n = 6$; $N = 205$).

Respondents were asked about their experience living in different types of intentional communities. Respondents had most experience living in

¹ Some of the percentages presented in this section are skewed due to respondents skipping select demographic questions.

co-housing communities, approximately 1–2 years on average ($M = 3.2$; $N = 208$). This was followed by planned agricultural communities, or communities planned with a strong agricultural focus, with less than a year on average ($M = 2.3$, $N = 198$).

Representatives from each community were asked to describe their community using categories from the *Fellowship for Intentional Community* database. Eighteen representatives described their community using multiple categories; one representative did not return the information by the deadline. Co-housing was also the most common type of community in which respondents were currently living ($n = 143$), followed by ecovillages ($n = 86$; $N = 259$; Table 2).

Intrinsic Satisfaction

Intrinsic satisfactions were measured by asking participants about the actions which they find meaningful. Responses to these questions were evaluated on a scale of 1–5 (Not at all–A very great deal). Factor analysis was performed on the questionnaire items, and six categories of intrinsic satisfaction were identified: *Community Connection*, *Participation*, *Sustainable Living*, *Frugality*, *Community Food*, and *Luxuries* (Table 3). Notably, three of the categories (*Frugality*, *Participation*, and *Luxuries*) were identified in prior research use of these items (De Young, 2000). *Community Connection*, *Sustainable Living*, and *Community Food* composed items newly developed for the present study. Pairwise t-tests were performed to compare means, and found that all categories were significantly different from each other ($p \leq .05$).

The first category, *Community Connection*, is the most highly endorsed by the survey respondents ($M = 4.41$). This category encompasses meaning derived

Table 2. Frequency of Community Type in the Sample

Community Type	Frequency	Percentage (N = 259)
Cohousing	143	55.6%
Ecovillage	86	33.2%
Shared Housing	34	13.2%
Commune	27	10.4%
Other	23	8.9%
Spiritual	19	7.3%
Student Co-Op	3	1.2%

Respondents could select multiple answers.

Table 3. Categories of Intrinsic Motivations

Category Name and Items Included	Mean*	SD	Alpha
Community Connection	4.41	.54	.66
Sharing with my community			
Participating in community initiatives			
Feeling connected to where I live			
Participation	4.30	.65	.77
Taking actions which can change the world			
Helping to make sense out of the world			
Doing things that help bring stability to the world			
Doing things that matter in the long run			
Sustainable Living	4.20	.69	.65
Living a low-carbon lifestyle			
Positively impacting the environment			
Avoiding industrialized agriculture			
Frugality	4.10	.75	.81
Finding ways to use things over and over			
Keeping something running past its normal life			
Repairing rather than throwing things away			
Finding ways to avoid waste			
Community Food	3.79	.97	.82
Growing food with my neighbors			
Providing food for my community			
Buying fewer groceries by growing my own foods			
Luxuries	2.42	.74	.69
Having many items to choose from when purchasing			
Having the luxuries and conveniences of our society			
Having clothing that is in style			
Being a citizen of a country with vast resources			

* All pairwise comparison of means is significantly different at $p \leq .05$

from the social connections found within a close-knit community. It includes ideas of sharing with others, engaging in local initiatives, and feeling personally connected to the individual's community of residence.

The second category, *Participation*, was also highly endorsed by respondents ($M = 4.30$). This concept involves the internal satisfaction provided by the feeling that an individual's personal actions will positively influence the world. This positive influence usually signifies that the individual is doing something that they consider contributes to a greater good.

The third category, *Sustainable Living*, was similarly highly endorsed ($M = 4.20$). This category refers to finding meaning in pursuing a lifestyle with little environmental impact, such as limiting personal carbon dioxide emissions and purchases of produce grown by industrialized agriculture.

The fourth category, *Frugality*, was also highly endorsed ($M = 4.10$). Those who endorse this category find internal satisfaction associated with avoidance of waste as well as reuse and fixing of items. Overall, the category's emphasis is placed on the intentional, nonwasteful use of resources.

The fifth category, *Community Food*, received modest endorsement from respondents ($M = 3.79$). This category represents meaning associated with agricultural activities. These activities may be performed in collaboration with neighbors, with the eventual goal of sharing with community members, or simply involve purchasing fewer groceries at the supermarket.

The sixth category, *Luxuries*, received moderately low endorsement ($M = 2.42$). This category relates to gaining intrinsic satisfaction from living in a developed society with modern affluences, conveniences, and choices. The category does not describe finding meaning from luxurious purchases, but instead from the affordances of living in a developed society.

As stated, the first four categories—*Community Connection*, *Participation*, *Sustainable Living*, and *Frugality*—were each highly endorsed by survey respondents ($M \geq 4.10$), suggesting that the respondents strongly related to these concepts. This suggests that intrinsic satisfaction involving each of these categories is experienced often and is familiar to

the respondents. The remaining categories, *Community Food* and *Luxuries*, were endorsed less often by respondents ($M = 3.79$ and 2.42 , respectively). The proximity of *Community Food* to the mid-point of the scale suggests that the experiences that the category encompassed may not have represented much to the respondents, such as usually lacking the opportunity to grow their own food. Furthermore, the moderately low endorsement of *Luxuries* suggests that respondents did not experience a great deal of satisfaction from this concept. This is perhaps not surprising, as this concept focuses specifically on the modern conveniences of technologically industrial society which some individuals are willing to forego for the sake of living in a developing community. However, it is worth noting that the average satisfaction derived is not extremely low, suggesting that these conveniences are still found to be somewhat satisfying to the sample.

Envisioned Community Features

A second analysis was conducted on a series of questionnaire items measuring the extent to which various community features were envisioned in respondents' ideals of a future neighborhood. Responses to these questions were also evaluated on a scale of 1–5 (Not at all–A very great deal). Factor analysis identified four categories: *Thriving Community*, *Transportation*, *Gardens*, and *Consumerism* (Table 4). The *Transportation* category was excluded from further analysis due to the thematic dissimilarity among its survey items.

The first category, *Thriving Community*, received the highest endorsement from the survey respondents ($M = 4.67$). This concept encompasses features that determine a safe and happy community. Neighbors live comfortably with access to the resources that they need, they gather in shared spaces, and their communities are situated in natural environments free of pollutants.

The second category, *Gardens*, was also highly endorsed by the sample ($M = 4.21$). This concept describes neighborhood and community features specifically relating to agriculture, including both the physicality and the social realm of gardening. These features include caring for livestock, private gardens, and teaching gardens.

Table 4. Categories of Envisioned Future Community Features

Category Name and Items Included	Mean	SD	Alpha
Thriving Community	4.67	.52	.83
Happy neighbors			
A thriving community center			
A healthy natural environment			
A safe neighborhood			
Neighbors who have what they need			
Transportation (Excluded from further analysis)	4.21*	.73	.71
People riding bicycles			
Public transportation			
Ethnically diverse neighbors			
The newest energy technologies			
Gardens	4.21*	.77	.71
Neighbors taking care of livestock (e.g., chickens, goats)			
Gardens outside of houses			
Teaching gardens			
Consumerism	1.55	.67	.72
The newest consumer products			
The latest fashion trends			
Corporate advertising			

* All pairwise comparison of means is significantly different at $p \leq .05$ except for those marked with an asterisk.

The third category, *Consumerism*, involved tangible representations of modern capitalism in a community. It would include perceiving fashion trends, consumer products, and corporate advertising throughout the community. This category had an extremely low endorsement ($M = 1.55$).

It seems worth noting that the high endorsement of *Thriving Community* and *Gardens* suggests that these features are important to respondents in the present and that they hope to see them as a central part of their communities in the future. Physical representations of modern consumerism, however, seem to be considerably less important to the respondents because they are rarely included in their ideas of what should be included in a future neighborhood.

Psychological Well-Being

A third analysis measured the psychological well-being of the sample using a 1–5 scale (Strongly disagree–Strongly agree). Factor analysis investigated categories of psychological well-being experienced by residents of intentional communities. As this set

of questionnaire items used the 18-item Ryff Measure of Psychological Well-Being, researchers expected that factor analysis would reveal the six categories associated with the Ryff scale: self-acceptance, positive relations, environmental mastery, personal growth, autonomy, and purpose in life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). However, the results of the factor analysis do not reflect these categories, revealing, instead, that the respondents organized the items into two categories, *Behavioral Aesthetics* and *Autonomy* (Table 5). Additional categories were identified but did not meet the Cronbach's alpha criteria for further study.

Behavioral Aesthetics received relatively high endorsement from the sample ($M = 4.01$). The concept delineates a life with positive and warm relationships, personal

fulfillment, and satisfaction with one's achievements. "Behavioral aesthetics" refers to the idea of a life well-lived, almost as a work of art, which, when reflected about as a whole, one would feel that they lived beautifully (De Young, 2019). The survey respondents indicate that an aesthetically beautiful life would include many of the concepts described within this category.

The category *Autonomy* received modestly high endorsement from respondents ($M = 3.87$). This concept indicates resolve and confidence in one's own opinions. It generally aligns with Ryff's definition of Autonomy (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) but includes one additional item ("Some people wander aimlessly through life..."). This addition suggests that respondents associated the sense of purpose conveyed by the item with the internal strength that is needed to be confident in oneself.

The relatively high support for both categories suggests that those respondents who live in intentional communities experience significant psychological well-being. They seem to be happy with their lives, as well as with their experiences and

relationships in particular. It also seems that they are satisfied with their decisions and generally confident in their opinions.

Meaning in Life

The fourth analysis investigated the meaning in life experienced and searched for by residents of intentional communities. This concept was operationalized using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), which utilizes a 1–5 scale (Ab-

solutely untrue–Absolutely true). This questionnaire divides this concept into two categories, *Presence* and *Search*, which were replicated by factor analysis using the current study data (Table 6). *Presence* was the most highly endorsed category ($M = 4.08$). It indicates the felt presence of meaning: a strong sense of purpose, an understanding of one’s life direction, and the meaning associated with one’s life and actions. *Search* received modest endorsement by the sample ($M = 3.10$). The cate-

Table 5. Categories of Psychological Well-Being

Category Name and Items Included	Mean*	SD	Alpha
Behavioral Aesthetics	4.01	.56	.83
Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me ^a			
In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life ^a			
When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out			
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others ^a			
The demands of everyday life often get me down ^a			
I like most aspects of my personality			
In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live			
People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others			
I am quite good at managing the responsibilities of my daily life			
Autonomy	3.87	.56	.60
I judge myself by what I think is important, not by what others think			
I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions ^a			
I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus			
Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them			

* Pairwise comparison of means is significantly different at $p \leq .05$.

^a Items reversed for factor analysis.

Table 6. Categories of Life Meaning Perceptions

Category Name and Items Included	Mean*	SD	Alpha
Presence	4.08	.75	.89
My life has a clear sense of purpose			
I have discovered a satisfying life purpose			
I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful			
My life has no clear purpose ^a			
I understand my life’s meaning			
Search	3.10	1.07	.89
I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant			
I am searching for meaning in my life			
I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful			
I am always looking for my life’s purpose			
I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life			

* Pairwise comparison of means is significantly different at $p \leq .05$.

^a Item reversed for factor analysis.

gory describes the search for life meaning, either internally (through reflection) or externally (by trying various activities). The commonality within this category is the search for a sense of purpose and meaning in one’s life.

The high endorsement of the *Presence* category suggests that intentional community residents feel a strong sense of life presence and meaning. It is possible that they discovered the sense of purpose as a result of living in an intentional community setting, although this cannot be confirmed without additional data from a longitudinal or comparative study. In contrast, the modest endorsement of the *Search* category suggests that a search for life meaning is not prioritized highly by intentional community residents.

The Role of Food Engagement

A series of stepwise multiple linear regression analyses investigated the relationships among the varia-

bles that predicted engagement in local food systems (*Food Engagement*), and if the engagement leads to intrinsic satisfactions and/or personal well-being. A forward stepwise regression analysis was chosen because the addition of each variable would strengthen the model. Analyses using categories created by factor analysis (i.e., *Envisioning, Meaning in Life, Intrinsic Satisfactions, Well-Being*) only used categories with high internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .70$).

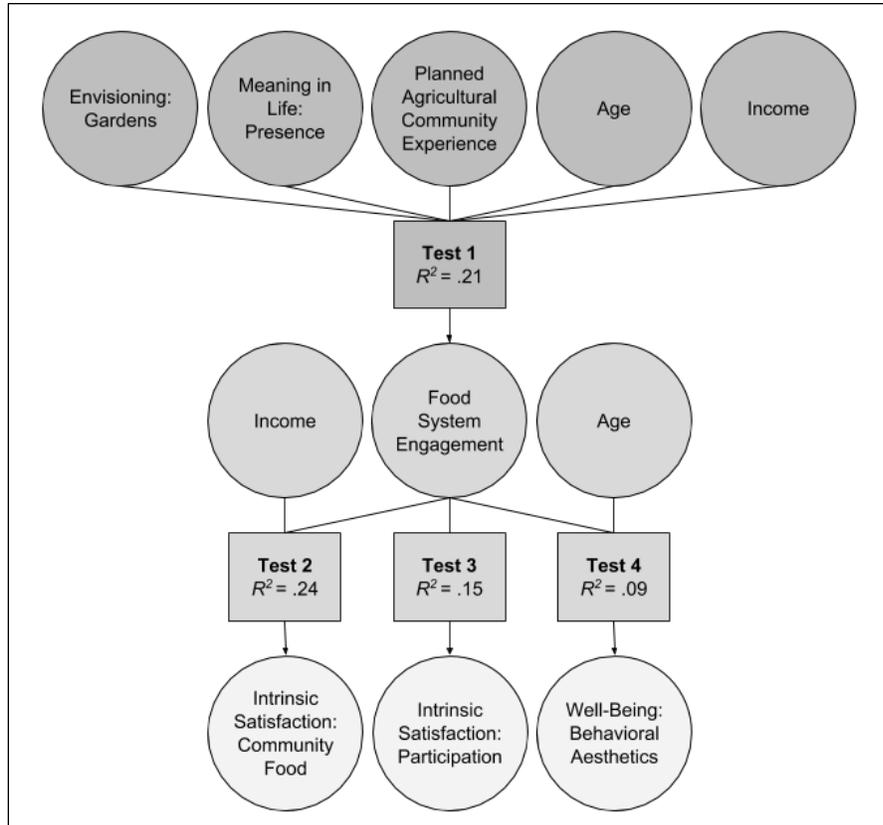
Four analyses were performed (Figure 1). First, a series of independent variables and categories was analyzed to determine the strength of their contribution to the likelihood of individual *Food Engagement* (see below, “Which variables contribute to food engagement?”). Then *Food Engagement* was analyzed in three separate tests in combination with demographic variables to determine its likelihood of contributing to intrinsic satisfactions and personal well-being (see below, “Which variables does food engagement contribute to?”). Thus, in

the analyses discussed below, *Food Engagement* was used first as a dependent and then as an independent variable. Note that each table below presents the final version of each model, as determined by stepwise regression analysis. For all model iterations developed in each analysis, see Appendix A.

Which Variables Contribute to Food Engagement?

In the first analysis, experience living in a planned agricultural community was the largest predictor in determining *Food Engagement* (Table 7). *Meaning in Life: Presence* also contributed positively to the model. The results indicate that the independent variable *Age* may have a negative effect in determining *Food Engagement*,

Figure 1. Diagram Outlining Regression Tests Described in the Sections “Which Variables Contribute to Food Engagement?” and “Which Variables Does Food Engagement Contribute to?”



such that younger individuals are more likely to participate in these behaviors ($\beta = -.19$). The variables *Income* and *Envisioning: Gardens* both have a positive effect on the model, suggesting that those with a higher income and who see a role for gardens in their ideal future report being more likely to engage in local food systems. Cumulatively, these results suggest that those who have experience living in a planned agricultural community, who feel meaning in their lives, are younger and have higher incomes, and who envision gardens in their ideal futures, are most likely to participate in local food systems and their associated activities. This model accounts for a modest 21% of the variance in *Food Engagement* behaviors ($R^2 = .21$), meaning that 21% of the model is explained by the independent variables.

Which Variables Does Food Engagement Contribute To?

The next stage of stepwise multiple regression analyses test if *Food Engagement* contributes to the various categories of intrinsic satisfaction and well-being. In the following analyses, the independent variables included *Food Engagement*, *Age*, and *Income*. Additional independent variables were tested but did not contribute to the strength of the models.

Table 8 documents the stepwise regression results from investigating the variables which predict deriving intrinsic satisfaction from *Community Food*, or activities which involve growing and sharing food with one's neighbors. Two independent variables were found to predict this type of intrinsic satisfaction: *Food Engagement*, which provided the largest effect, and *Income*. Notably, *Income* has a negative effect on obtaining intrinsic satisfaction from *Community Food* ($\beta = -.33$), suggesting that those who have lower incomes find greater satisfaction from these activities. It is possible that people of lower income levels are more likely to appreciate the gains from supporting local food systems, such as buying produce from local farms or pur-

Table 7. Dependent Variable: Food Engagement

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Planned Agricultural Community Experience	.20	.05	.30	.000
Meaning in Life: Presence	.30	.11	.20	.005
Age	-.14	.05	-.19	.006
Income	.10	.03	.21	.004
Envisioning: Gardens	.24	.10	.16	.021
R ²	.21			
Adj. R ²	.19			
F	10.87*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

Table 8. Dependent Variable: Intrinsic Satisfaction From Community Food

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Food Engagement	.33	.05	.40	.000
Income	-.13	.02	-.33	.000
R ²	.24			
Adj. R ²	.23			
F	31.3*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

Table 9. Dependent Variable: Intrinsic Satisfaction From Participation

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Food Engagement	.21	.04	.39	.000
R ²	.15			
Adj. R ²	.14			
F	35.38*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

chasing CSA shares, due to the socioeconomic barriers challenging their ability to access and engage in these activities. This model accounts for 24% of the variance for this variable ($R^2 = .24$).

Table 9 shows the results of stepwise regression analysis of the intrinsic satisfaction from the *Participation* category, that is, the satisfaction gained from feeling as if one's actions are contributing to a larger purpose. In this analysis, only *Food Engagement* predicted experiencing this type of intrinsic satisfaction. Perhaps individuals of all ages and incomes are equally likely to experience this kind of intrinsic satisfaction, while engaging with the local food system could elicit a greater sense of

Figure 2. Diagram Outlining Regression Tests Described in the section “Additional Predictors of Intrinsic Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being

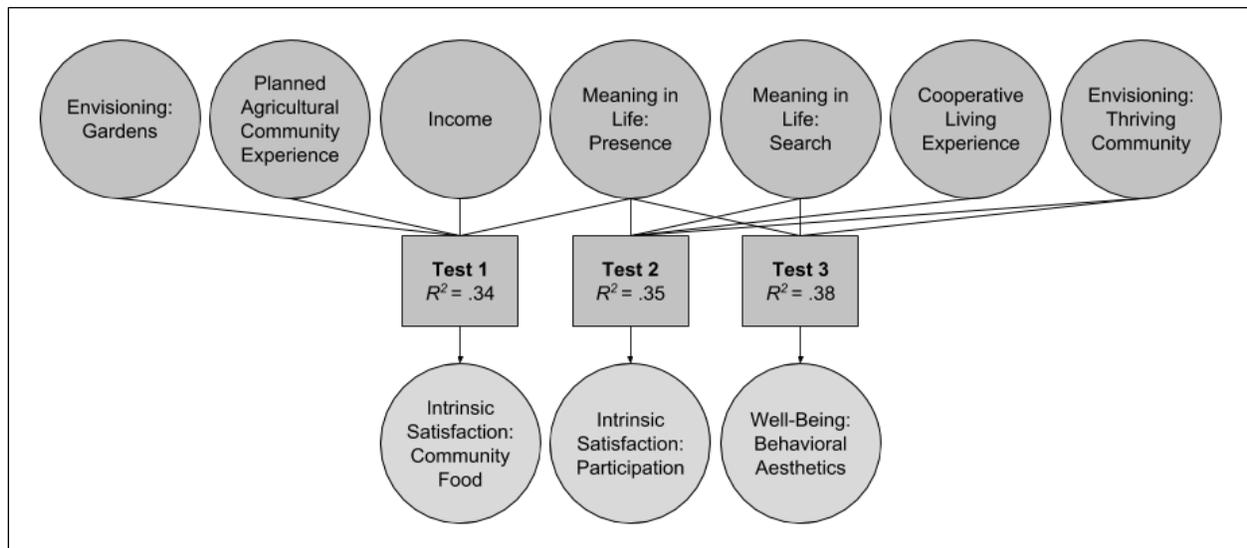


Table 10. Dependent Variable: Behavioral Aesthetics

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Food Engagement	.14	.03	.27	.000
Age	.05	.02	.15	.027
R ²	.09			
Adj. R ²	.09			
F	10.43*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

supporting community members and the local food movement. However, this regression model only accounts for a modest percentage of the variance in this variable: 15% ($R^2 = .15$).

The final regression model investigated the predictors of the *Behavioral Aesthetics* well-being category (Table 10). In this model, *Food Engagement* was the largest predictor of experiencing this form of well-being. *Age* was the second main predictor, with the likelihood of experiencing this well-being slightly increasing as respondents grow older ($\beta = .15$). However, the relationship of both variables to well-being is weak. This model only explains 9% of the variance in well-being relating to *Behavioral Aesthetics* ($R^2 = .09$).

Additional Predictors of Intrinsic Satisfaction and Psychological Well-Being

A second stage of stepwise multiple regression analyses was conducted to determine the role of intentional community experience, envisioning, and meaning in life in influencing intrinsic satisfactions and psychological well-being (Figure 2). While the previous set of regression analyses used the *Food Engagement* category as a mediating variable, the second stage of analyses determined the *direct* effect of these variables on intrinsic satisfactions and psychological well-being. These tests utilized a forward stepwise regression, that allowed the variables to build upon each other while strengthening the models. Like the previous set of regression analyses, categories that demonstrated high internal reliability ($\alpha \geq .70$) were used.

Table 11 shows the results of the analysis exploring the relationship between the independent variables and the intrinsic satisfaction gained from engaging in activities related to *Community Food*. Of the four variables found to predict this type of intrinsic satisfaction, the *Envisioning: Gardens* category was the foremost predictor ($\beta = .42$). This prominence, combined with the second main predictor, *Planned Agriculture Community Experience*, is possibly due to the heightened valuing of and direct experience in gardening and other agricul-

tural operations associated with agricultural community living. Income also served as a negative predictor in the model, suggesting that there is a relationship between decreasing income and increasing satisfaction from *Community Food* ($\beta = .17$). Finally, *Meaning in Life: Presence* serves as the fourth predictor, indicating that those who experience this meaning may be more likely to gain satisfaction from *Community Food* activities. This model explains 34% of the variance in experiencing intrinsic satisfaction from *Community Food* activities ($R^2 = .34$).

Table 12 documents the effects of the independent variables on intrinsic satisfaction gained from *Participation*. Four variables were found to predict this satisfaction, with *Meaning in Life: Presence* the largest predictor. As both *Meaning in Life: Presence* and *Meaning in Life: Search* appeared in the model, it seems that meaningfulness increases the likelihood of experiencing intrinsic satisfaction from *Participation*. It is possible that the activities that these individuals engage in are more likely to give them a sense of purpose. *Envisioning: Thriving Community* was also a positive predictor in the model: those respondents who value this type of future community may be more likely to engage in activities with their current community which would then elicit their reported satisfaction gained from *Participation*. Prior experience living in a cooperative living community also had a modest effect in the model ($\beta = .16$), possibly because of the value placed on collaborating and working toward common goals in these communities. This model explains 35% of the variance in the intrinsic satisfaction gained from *Participation* ($R^2 = .35$).

Table 13 shows the results of the final regression model, which explored the predictors of a sense of well-being derived from *Behavioral Aesthetics*. Three variables were found to contribute to *Behavioral Aesthetics*, with the most significant predictor an experienced *Meaning in Life: Presence*. Notably, the second predictor, *Meaning in Life: Search*, has a negative relationship with well-being from *Behavioral Aesthetics* ($\beta = -.18$), suggesting that those searching for meaning are less likely to experience this form of well-being. The final predictor of *Behavioral Aesthetics* was *Envisioning: Thriving Community* ($\beta = .12$), indicating that those respondents

Table 11. Dependent Variable: *Intrinsic Satisfaction From Community Food*

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Envisioning: Gardens	.53	.08	.42	.000
Planned Agriculture Community Experience	.14	.04	.25	.000
Income	-.07	.03	-.17	.008
Meaning in Life: Presence	.17	.08	.13	.038
R ²	.34			
Adj. R ²	.32			
F	23.51*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

Table 12. Dependent Variable: *Intrinsic Satisfaction From Participation*

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Meaning in Life: Presence	.38	.05	.43	.000
Envisioning: Thriving Community	.43	.08	.34	.000
Meaning in Life: Search	.15	.04	.25	.000
Cooperative Living Experience	.07	.03	.16	.007
R ²	.35			
Adj. R ²	.34			
F	24.78*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

Table 13. Dependent Variable: *Behavioral Aesthetics*

Independent Variable	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Meaning in Life: Presence	.40	.04	.54	.000
Meaning in Life: Search	-.09	.03	-.18	.003
Envisioning: Thriving Community	.12	.06	.12	.050
R ²	.38			
Adj. R ²	.37			
F	37.85*			

* F-test is significant at $F \leq .05$

who value these community-based social structures are modestly more likely to experience greater psychological well-being. This model explains 38% of the variance in well-being in the form of *Behavioral Aesthetics* ($R^2 = .38$).

Discussion

This data has been interpreted and organized into three primary themes:

1. Intentional community living and psychological health;
2. Food system engagement, intrinsic satisfactions, and well-being;
3. Communications and recruitment strategies for intentional community developers.

This section is intended for those planning and/or working in intentional communities. It may also inform the practices of those working in organizations involved in local food systems and other environmental issues.

Intentional Community Living and Psychological Health

The increased social connectedness that results from living in an intentional community likely leads residents to experience feeling greater psychological health and well-being. According to the survey results, there seems to be a positive relationship between living in an intentional community and heightened psychological health. Overall, the survey respondents demonstrated high psychological well-being (Table 5, *Behavioral Aesthetics*, $M = 4.01$) and experienced a high degree of meaning in their lives (Table 6, *Meaning in Life: Presence*, $M = 4.08$).

These positive psychological health outcomes are possibly due to the significant social benefits associated with living in an intentional community. This interpretation is supported by the high rates of intrinsic satisfaction associated with community living, such as heightened sense of social connection and of one's actions being meaningful and purposeful (Table 3, *Community Connection*, $M = 4.41$; *Participation*, $M = 4.30$). This interpretation is also consistent with past research that has demonstrated that social and community support is crucial for ongoing psychological well-being and health

(Sameroff & Rosenblum, 2006). In summary, intentional community residents report experiencing heightened satisfaction from social support likely due to their close-knit community structures. This support likely influences and increases the psychological health—such as well-being and a sense of meaning—experienced by community members.

Food Engagement, Intrinsic Satisfactions, and Well-Being

Intentional community residents report that engaging in local food systems is intrinsically satisfying to them, though this engagement does not yield increased psychological well-being. Many intentional communities that engage in ecological resilience also prioritize involvement in local food systems. This may involve buying food from local farmers, volunteering at farms, or purchasing CSA shares. However, the role of such engagement in increasing intrinsic satisfaction and psychological well-being has not been previously studied.

Generally, this study shows a positive relationship between *Food Engagement* and two intrinsic satisfactions: those derived from *Community Food* and from *Participation* (Table 8, $R^2 = .24$; Table 9, $R^2 = .15$). However, we note that *Food Engagement* is a behavioral concept and satisfaction from *Community Food* is a motivation. Satisfaction from *Community Food* derives from both the social and personal benefits of engaging in gardening and other food-related activities. In addition, those who engage in local food systems are likely to derive satisfaction from *Participation* because they feel like they are involved in an important, large-scale movement while also contributing positively to their local community. Thus, the link between *Food Engagement* and intrinsic satisfactions has policy implications: involvement in local provisioning can be promoted by leveraging the motivations embedded in those same behaviors.

There is not a strong relationship between *Food Engagement* and *Behavioral Aesthetics*, a measurement of psychological well-being (Table 10, $R^2 = .09$). This suggests that engagement in local food systems does not directly contribute to individual psychological well-being. It seems that these activities instead result in satisfaction from fulfilling individ-

ual desires and motivations, such as wanting to grow food with one's community or to participate in a movement. However, these activities and satisfactions do not seem to contribute meaningfully to individual psychological health.

It is worth noting that other variables in the study supplement the measured intrinsic satisfactions and well-being. For example, *Meaning in Life: Presence* contributed to intrinsic satisfaction from *Community Food* and *Participation*, and well-being from *Behavioral Aesthetics* (Table 11, $R^2 = .34$; Table 12, $R^2 = .35$; Table 13, $R^2 = .38$). The sense of having meaning in one's life likely provides a sense of purpose that contributes positively to these variables.

Communications and Recruitment Strategies for Intentional Community Developers

Based on survey data, intentional community residents would be supportive of communications emphasizing the importance of community living and the value of sustainable living to protect environmental health. When developing communication and recruitment plans to attract new members to an intentional community, it is important to consider the profile of the typical person who would be interested in joining this kind of community. Communications and marketing materials can be crafted to emphasize messaging that is likely to resonate with this audience after better understanding their values and motivations.

Communitarian values are repeatedly emphasized in the survey data, such as the significant amount of intrinsic satisfaction gained from connecting with one's community and the significant inclusion of vibrant community features in an ideal future (Table 3, *Community Connection*, $M = 4.41$; Table 4, *Thriving Community*, $M = 4.67$). Other significant themes that may inspire individuals are finding intrinsic satisfaction from *Participation*, and satisfaction from contributing to a larger goal or purpose (Table 3, *Participation*, $M = 4.30$).

Finally, it is worth noting that the typical intentional community resident finds meaning in adopting a sustainable lifestyle and using far fewer resources (Table 3, *Sustainable Living*, $M = 4.20$; *Frugality*, $M = 4.10$). Residents are less likely to find meaning in modern conveniences but seem unwill-

ing to fully give them up (Table 3, *Luxuries*, $M = 2.42$). However, the respondents generally did not report perceiving advertising or a heightened corporate presence in their ideal future (Table 4, *Consumerism*, $M = 1.55$), suggesting that they are not envisioning a materialistic future or interested in needless purchases. In marketing materials, intentional community planners are advised to highlight the sustainable features of the community, especially those related to sharing with others in order to reduce resource use or wasteful purchasing (e.g., a tool library).

Research Limitations and Future Directions

The survey data was limited by the number of responses received on a per community basis. Almost all intentional communities studied had a relatively low number of residents complete the survey. This may have skewed the data in that individuals who completed the survey may have had more time available, perhaps due to being older or wealthier than other residents. Furthermore, the low number of respondents per intentional community limits data analysis by restricting the statistical capacity to derive meaningful comparisons among communities and types of communities.

Future research might investigate psychological trends within intentional communities to determine if they are congruent with the explicitly ratified goals of the community, thereby causing some to prosper and others to fail. In addition, future research might include interviewing and surveying those interested in and supportive of intentional communities but who have not yet joined any, to further inform communication and recruitment tactics used by intentional community planners.

Finally, intentional community research must expand to communities other than those operating within a traditional physical and planned framework. For example, this could include "living in place" communities: groups of people who have developed a significant social bond while living in their existing homes and trying to tackle difficult cultural, environmental, and political issues. In contrast to the conventional idea of an intentional community—if such a convention exists—new structures on new parcels of land may not be built or even need to be built. It is necessary to explore

this alternative approach to creating an intentional community because of the unsustainability of new development, due both to the required physical and energy resources as well as the use of land that could otherwise be used for provisioning to protect against food insecurity (Preservation Green Lab, 2011; Smith & Gregory, 2013).

Conclusion

Intentional communities provide exciting opportunities for individuals to embrace alternative community solutions while prioritizing shared values. This research confirms positive consequences of living in such communities which have a gardening or food provisioning focus, as their residents report beneficial psychological health outcomes.

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The results also suggest that resident participation in local food systems can be increased through highlighting various personal and social benefits that are associated with this engagement. Finally, those seeking to start their own intentional community or recruit new residents should emphasize community features associated with social and environmental benefits, as these qualities most often drew current residents to their communities or were part of the ideal futures that these residents imagined for their communities. 

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Appendix. Supplemental Regression Tables

Table A1. Dependent Variable: Food System Engagement

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4				Model 5			
	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Planned Agricultural Community Exp.	.21	.05	.31	.000	.20	.05	.29	.000	.19	.05	.29	.000	.20	.05	.29	.000	.20	.05	.30	.000
Meaning in Life: Presence					.33	.11	.21	.003	.38	.11	.24	.001	.34	.11	.22	.002	.30	.11	.20	.005
Age									-.11	.05	-.16	.021	-.14	.05	-.20	.005	-.14	.05	-.19	.006
Income													.08	.03	.16	.022	.10	.03	.21	.004
Envisioning: Gardens																	.24	.10	.16	.021
R ²	.10				.14				.17				.19				.21			
Adj. R ²	.09				.13				.15				.17				.19			
F*	20.19				15.22				14.1				12.2				10.87			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$

Table A2. Dependent Variable: *Intrinsic Satisfaction From Community Food*

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Food System Engagement	.30	.05	.36	.000	.33	.05	.40	.000
Income					-.13	.02	-.33	.000
R ²	.13				.24			
Adj. R ²	.12				.23			
F	29.75*				31.3*			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$

Table A3. Dependent Variable: *Psychological Well-Being Behavioral Aesthetics*

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Food System Engagement	.13	.03	.27	.000	.14	.03	.29	.000
Age					.05	.02	.15	.027
R ²	.07				.09			
Adj. R ²	.07				.09			
F	15.62*				10.43*			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$

Table A4. Dependent Variable: Intrinsic Satisfaction From Participation

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4			
	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Meaning in Life: Presence	.34	.06	.39	.000	.32	.06	.37	.000	.36	.05	.42	.000	.38	.05	.43	.000
Envisioning: Thriving Community					.42	.08	.33	.000	.41	.08	.32	.000	.43	.08	.34	.000
Meaning in Life: Search									.15	.04	.25	.000	.15	.04	.25	.000
Cooperative Living Experience													.07	.03	.16	.007
R ²	.15				.26				.32				.35			
Adj. R ²	.15				.26				.31				.34			
F	33.95*				33.37*				29.56*				24.78*			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$

Table A5. Dependent Variable: Intrinsic Satisfaction From Community Food

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4			
	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>
Envisioning: Gardens	.60	.08	.48	.000	.59	.08	.47	.000	.55	.08	.44	.000	.53	.08	.42	.000
Planned Agriculture Community Experiences					.16	.04	.28	.000	.15	.04	.27	.000	.14	.04	.25	.000
Income									-.06	.03	-.14	.027	-.07	.03	-.17	.008
Meaning in Life: Presence													.17	.08	.13	.038
R ²	.23				.30				.32				.34			
Adj. R ²	.22				.30				.31				.32			
F	54.91*				40.65*				29.34*				23.51*			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$

Table A6. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-Being Behavioral Aesthetics

Independent Variable	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	B	SE B	β	p	B	SE B	β	p	B	SE B	β	p
Meaning in Life: Presence	.43	.04	.58	.000	.41	.04	.55	.000	.40	.04	.54	.000
Meaning in Life: Search					-.09	.03	-.17	.004	-.09	.03	-.18	.003
Envisioning: Thriving Community									.12	.06	.12	.050
R ²	.34				.37				.38			
Adj. R ²	.34				.36				.37			
F	95.60*				53.98*				37.85*			

* All F-tests are significant at $F \leq .05$