

MARTIN
Prosperity*Institute*

Lived Experiences

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Preface

Many have sought to describe, explain and understand the lived experiences of individuals. Authors of plays, poetry, novels and those who write autobiographies, have contributed to the literature that bears witness to the notion that each person has a story to tell and that the examination of a lived life is a worthy enterprise. Filmmakers have also made significant contributions to the portrayal of lived experiences. The American writer and broadcaster Studs Terkel (<http://www.studsterkel.org/>) became famous by interviewing and listening to all kinds of people from many walks of life describe their day-to-day activities: fascinating tales were told in the conversations of the joys and pains of life, work experiences, the days of retirement and everything in-between. While these informal discussions offer oral histories of the lived experiences of individuals we are left to ponder how such histories could be used to enlighten policy makers and others who wish to improve lived experiences of individuals.

The notion of human consciousness is a remarkable evolutionary achievement and some argue that we each have choices in life and the intellectual capacity and will to use our consciousness to make choices. However, as Duhigg (2012) clearly reminds us most of our behaviour is habitual and takes place without conscious consideration, pondering and reflection that result in a choice. Our lived experiences are for the most part unconscious actions.

To know a man it is suggested by the monk Thomas Merton it is sufficient to ask just one question: ‘what do you live for and what prevents you from achieving this state.’ He argues that answers to questions about place of birth, childhood, teenage years, parents and friends, career and the like tell you nothing of real substance about a person. At a more prosaic level the novelist Peter Robinson (1991) describes the lack of direction in the life of his character Keith. His friend Pratt remarks, “Oh, years ago we’d let loose once in a while, go get blind drunk and not care a damn. Sometimes we’d go fishing together. But over time, Keith sort of reined himself in, cut himself off. I don’t really know how to explain this. It was just a feeling. Keith was very private person ... well, lots of people are ... but the thing was, I had no idea what he lived for.” Pratt goes on: “... I’d be hard pushed to say what I live for. There’s the wife and kids, of course, my pride and joy. And we like to go hand-glidingI collect antiques, I love cricket and we like to explore new places on our holidays. See what I mean? None of that’s what I actually live for, but it’s all part of it.”

The celebrated Tibetan Buddhist teacher Sakyong Mipham reminds us of the Sanskrit word *samsara* “... that describes an endless dark age in which we are completely distracted by the agitation that comes from trying to make ‘me’ happy. Our mind is constantly volleying between irritation and desire, jealousy and pride. We are unhappy with who we are, and we are trying to destroy our own suffering, which reflects our basic discontent. ... Bewilderment rules our days and nights.” Mipham (2005, 13). The challenge is to seek ways to find contentment and

equanimity and so celebrate all lived experiences.

Perhaps another way to know a person these days, and consider what they live for, is to look at the web sites they have visited over recent days and weeks: or to look at their Facebook page or their messages on one of the burgeoning computer-based internet social networks.

Gerzon (<http://www.consciousearth.us/socrates-unexamined-life.html>) has long been fascinated by Socrates' bold statement that "The unexamined life is not worth living." Gerzon suggests that Socrates doesn't say that the unexamined life is "less meaningful than it could be" or "one of many possible responses to human existence." He simply and clearly says it's not even worth living. Why does he make such a strong, unequivocal statement? Socrates believed that the purpose of human life is personal and spiritual growth. We are unable to grow toward greater understanding of our true nature unless we take the time to examine and reflect upon our life. We can speculate that most people fall short of this ideal way of life promoted by Socrates. Another philosopher, Santayana, observed; "He who does not remember the past is condemned to repeat it." Examining our life reveals patterns of behavior. Deeper contemplation yields understanding of the subconscious programming, the powerful mental software that runs our life. Unless we become aware of these patterns, much of our life is unconscious repetition: a view that we have noted above as argued by Duhigg (2012).

In a contemporary vein the work of Basu (2012) focuses on the lives of individuals in Toronto who arrive in this city as immigrants and refugees. In the modern world the lived experiences of individuals often must confront pluralism in a society and one's place as an outsider who seeks to fit in and belong. In the words of Basu it is worthy project for academics and policy makers to help 'in the search for Nimmathi [place of peace] as a place of social sustainability.'

This book describes an initial attempt to offer a way to collect, display and organizes information about lived experiences for a small sample of individuals (undergraduate/graduate students) in four countries: Canada (Toronto), Mexico (Puerto Vallarta), Poland (Gdansk) and Sweden (Uppsala). We also offer introductory remarks about the concept Quality of Life (QOL), lived experiences and elements of living that capture notions of living well and the good life. We will suggest ways that this work might help individuals change their lived experiences, and also ways that possibly help in the formulation and implementation of public policies that purport to improve lived experiences.

Introduction

The term quality of life (QOL) has attracted much attention from academics, planners and the public as it implies a measure of success or failure in the lives of individuals, families, groups, society and places, and as such policies and styles of life that purport to improve or limit QOL can perhaps be identified. A critical review of the literature on QOL as a reflection of public policies and private initiatives by individuals is offered by Massam (2002). The topic of QOL and its related surrogate 'happiness' have generated a vast array of literature ranging from the earliest times of Epicurus, for example, to the latest contributions on websites and search engines like Google. Recent comprehensive overviews of relevant literature are provided by the Dalai Lama (1998), Gilbert (2006), Haidt (2006) and Layard (2006). A search on Google for the topic 'definitions of QOL' yields over 76 million references. While the term QOL is used by academics, politicians, bureaucrats and journalists to describe how life is lived in a particular place by individuals, it is far from certain that the term means much to the individuals it claims to describe.

QOL is closely linked to notions of happiness and contentment, and the first World Happiness Report edited by Helliwell, Layard and Sachs (2012) was published under the aegis of the United Nations in 2012. The report provides a careful and comprehensive overview of the ways that happiness can be defined and the evaluated in terms that impinge on lived experiences.

(<http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/2960>)

We offer suggestions on a way to collect, display and interpret empirical data about the lived experiences of an individual. Such interpretations may help the individual examine their own life critically with a view to make modifications to achieve more balance, wellbeing or a greater sense of equanimity, dignity and contentment: all of which can contribute to an individual's efforts to live a good life well, and hence achieve a high QOL. Hindrances and obstacles to make changes can become more evident to an individual if an open mind is available. Also interpretations can be suggested as to how public policies may be used to allow and encourage individuals to succeed as they strive to improve their wellbeing. Van Manen (1990) and Lindseth, and Norberg, (2004) explore the rich intellectual heritage embedded in the notion of research on lived experiences.

In the academic literature QOL typically embrace measures relating to a variety of social, economic, political and environmental indicators. Two internationally recognized academic journals that report on indicators of QOL and the psychological elements of well-being are:

Social Indicators Research

(<http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/journal/11205>)

and

Psychology of Well-being

(<http://www.springer.com/psychology/klinische+psychologie/journal/13612>).

Often questionnaires are used to solicit opinions of individuals about the importance of the indicators and the level of achievement for each indicator, and then scores are combined arithmetically to derive an overall numerical score of QOL. From these scores individuals, families, groups, societies and places can be classified and the changes over time studied. Also it is often suggested that the impacts of public policies can be judged and assessed as to their effectiveness at improving QOL. We may interview individuals and ask them to complete questionnaires about QOL and the indicators that supposedly relate to this nebulous term. The responses may be structured in such a way as to derive numbers to characterize QOL. A typical exercise of this sort underlies the work of QOL Research Unit at the University of Toronto, Canada (<http://www.utoronto.ca/qol/>). A clear exposition of this approach as applied to lived experiences and the QOL of residents in suburbs around Gdansk in Poland is offered by Masik (2010).

Asking a person to reflect or contemplate on the notion of QOL is to present them with a very difficult task. We can never be certain how an individual interprets or defines the abstract concept of QOL. So even if we have scores and numbers assigned by an individual to indicators that may contribute to QOL it is unclear what such numbers actually represent other than stated opinions: they are certainly not revealed behaviour patterns. Such opinions may not represent clearly and unambiguously the experiences of an individual in his or her life on matters like satisfaction or distress as manifestations of QOL. The numerical approach is essentially one that asks the person to imagine and envisage the notion of QOL. The approach of using stated values and numerical scores appears to be scientific in the sense of transparency and replication of method used to derive scores. Is the method meaningful though? This is the issue addressed by Kahneman (2011) who argues that it is seriously flawed. The contributions of this renowned psychologist earned him the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002. Kahneman (2011, chapter 37) suggests that so many studies of QOL are based on surveys asking 'how good is your life?' The question should be "when you think about your life, how good you think it is?" or, "how good is your life at this point in time? Are folks introspective and can we ask them without prompting how good their life is and how good is their QOL? Selected web sites that relate to this argument are at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihaly_Csikszentmihalyi

http://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/4751.asp>

<http://ciw.ca/en/>

In the nineties, Kahneman's research focus began to gradually shift towards the field of "hedonic psychology." This subfield is closely related to the positive psychology movement, which was steadily gaining in popularity at the time. According to Kahneman and colleagues,

"Hedonic psychology ... is the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is also concerned with the whole range of circumstances, from the biological to the societal, that occasion suffering and enjoyment." (Kahneman, Diener and Schwarz, 1999, ix)

An alternate approach suggested by Kahneman (2011) to the numerical one using questionnaires about 'how good your life is?' is to ask an individual to identify types of activities remembered in the near past, for example, the last 2–3 weeks, and to list the activities and experiences that were enjoyed and wished to be continued, these could be referred to as Type 1 activities; those activities that they found unsatisfying (Type 2) but perhaps necessary to some degree in the daily life, and those experiences when boredom set in and no clear feelings and emotions as to satisfaction or annoyance were evident (Type 3). If Type 1 activities and experiences occupy a lot of time that person is defined as probably happy and has a satisfying disposition toward life. However, if Type 3 activities and experiences occupy a large portion of time for an individual then we might suggest this person is bored, indifferent, detached, and suffers from malaise and perhaps anxiety or even depression. A modest amount of time spent on Type 2 activities and experiences is to be expected to deal with some of the daily matters of living that might be preferred to be overlooked and avoided, but have to be dealt with by the responsible person living in the world. Such activities cannot be sloughed off and discarded. Hence instead of asking for stated levels of QOL the approach suggested here is to observe the revealed patterns of activities as a surrogate for QOL.

We will use this approach of asking individuals to describe their activities over a recent period of time (2–3 weeks) to derive data for the tests described in this book. Specifically we will collect four small sets of data from undergraduate and graduate students in Canada, Mexico, Poland and Sweden using the same protocol. The emphasis will be on testing the overall protocol for data collection, display and analysis, rather than a detailed extensive empirical analysis. If this test project appears to have merit then future detailed projects will be undertaken.

The good life and living well

While some individuals, perhaps most of us in fact, live and experience life without deliberate conscious consideration or reflection on existence and meaning, there are others who contemplate life and seek to define and understand what it is to live well and meaningfully. Do individuals actually think about the matter of living a good life or living well? Certainly there is much evidence around us to suggest that individuals seek pleasure as a matter of possessing, craving and consuming. The Dalai Lama (1998) provides opinions derived from Buddhist philosophy about the consequences on wellbeing and happiness what are the result of attachments, craving, desires, wants and needs, and their significance in causing human suffering. The alleviation of suffering can be achieved if attachments to the ego are severed: a virtually impossible task for most people, but with the right intentions some individuals in their lived experiences move in the direction of lessening attachments and so reach a level of contentment to cope with events in life with poise, dignity and equanimity. Epicurus, writing over 2000 years ago, believed that the greatest good was to seek modest pleasures in order to attain a state of tranquility, equanimity and freedom from fear, as well as absence of bodily pain – aponia – through knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of one's desires. The trilogy of close friendships defined by propinquity, openness, eating and living together, freedom as self-sufficiency and the necessary effort to analyse life to reflect on one's troubles can lead to peace of mind, fulfillment and living well and the good life according to Epicurus. Perhaps little has changed through the centuries as in the modern world there are many who subscribe to these views as ways to have fulfilling lived experiences. A recent book by Klinenberg (2012) examines the dramatic rise in the numbers of adults who live alone. Are they happier than their counterparts who are in relationships? What explanations might account for this rise? What are the consequences on society in social terms, connectivity and civil relations? These and related questions are discussed. Struggles with loneliness continue and the search for complete life continues. 'Going solo' is not the secret route to happiness, in fact at times living alone not by choice can be a crushing experience especially as one ages, becomes sick and has limited means. A good example of a place where people can live alone in a communal setting is Fardknappen in Stockholm where 60% of the dwellings are occupied by a person living alone. This community-owned facility offers opportunities to eat together in a communal dining room as well as communal spaces – a library, weaving room and an exercise room. Is this formula for achieving a place of contentment and a high QOL?

Some reflect on the word happiness as related to acts of generosity, decency, forgiveness, reconciliation and civic behaviour toward others, not just family and friends, but strangers, as part of the good life. The concept of virtue has been

carefully examined from socio-biological perspectives by Ridley (1996), and topics that embrace reason, trust, cooperation and choice have attracted much attention from philosophers for example, Hollis (1998) and Axelrod (1990). While self-examination of lived experiences may help some individuals make choices they feel are decent and dignified, solipsism as extreme preoccupation with an indulgence of one's feelings, desires and egotistical self-absorption is hardly a desirable state of mind that yields personal or collective peace and equanimity. Some thinkers exert considerable intellectual effort to examine the human condition and seek answers to questions about the definitions of the good life and living well. Philosophers have reflected and speculated on ways an individual may lead his or her life, conduct their affairs and behave: notions of contentment, meaning and purpose, happiness and pleasure are frequently examined in the academic and popular literature, and self-help books abound. The poet Robert Browning tells us that 'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?' In a series of lectures delivered in the 1930's at the University of Glasgow as the Gifford Lectures the poet, historian and scholar of the English language MacNeile Dixon (1937) reminds us that as thinkers and humans who seek to understand the human condition 'we journey and never arrive': a sentiment that matches the Buddhist notion of the journey being the way, rather than a journey that leads to a destination.

In this section we offer an introduction to views of two remarkable contemporary moral philosophers: Dworkin and Parfit. Jeffries (2011) interviewed Dworkin recently and writes '... [Dworkin is] one of the greatest legal and moral philosophers of the post-war era ...' MacFarquhar (2011) asserts that 'Parfit is thought by many to be the most original moral philosopher in the English-speaking world.' Moral philosophers seek to present arguments concerning questions of lived experiences and matters of ethical and moral behaviour as well as issues of right and wrong. Whereas some philosophers suggest there are many truths and that they may be irreconcilable, Dworkin and Parfit continue to search for single truths that are in some sense absolute and all-embracing as guides to behaviour and desirable lived experiences.

Dworkin's book '... defends a large and old philosophical thesis: the unity of value.' Dworkin (2012, 1). He explains that the title of his most recent book: *Justice for Hedgehogs* derives from a line of the ancient Greek poet, Archilochus, which was made famous by Isaiah Berlin: the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Value is one big thing. The search is for the truth about living well and being good as being coherent and mutually supporting must fit the view that '... what we think about any one of these must stand up, eventually, to any argument we find compelling about the rest. I try to illustrate the unity of at least ethical and moral values: I describe a theory of what living well is like and what, if we want to live well, we must do, and not do to, other people. That idea – that ethical and moral values depend on one another – is a creed: it proposes a way to live.' Dworkin (2012, 1)

Dworkin (2012) argues that to fulfill our potential as a human we owe it to ourselves to live well and to live a good life: precisely what these terms mean is a matter of some conjecture, and how to follow the advice of Dworkin (2012) is also a matter of considerable speculation. Jeffries (2011) provides a succinct set of remarks that capture some of the essence of the views of Dworkin.

“He [Dworkin] builds up a comprehensive system of value-embracing democracy, justice, political obligation, morality, liberty, equality – from his notions of dignity and self-respect. Again, Dworkin isn’t part of the zeitgeist. ‘Almost all moral philosophy nowadays is stepped in self-abnegation. Mine starts from self-assertion, which was popular with the Greeks like Aristotle and Plato but not now. Now morality is perceived as being about self-sacrifice. I try to show how that’s wrong.’ Why is self-assertion important? ‘We have responsibility to live well. Our challenge is to act as if we respect ourselves. Enjoying ourselves is not enough.’ But doesn’t self-assertion clash with our moral duties to others? ‘No, the first challenge is to live well – that is ethics – and then to see how that connects with what we owe other people – which is morality. The connection is twofold. One is respect for the importance of other people’s lives. And the other is equal concern for their lives.’”

‘Without dignity our lives are only blinks of duration. But if we manage to lead a good life well, we create something more. We write a subscript to our mortality. We make our lives tiny diamonds in the cosmic sands.’

‘Each person must take his own life seriously: he must accept that it is a matter of importance that his life be a successful performance rather than a wasted opportunity. I’m talking about dignity. It’s a term overused by politicians, but any moral theory worth its salt needs to proceed from it.’

MacFarquhar (2011) suggests that Parfit ‘... thinks he can distill all morality into a formula. Is he right?’ Parfit asks ‘What makes me the same person throughout my life, and different person from you? And what is the importance of these facts? I believe that most of us have false beliefs about our own nature, and our identity over time, when we see the truth, we ought to change some of our beliefs about what we have reason to do.’ According to MacFarquhar the views of Parfit ‘... resemble in some ways the Buddhist view of the self, a fact that was pointed out to him years ago by a professor of Oriental religions. ... It is difficult to believe there is no such thing as an all-or-nothing self-no “deep further fact” beyond the multitude of small psychological facts that make you who you are. ... Parfit finds that his own belief is unstable – he needs to re-convince himself. Buddha, too, thought that achieving this belief was very hard, though possible with much meditation. But, assuming that we could be convinced, how should we think about it? ... Parfit believes there are true answers to moral questions, just as there are to mathematical ones. Humans can perceive these truths, through a combination of intuition and critical reasoning, but they remain true whether humans perceive them or

not. He believes there is nothing more urgent for him to do in his brief time on earth than discover what these truths are and persuade others of their reality. He believes that without moral truth the world would be a bleak place in which nothing mattered. This thought horrifies him. 'We would have no reasons to try to decide how to live. Such decisions would be arbitrary ... we would act only on our instincts and desires, living as other animals live.' '... Parfit has always been preoccupied with how to think about our moral responsibilities toward future people. It seems to him the most important problem we have. Besides the issue of global warming, there is the issue of population. It would seem that if the earth were teeming with many millions of people, making everyone's life worse that would be bad. But what if the total sum of human happiness would be higher with many billions of people whose lives were barely worth living-higher, that is, than with a smaller population of well-off people? He sees that we have the ability to make the future much better than the past, or much worse, and he knows he will not live to discover which turns out to be the case. He knows that the way we act toward future generations will be partly determined by our beliefs about what matters in life, and whether we believe that anything matters at all. That is why he continues to try to prove that there is such a thing as moral truth.'

While it is true that the problems and approaches of philosophy are for the most part abstract and may appear to be far removed from the daily lives of individuals, we believe it is important to make the respondents of the surveys at least partially aware of the work of thinkers on matters of lived experiences. Such awareness may help individuals reflect on their lives, and evaluate matters concerning gaps between actual lived experiences and desired styles and levels, and the consequences of patterns of lived experiences on others, and whether all this matters or not.

The internationally-recognized Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) has written and lectured extensively on modern life and the ways that current values differ from those of earlier times. He argues that self-fulfillment is a driving and dominant force today. While throwing off the shackles of repression and subjugation is a distinct advance for humans as we seek liberation, the trend toward what Lasch has called the culture of narcissism is disturbing. How to balance self-interest against the interests of others is a challenge for all who contemplate seriously their lived experiences.

Identifying activities that comprise experiences of living

Prior to offering a description of the protocol which we will use to collect empirical data we will present comments on the notions of lived experiences. Earlier we outlined Type 1, 2 and 3 activities. We argue that lived experiences involve a myriad of activities that embrace an enormous variety of ways to pass time, deal with life and assert individual preferences and habits. The activities reflect *inter alia* an individual's circumstances, exigencies, values, attitudes and choices: rights, obligations and duties may conflict and cause an individual distress.

The novelist Joanna Trollope captures some of the essence of the impacts of a significant and profound event on one's lived experiences in this passage from *Second Honeymoon* (2006, 35):

“...Rosa reflected how odd it was that one hardly noticed details in life – or at least, didn't dignify them with significance – until one was forced into some heightened state of consciousness by joy or grief or disappointment or fear, at which point the whole of existence, from the largest things to the smallest, seemed to take on a kind of meaningful drama.”

Lived experiences may range from the apparent mundane ‘petit train train’ activities of daily untroubled life to dramatic life-changing situations of the sort described by Taylor (2008), a medical specialist on the brain, as she observed, experienced and documents her stroke. Other examples of crises that inflict great stress and trauma on an individual can involve, for example, the death of child as discussed so poignantly by Buckle and Fleming (2011). The psychologist Endler (1990) has described his life-changing experiences of suffering severe depression. Clearly the consequences of such profound events – stroke, death of child, severe depression – for an individual can cause radical effects on all dimensions of lived experiences possibly with long-term detrimental consequences. On some rare occasions they can provide opportunities for personal emotional and psychological growth toward contentment and equanimity. As an individual emerges from childhood into teenage years and on into adulthood, a set of values and expectations about life and the world tends to emerge. This context or milieu can be referred to as the assumptive world of normal expectations regarding events in life, one's degree of self-confidence, and the way life is supposed to unfold: of course this set of expectations is not without events and circumstances that can cause an individual sadness, distress and pain. Typically the emotionally supported and secure individual emerges from such situations still able to function well in the world without too detrimental consequences. As Nietzsche suggests “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger” This phrase that has entered common

folk wisdom was in fact written somewhat differently by Nietzsche: ‘Out of life’s school of war, what does not destroy me makes me stronger.’ (Twilight of the Idols: maxims and arrows, section 8). Sadly events that disrupt the assumptive world in significant ways can leave the individual severely and permanently damaged emotionally.

The concept of the assumptive world has been elaborated by psychologists and Parkes (1971, 1988) is credited with the introduction of the term assumptive world into thanatology literature. He defines the assumptive world as ‘The only world we know and it includes everything we know or think we know. It includes our interpretations of the past and our expectations of the future, our plans and our prejudices. Any or all of these may need to change as a result of changes in the life space’ Parkes (1971, 102). Janoff-Bulman (1992, 4) argues that the assumptive world is illusory believed to be reality. ‘At the core of our internal world we hold basic truths of ourselves and our external world that represent our orientation towards the total push and pull of the cosmos.’ This is not the world of science and logic rather it the world of, and power over humans of assumptions in human beings. Some individuals suffer terribly in their lived experiences because their assumptive world has been shattered by a traumatic event. Janoff-Bulman (1992, 18) suggests that the illusory assumptive world is based on three basic assumptions typically derived from childhood experiences then applied to experiences occurring during adulthood:

1. the belief in personal invulnerability
2. the perception of the world as meaningful and comprehensible
3. the view of ourselves in a positive light

These illusions are shattered by trauma: in some cases a new assumptive world emerges and the individual thrives and flourishes: in other cases irreparable psychological damage is suffered by the individual. The case of the person who has enjoyed what Rando (2002, 189) calls the curse of too good a childhood meets trauma and major loss ‘...with inherent specific deficits because of overly positive, unrealistic, overgeneralized assumptions and/or insufficient experience in defending or revising their assumptive world.’

Kauffman (2010) examines the ways that death, grief and trauma in life can give rise to shame in an individual, and he argues that the silence that typically surrounds shame can be a debilitating influence on the achievement of lived experiences of a positive and rich variety. The authors in the collection of essays edited by Kauffman (2010) consider the psychology of shame which not only death, grief and trauma can create but shame also embraces related issues of social justice, social criticism, and morality as integral elements in the understanding of the phenomenon of shame as an element of lived experiences.

The examination of lived experiences of a person whose assumptive world has been severely affected is outside the specific work we report here on the lived experiences of groups of students in Canada, Mexico, Poland and Sweden. However, it should be noted that this topic is a worthy one for discussion with subjects who complete the surveys in order to raise their awareness of the notion of the assumptive world so that individually they may reflect on it as they examine their own lived experiences.

Lived experiences for data collection

As an individual moves from birth to death through a variety of stages and circumstances – childhood, teenage years, marriage, old age, for example, experiencing losses, absences and deprivations, and the emotions of sadness, grief and mourning, joys, happiness, expectations and desires, the lived experiences can change significantly. Even over a short period of time – a day, week, month – the experiences can fluctuate enormously. We derived a long list of lived experiences from samples of individuals in Canada, Mexico, Poland and Sweden during the period January – April 2012. The individuals comprised:

1. students in universities in Canada/Mexico/Poland/Sweden
2. young academics and researchers in Canada/Mexico/Poland/Sweden
3. colleagues of the authors

Three basic questions were used to prompt each respondent and the informal focus group discussions with respondents to yield a long list of lived experiences and activities.

- Q1. Which activities have you enjoyed in the last 2–3 weeks and which activities would you like to continue in the coming weeks
- Q2. Which activities have you undertaken in the last 2–3 weeks which you did not enjoy, but felt some responsibility, obligation or duty to undertake
- Q3. Which activities filled some of your time in the last 2–3 weeks which do not clearly fit into the first two categories

From the long list of responses we derived four basic clusters of activities which we portray as MIND (intellectual/thinking and reflection): BODY (state of being, health): WORK (activities that require effort and some degree of commitment to be busy): PEOPLE (interactions with others).

The long list is summarized below.

MIND

worrying, anxiety, sadness, distress, joy, pleasure, eroticism, happiness, prayer, meditation, reflection, contemplation, reading, spirituality, belief, moral and ethic considerations, aesthetics, fear, hope, acceptance, wellbeing

BODY

health, exercise, looks, clothes, aging, medical condition, pain, chronic distress, diet, weight, body shape, afflictions

WORK

paid employment, unpaid employment, studying, volunteering, caring, hobbies, responsibility for others, household chores – cooking, cleaning, shopping, cooking

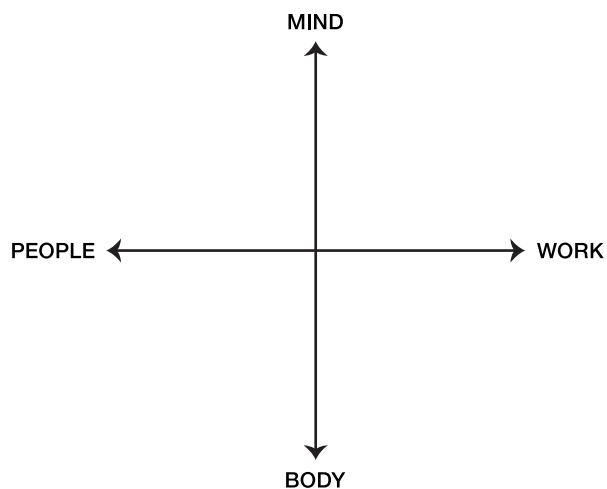
PEOPLE

Family, friends, virtual friends e.g. Facebook friends, colleagues, neighbours, strangers, community, clubs.

Each dimension embraces a range of activities which reflect the possibilities and choices an individual may make depending for example, on their age, gender, marital status, location, as well as their obligations, responsibilities and duties, and commitments and values, as well of course as their habitual patterns of behaviour that occur without premeditation and reflection. The socio-economic and cultural tradition in the milieu of the respondents also plays a significant part in defining activities. The four dimensions of lived experiences are presented schematically on Figure 1 as a template that is used for data collection.

Template to display data on experienced life

Figure 1



The protocol for collecting data from each respondent is presented below with three figures (Fig. 2, Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) that clarify some of the elements of the diagrams for those who are interviewed.

Protocol for data collection

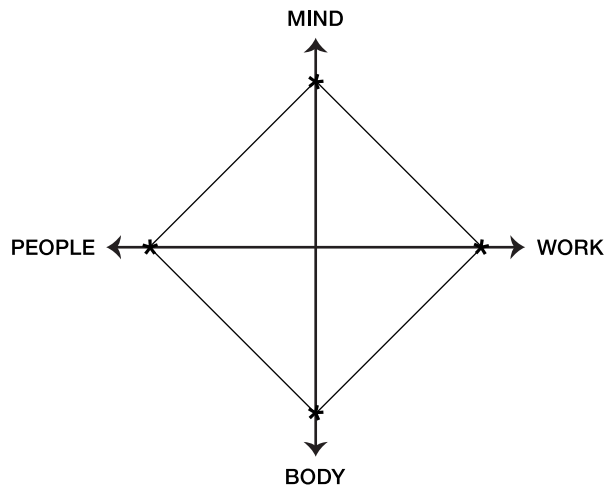
During the data collection exercise the interviewer avoids using words and phrases like QOL, wellbeing and happiness. Toward the end of the exercise these terms are introduced in the general discussion with the respondents. At the outset it is stressed that there are no right or wrong answers or responses, and no judgments are made about the quality or nature of the responses.

The protocol involves 8 steps as outlined below:

1. A brief preamble on the concepts of lived experiences and activities (type 1, 2 and 3) and an overview of the variety of responses derived from the long list.
2. Distribute the list for each cluster and discuss: ask each respondent to identify some relevant activities that apply to their unique lived experiences, and add others in order to identify the sets of activities for the individual for each cluster that suit the opinions of the individual.
3. Explain Fig 1 and the 4 clusters/dimensions of lived experiences/activities.
4. Explain that for each axis the respondent is asked to reflect and think about and try to remember the activities that fit into each cluster for a specific time period namely the last 2–3 weeks. Distribute Fig 4 and discuss the implications of placing the (*) at the centre or the edge of each axis.
5. For each axis, after careful reflection, the respondent is asked to suggest a level of engagement (marked with a O) with the set of activities in each cluster: ranging from low (centre) to high (edge): this point is marked on each axis.
6. This step involves the respondent to make a judgment about the level they selected in step 5 in terms of satisfaction: is the level to their liking or not? Is it too low or high? By how much is it too high or low? Do not rush this step: stress again that there are no right or wrong answers.
7. Each individual is now asked to look at the gaps between the actual levels of activities and the desired levels: are they significant? Should the gap be closed? Should the responsibility for closing the gap rest with the individual? Should someone else help to close the gap for the individual? Would different public policies help close the gap? Which specific changes to public policies might help? Can the respondent suggest some reasons why the desired level is not actively sought?
8. What is the overall assessment of the exercise? Do the 4 clusters make sense and are they comprehensive? Does the notion of lived experience have significance to the respondent? Is the procedure useful to help the respondent think about their life and the role of individual responsibility and possible ways that others, including governments, may help to close gaps?

Hypothetical display for ideal experienced life

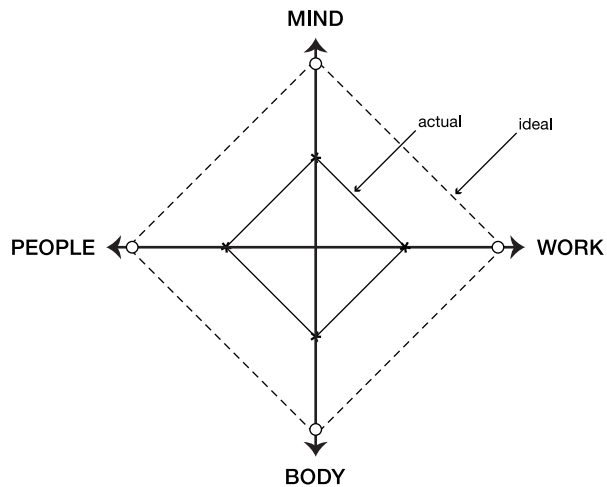
Figure 2



Somewhat simplistically and naively we might suggest that an ideal lived life would generate a pattern of the sort shown on Figure 2 in which for an individual they select high levels of participation on each of the four dimensions. Low level of participation is portrayed by placing the cross [*] close to the centre of the figure.

Hypothetical patterns for ideal and actual experienced life

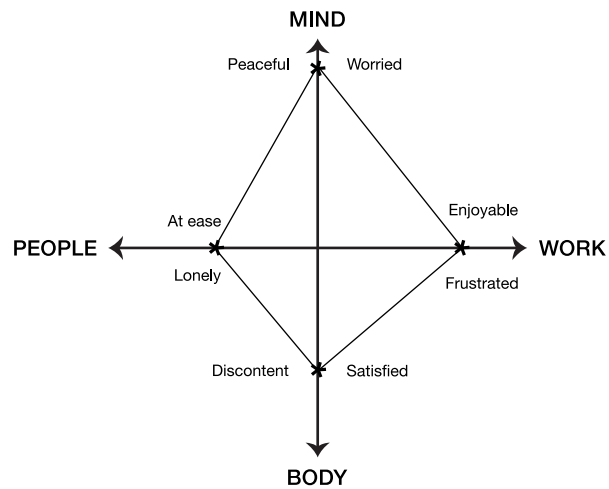
Figure 3



If we then ask each individual to assign an actual level of their perceived level of participation on each axis a pattern of the sort shown on Figure 3 might be generated. If we assume that the ideal pattern is defined by the broken lines and this is a prescriptive pattern, then the actual pattern of lived experiences shown as solid lines appears to fall short of the ideal. To draw this conclusion from the two patterns shown on Figure 3 is misguided as there is no definitive prescribed pattern that applies to all individuals.

Hypothetical pattern of experienced life
and possible interpretations

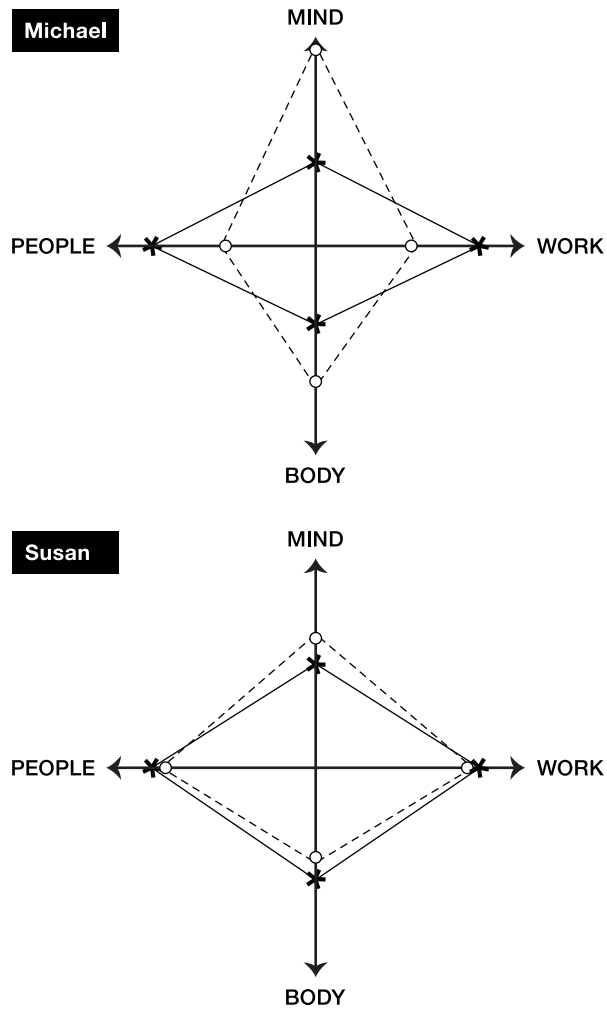
Figure 4



Consider Figure 4. It is clear that a high level of participation might be the result of a positive and desirable level of lived experience; on the other hand a high level may indicate negative and undesirable lived experiences. Let us now consider the patterns of two hypothetical subjects named Michael and Susan as shown on Figure 5.

Comparisons of actual and ideal patterns of experienced life for two subjects

Figure 5



Each individual provides their estimates of their actual lived experience on each axis, and also their desired level for each dimension. Both subjects appear to have the same actual levels of perceived lived experiences as shown by the solid lines. However, whereas Susan's desired levels of lived experiences for each dimension matches closely her actual levels, in the case of Michael there is considerable mismatch for each. On the basis of these patterns we might infer that the overall QOL for Susan is high and that for Michael is lower. However, to confirm this general conclusion we need comments from each subject about the significance of the gaps between actual and desired levels for each dimension. In the empirical tests we report in the next section for individuals these points are elaborated.

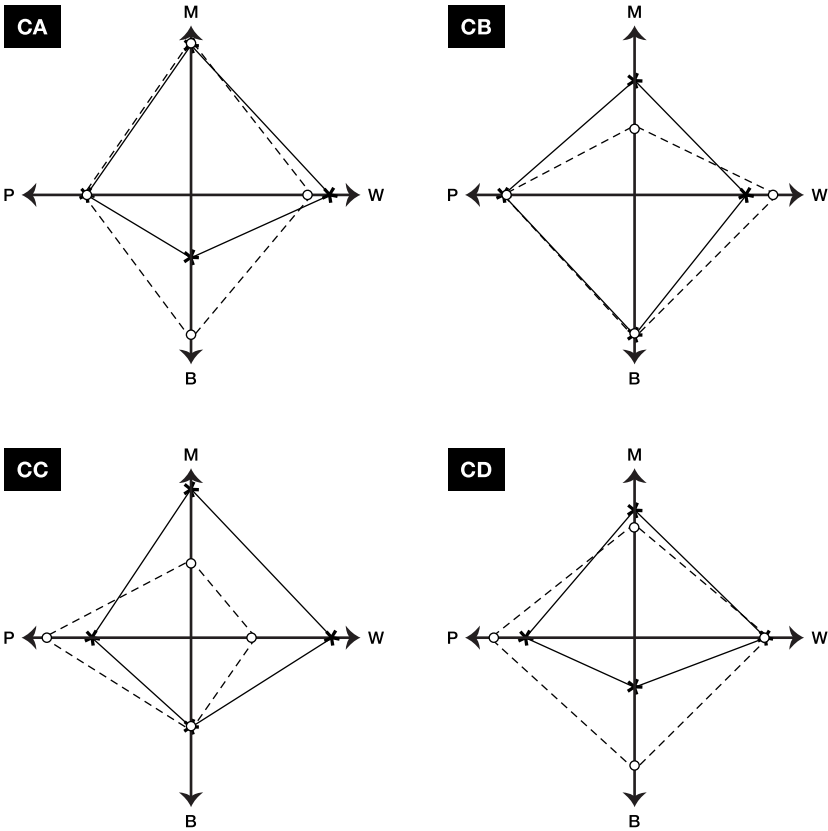
Four Case Studies: Canada, Mexico, Poland, Sweden

The first part of this section presents a summary of the empirical results as a series of figures of the style shown earlier. Eight figures are provided for each case study. Each individual is identified with a code e.g. CA refers to individual A in the Canadian data set. This is followed by notes concerning the individual responses of the respondents for each case study. Each of the four interviewers conducted the survey using the protocol in the same sequence and style. The responses for the figures were recorded in a standard format to allow a set of comparable figures to be constructed for all respondents from the four countries. The opinions of the four sets of respondents were recorded in slightly different formats as reflective of the styles of the interviewers to interpret the protocol and to note the answers and comments. Hence the presentation of the opinions of the respondents noted after each set of figures vary slightly among the four sets of data, though substantively they record the same sorts of replies to the same questions.

A summary of the overall results is presented in the conclusions section of this book.

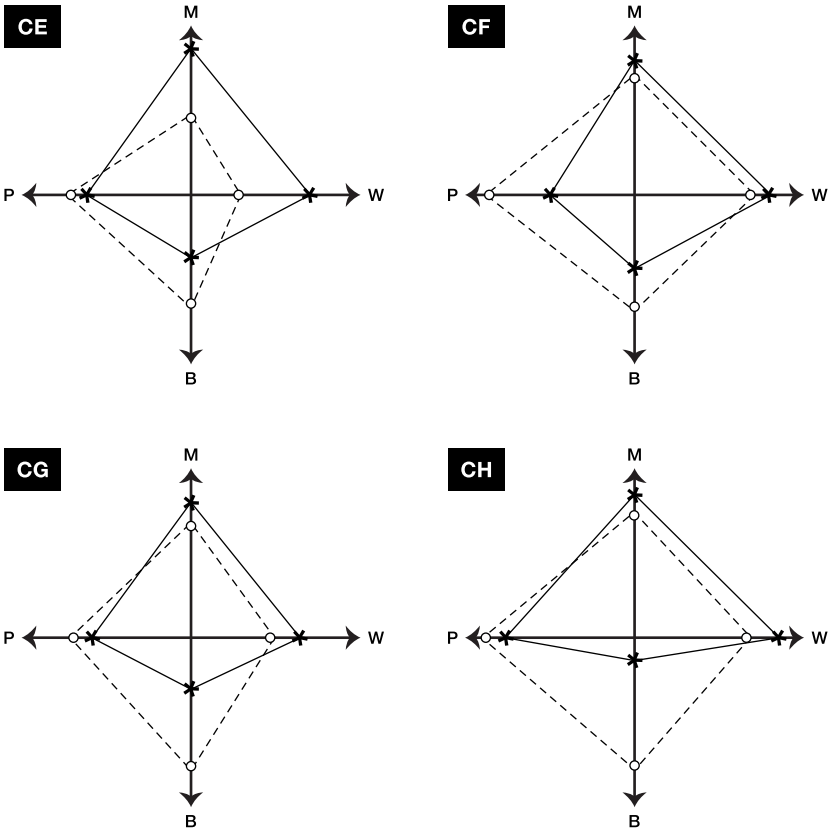
Lived Experience: Canada

Figure 6a



Lived Experience: Canada

Figure 6b



Canada (Toronto) data summary sheet (March 2012)

CA

Male (23) single, lives alone, 15 months in Toronto, from Ottawa	
MIND	contemplation, intellectual activities, happy thoughts
BODY	exercise, pain, weight, diet, body shape
WORK	paid & unpaid, studying, groceries, shopping
PEOPLE	friends (+virtual), colleagues, neighbours, my students
Gaps	<i>Mind:</i> <i>Body:</i> significant, my responsibility with friends and family <i>Work:</i> significant, my responsibility <i>People:</i>

CB

Female (23) single, lives at home, 2 parents, born in Toronto	
MIND	joyful thoughts, worrying, contemplation
BODY	exercise, health dance
WORK	studying, cleaning, shopping
PEOPLE	daily with family& friends, dance club
Gaps	work gap insignificant, mind gap is important, I am responsible to close gap with help of family and reduce worrying

CC

Male (25) single, lives alone, 2 years in Toronto	
MIND	wellbeing, anxiety, contemplation, read, writes
BODY	health, exercise, chronic distress, medical condition
WORK	paid employment, shopping, household chores
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, strangers, community
Gaps	significant gaps for mind, work people, I am responsible and government policies (health care/transportation)

CD

Male (26) single, shares with room-mate, from Montreal, 6 months in Toronto	
MIND	worry, hope, contemplation, expectations, home
BODY	health, eating well/poorly, allergies/sickness, sleep
WORK	teaching, studying, reading/writing, cleaning
PEOPLE	family, friends, dog, colleagues, supervisor/professors
Gaps	significant for mind, body people, I am responsible and for work, government policies (provide funds to help students) would assist me

CE

Male (32), married, 2 children, apartment, from USA, 7 months in Toronto	
MIND	anxiety, thinking, reflection, contemplation
BODY	health, exercise, stress
WORK	responsible for others (children), household chores, studying
PEOPLE	family, friends (+virtual)
Gaps	very significant, I am responsible and government policies (daycare/fees/transportation) would help

CF

Female (30), married, daughter, apartment, from USA, 7 months in Toronto	
MIND	worrying, contemplation, intellectual activities, laughter
BODY	sore ankle, more exercise needed, need hair treatment
WORK	studying, housework, care for family
PEOPLE	daughter, and husband, friends (away), new friends
Gaps	significant gaps, I am responsible and government policies (reduce fees — hence reduce work hours) would help and more facilities closer to apartment (gym and daycare) less work would help me spend more time with family

CG

Male (24), single, room-mate, in apartment, Toronto 7 months, from Kingston	
MIND	worry, excitement, anticipations, creativity, appreciation
BODY	lethargy, comfort, fatigue, nervous
WORK	studying, song-writing, shopping for groceries/cooking, organizing
PEOPLE	band-mates, housemates, friends missing family
Gaps	significant gaps, I am responsible and government policies (unspecified) would help

CH

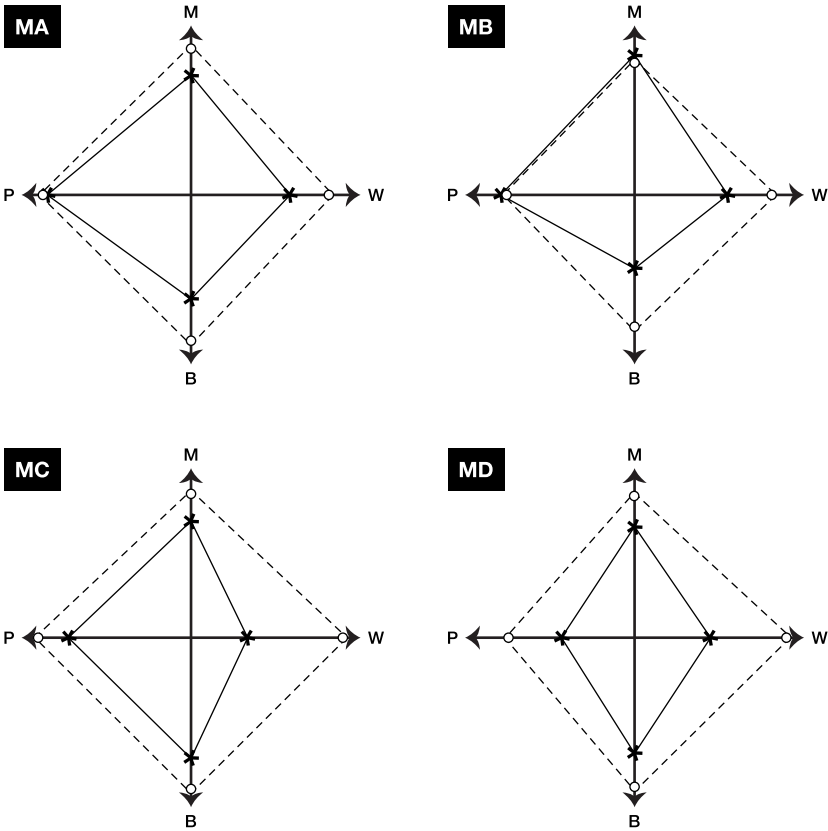
Female (47), married, 2 children, husband, house, 22 years in Toronto, India	
MIND	joy, peace, sadness, curiosity, reflection
BODY	pains, health issues, exercise, meditation
WORK	writes, talks, read, teach, volunteering
PEOPLE	family, neighbours, students, colleagues
Gaps	body is very significant (I am responsible), other gaps less important but I am responsible

Summary Notes: Canada data

- Overall shapes are open and large with some gaps for each individual which in some cases are seen as significant and worth trying to close
- Limited sets of words comprise clusters
- Only one reference to pet
- Only one reference to volunteer work
- Oldest person (H) with 2 children has very significant body gap
- G also has significant body gap
- Married/single differences
- Male/female differences
- Individuals feel most responsibility lies with them to find will, ways and means to close gaps, with some government intervention/policies (transportation improvement to and from campus, fees reduced and student loan programmes need to be increased, accommodation assistance, daycare)
- All individuals thought that the exercise was useful to highlight the concept of Lived Experiences: better than using a numerical scale approach to calculating a number to describe the QOL of a person
- More discussion on public policies could follow in later work with the group to elaborate specific details of policies they felt were important
- The long list of words for each cluster was deemed to be comprehensive
- All agreed that the four basic dimensions neatly capture the essential variety of lived experiences

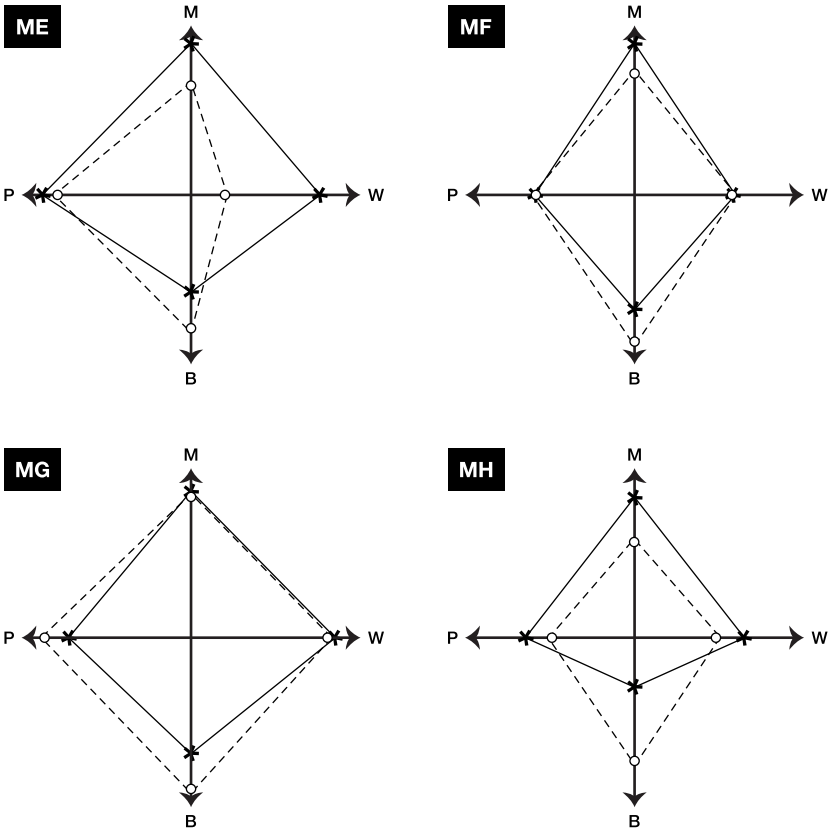
Lived Experience: Mexico

Figure 7a



Lived Experience: Mexico

Figure 7b



*Mexico (Puerto Vallarta) Data Summary Sheet (April 2012)***MA**

Female (19), single, born in Villa Corona Jalisco, at home with my family.	
MIND	worrying, happiness, fear, hope, acceptance.
BODY	clothes, chronic distress, health, exercise, afflictions.
WORK	studying, hobbies, responsibility for others, shopping, cleaning.
PEOPLE	family, friends, neighbours, community, colleagues.
Gaps	mind, work and body important gaps to be closed by me, I am responsible.

MB

Female (20), single, born in Vallarta, at home with my family.	
MIND	wellbeing, worrying, reflection, acceptance, happiness.
BODY	health, looks, chronic distress, exercise, pain.
WORK	studying, volunteering, responsibility for others, cooking, cleaning.
PEOPLE	family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, community.
Gaps	mind, work, body and people all are important, I am responsible to close the gaps, but friends can help to do it.

MC

Female (19), single, born in Llano Grande, Jalisco, but live in Puerto Vallarta with my family.	
MIND	spiritually, anxiety, happiness, pleasure, hope.
BODY	health, clothes, chronic distress, afflictions, pain.
WORK	unpaid employment, cooking, shopping, studying, hobbies.
PEOPLE	family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, virtual friends.
Gaps	mind, work, people and body gaps are significant, I am responsible but friends and owners of enterprises can help to close work gap.

MD

Female (22), single, born in Guadalajara, at home with my family.	
MIND	joy (passion), wellbeing, happiness, reflection, acceptance.
BODY	diet, shopping, health, exercise, chronic distress.
WORK	studying, caring, responsibility for others, cleaning, hobbies.
PEOPLE	family, friends, virtual friends, strangers, neighbours.
Gaps	mind, work, body and people gaps are important to be closed. I am responsible for in a general way.

ME

Female (25), single, born in Guadalajara, at home with my family.	
MIND	distress, reflection, happiness, reading, joy (passion).
BODY	health, shopping, clothes, chronic distress, body shape.
WORK	unpaid employment, studying, responsibility for others, cleaning, hobbies.
PEOPLE	family, friends, neighbours, clubs, colleagues.
Gaps	mind, work, people and body are important gaps, I am responsible for: mind, body and people, but for work the responsibility is the government because it isn't generating enough job opportunities.

MF

Female (19), single, born in la Estancia de Landeros, Jalisco, at home with my family brothers.	
MIND	worrying, anxiety, happiness, reflection, prayer (religious).
BODY	chronic distress, health, weight, medical conditions, exercise.
WORK	studying, hobbies, cleaning, volunteering, shopping.
PEOPLE	family, virtual friends, colleagues, neighbours, strangers.
Gaps	mind, body, work and people gaps are important, I am responsible.

MG

Male (19), single, born in Mexico D.F., at home with my family.	
MIND	reflection, worrying, happiness, pleasure, joy (passion).
BODY	clothes, health, weight, exercise, chronic distress.
WORK	paid employment, studying, hobbies, shopping, cleaning.
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, strangers, neighbours.
Gaps	mind, body, work and people gaps are important to be closed. I am myself responsible.

MH

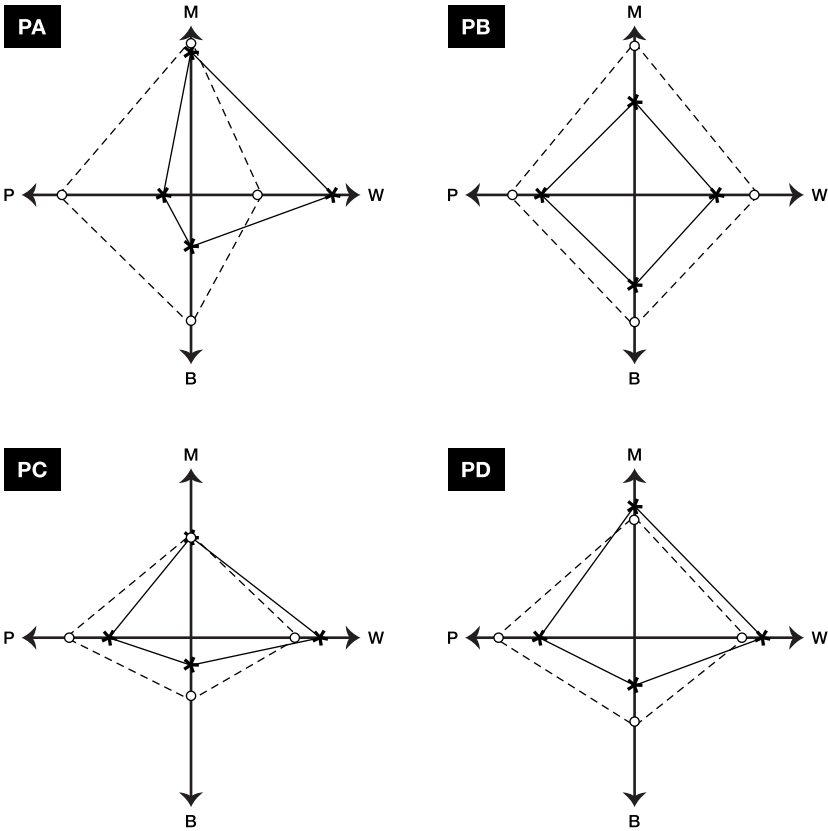
Male (21), single, born in Puerto Vallarta, I live at home with my family.	
MIND	worrying, acceptance, joy, anxiety, thinking
BODY	medical condition, weight, exercise, diet, clothes.
WORK	paid employment, hobbies, responsibility for others, cleaning, shopping.
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, community.
Gaps	mind, body, work and people are important, I am responsible.

Summary Notes: Mexican data

- All the individuals live in Puerto Vallarta, but only two of them were born there.
- All the individuals assumed that they were in March when they were responding to the questions about life experiences. The 2 weeks prior to the survey were vacation time for them
- All the individuals think that mind, body, work and people clusters or dimensions are very important for seeking equilibrium in life.
- Limited set of words (5) compound each dimension.
- Only one reference to volunteer work
- Male and female don't show any differences.
- Only one individual refers on the work dimension that the government is responsibility for it.
- Some individuals think that their distress is caused by no job opportunities.
- All the individuals feel that they are the responsible for finding ways of closing the gaps in every dimension.
- All individuals agreed that the list of words for each dimension was clear and comprehensive.
- All individuals explained the importance of being in equilibrium in each dimension (mind, body, work and people).
- All the individuals thought that this kind of exercise was useful to understand the sense of their lives, and also it can work as a measure life equilibrium and QOL.

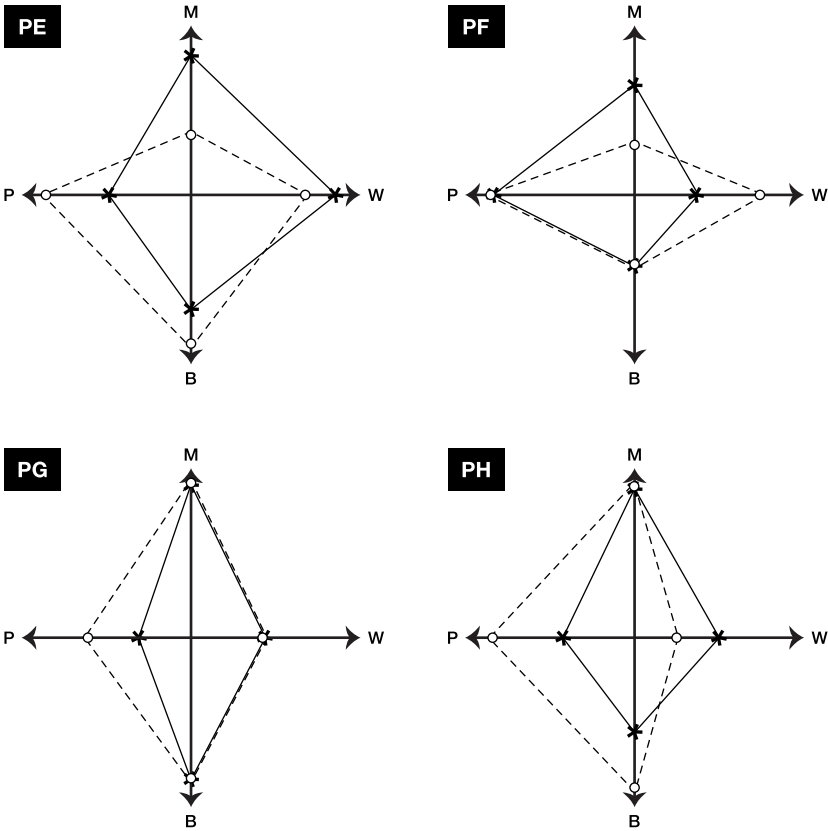
Lived Experience: Poland

Figure 8a



Lived Experience: Poland

Figure 8b



*Poland (Gdansk) Data Summary Sheet (April 2012)***PA**

Female, 28, single, lives with boyfriend, born in Warsaw, 13 years in Gdansk	
MIND	worrying, anxiety, reflection, contemplation, hope
BODY	health, chronic distress, afflictions, diet, tiredness
WORK	paid employment, learning, responsibility for others, seeking different job, hobbies
PEOPLE	friends, family, virtual friends, motorcyclists, musicians
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant.</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, I work too much, no time for physical exercise, I eat in a car, fast food mainly, too tired to cook, I eat out as it is easier, more physical exercise facilities should be available, I am responsible for closing the gap</p> <p><i>Work</i>: very significant, I have to maintain my family without help, both parents dead, I have to work at job as I need money and am short of money, I work long hours, I am responsible but some better social insurance would help, my boyfriends should work more but I don't think he will so I have to accept this</p> <p><i>People</i>: not significant, I am a loner type and don't mind being alone</p> <p>Difficult to compare axes, it is good to examine life and I am not responsible for changing everything in my life but I could change some if I set my mind to it</p>

PB

Male, 24, single, lives alone, 5 years in Gdansk	
MIND	reading, spirituality, intellectual development, contemplation, joy
BODY	health, medical condition, body shape, exercising, clothes
WORK	responsibility for others, learning, paid employment, volunteering, hobbies
PEOPLE	friends, colleagues, communities, strangers
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant, days are too short to read all the books I wish, try to organize time but still not enough, probably I can't close this gap so I learn to accept it</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, but not most significant, physical condition is important and I am not in too good shape, and not so good body shape, I am responsible for closing the gap, I would like to overcome my laziness and stop eating so much pizza in the evenings</p> <p><i>Work</i>: significant, but it depends on my work some work is fast and easy, some is harder and takes longer to complete, government should limit the number of graduates so they find work, too many study and do not find rewarding well paid work</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, I have to stop using computer so much and find time for so-called real people</p> <p>An interesting and unusual exercise that makes me think about my life and policymaking and my ability to change. I already am aware of gaps and my responsibility to change if I have the will. Useful 4 dimensions</p>

PC

Female, 25, single and engaged to marry, lives with parents	
MIND	intellectual development, wellbeing, faith, reading, writing
BODY	my looks, weight, body shape, health, chronic distress
WORK	hobbies, learning, paid employment, household chores, looking after people
PEOPLE	family, friends, virtual friends, colleagues, strangers
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: difficult to say if this is significant, I may be responsible but family and friends could help if we exercised together</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not very significant, I am responsible, better insurance system would help and government helps with better tax system and less bureaucracy</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, not enough time, I have personal difficulties relating to people, possibly this is psychological issue, I am responsible</p> <p>I spend a lot of time thinking about my life so the gaps are not new to me and the dimensions are familiar to my way of thinking, the 4 dimensions helps me to clarify my thinking</p>

PE

Female, 37, single, lives with parents in Gdynia	
MIND	moral and ethical considerations, thinking, intellectual development, distress
BODY	health, chronic distress, weight, afflictions, exercise
WORK	paid employment, missed some deadlines, too many duties, learning, household chores
PEOPLE	friends, family, communities, virtual friends, chatting to strangers
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant, I am responsible, poor time management, too many duties and responsibilities, more green open spaces where we could relax and reflect on life would be useful</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, I am responsible; I am too lazy, free swimming pools would help exercise</p> <p><i>Work</i>: significant, my employer and I are responsible, I cannot say no and have many tasks, and other employees could help and equal wages for men and women</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, I and others (friends/family) are responsible to close gap, I have few contacts with others</p> <p>The 4 dimensions and clear and appropriate, the exercise made me think clearly about my problems, the figures are very useful</p>

PD

Female, 30, lives with parents in Gdynia	
MIND	worrying, moral and ethical matters, think, write, distress
BODY	aging, diet, weight, body shape, medical condition
WORK	paid employment, learning, hobbies, responsibilities for others, volunteering
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, communities, virtual friends
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant because great body shape makes me feel better, connected to my health too, I am responsible to close gap but my work life influences time available, I am lazy</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not significant, I spend a lot of time working and I do not mind, pay increase would be rewarding and make the work more satisfying</p> <p><i>People</i>: very significant, I do not spend enough time with my friends, my long hours of work including weekends cuts into time available to see friends</p> <p>The project is coherent and important, the 4 dimension help me to clarify my thoughts about the areas of my lived experiences, and the exercise helps me to examine my life and my goals and other matters</p>

PF

Female, 26, single, lives with parents	
MIND	worrying, distress, joy, hope thinking
BODY	health, physical exercise, diet, effort, sport
WORK	learning/studying, volunteering, social work, looking for a job organizing debates and politics
PEOPLE	fiancé, friends, family, local society, local musicians
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant, worrying about finances, a crucial moment in my life is approaching; I cannot decide which way I should go in my life, I alone am responsible, but fiancé and friends help</p> <p><i>Body</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Work</i>: significant, too many duties connected to university and work, looking for paid work, I am unhappy I have to work as volunteer, I am responsible to close gap but I am not well organized to manage my time, my colleagues are lazy and do not pay attention to work, friends and family could help me</p> <p><i>People</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Work and mind are critical dimensions</i>: I should try to concentrate more on a single task, need for more opportunities for young entrepreneurs, but I should try harder to find work. Better connections between universities and employers are needed. Sport is important for me my hobby perhaps I should add this to body or work. Overall a very interesting technique to help me think about my life: there is strong psychological aspect to this work as well as political and social.</p>

PH

Male, 36, lives with wife and 3 children	
MIND	worry, think, contemplate, intellectual activities
BODY	health, exercise, diet, weight, body shape
WORK	paid employment, learning/studying, hobbies, responsibility for others, personal development
PEOPLE	family, friends, bikers, tourists, volunteers
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, I am short of time, I work too much, I am responsible and nobody can help me close this gap</p> <p><i>Work</i>: significant, not enough spare time, I work too much as my university salary is too low and I have a second job.</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, I work too much, I am responsible to close this gap, if I earned more as a university teacher then I would not need second job, I am short of spare time.</p> <p>Where is the dimension of spirituality? [NOTE- This is typically included in Mind dimension].</p> <p>The exercise is not so useful.</p>

PG

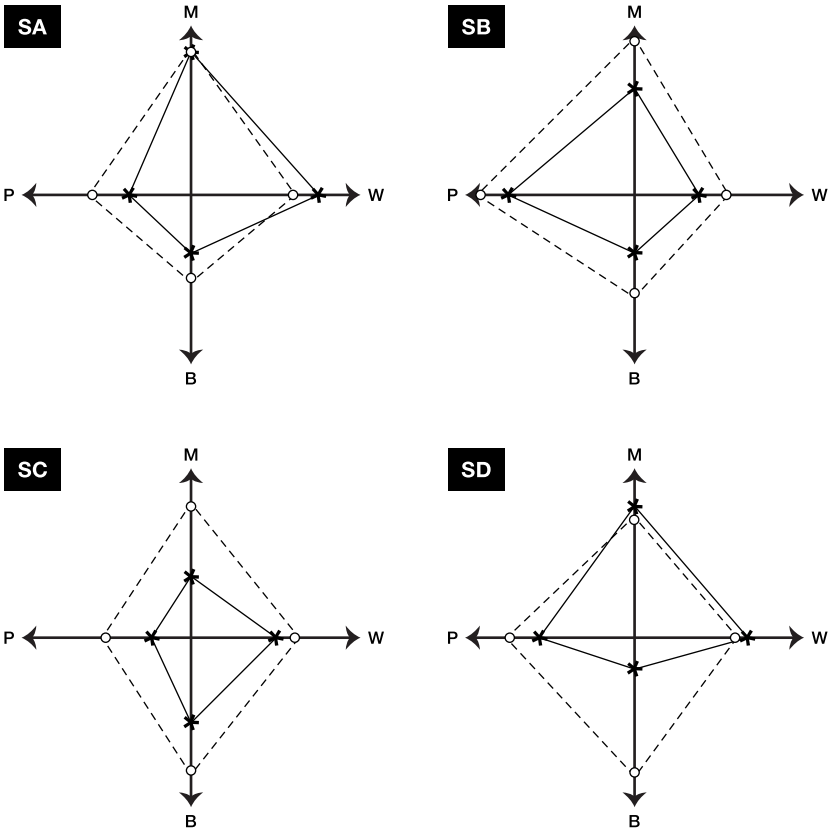
Male, 27, lives with a partner	
MIND	anxiety, distress, hope, eroticism, intellectual development
BODY	health, looks, diet, weight, clothes
WORK	hobbies, paid employment, household chores, unpaid employment
PEOPLE	friends, transport enthusiasts, parents, colleagues, virtual friends
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, no time, too much work, distance and shortage of money, I am responsible as well as my friends, after this session I intend to call some friends! I need to organize my time better; better public transport system would help and cheaper too.</p> <p>I think this procedure has no formal disadvantages. The procedure shows things I am aware of and maybe I was not so aware of their importance before.</p>

Summary Notes: Poland data

- Most of the respondents were very talkative and they expressed their views about their experiences and life.
- 1. Almost all of them have to work in multiple places, because they don't receive enough money from the university (some receive no university monies) — they have to live with their parents and they admit that this is a problem for them.
- 2. They are tired and it can be seen on their faces – the women don't wear any make-up, they don't care about clothes, it is sad.
- 3. They don't talk about any advantages of being a scientist; they only talk about problems connected with the duties connected to it. Being a scientist is not a privilege.
- 4. Many people admitted that they wanted to quit and start “working in a normal company”.

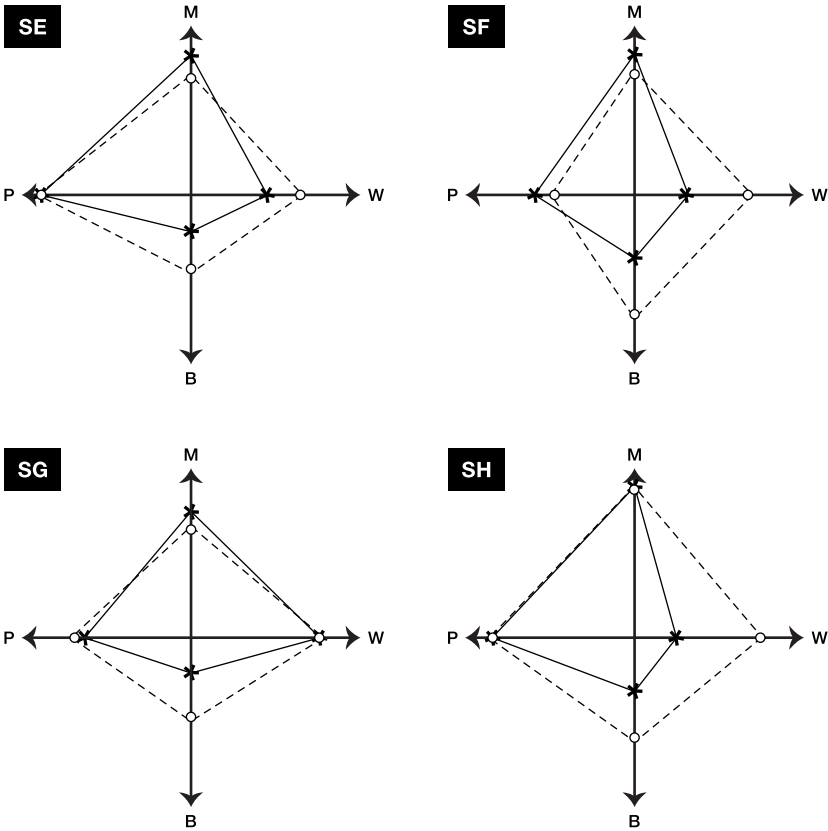
Lived Experience: Sweden

Figure 9a



Lived Experience: Sweden

Figure 9b



*Sweden (Uppsala) Data Summary Sheet (April 2012)***SA**

Male, 28, lives with partner, born Amsterdam, 2 ½ years in Uppsala	
MIND	happiness, reflection, intellectual thoughts, learning, progress
BODY	diet, illness, clothes, shoes, travel
WORK	studying, paid employment, life, mind, home
PEOPLE	friends, family, eating, colleagues, distance
Gaps	<p><i>Mind:</i> not significant <i>People:</i> significant as I am away from friends and family, working abroad, I should close this gap, public policies would not help <i>Body:</i> significant, chronic illness, the gap cannot be closed, but it seems to be decreasing with time and I am learning to accept this. It is my responsibility to deal with this. <i>Work:</i> not significant: I work a lot and I am happy with this</p> <p>The 4 dimensions are perfectly fine by me. I actually don't really care about the actual names. In combination with examples they make perfect sense to me. Lived experience as a concept rings a bell with me. I think the procedure is useful. I do reflect quite frequently about similar things in my life. In that sense the technique does not add much to my reflections, but not because of the technique <i>per se</i>.</p>

SB

Female, 26, in a relationship in shared flat, born in Italy, in Uppsala 8 months	
MIND	intellectual activities, acceptance, pleasure, eroticism, reflection
BODY	body shape, eroticism, clothes, weight, diet
WORK	caring paid employment, responsibility for others, studying, volunteering
PEOPLE	family, friends, community, Facebook
Gaps	<p><i>Mind:</i> significant, I would like my environment to have more cultural activities, and more accessible ones: public policies could help-free concerts, museums, cheaper tickets for students in cinema <i>Body:</i> not significant <i>Work:</i> not too significant I could or should do more <i>People:</i> significant gap as I live far from people I would like to spend time with: I don't see how to close this gap because of physical distance ... more 'skypeing' perhaps. Public policies can't do much but perhaps reduce costs of eating out, pubs, open longer at night better public spaces.</p> <p>In a general way the 4 dimensions make sense, but lived experiences are also those activities we do not have, that are why the gap concept is important. Lived experiences+ expectations+experiences we will never have could be described as 'life'. It is interesting to compare the figures with those I would draw if I lived in my home country; in that way I might be able to see who is responsible to close gaps-me or the context of the location.</p>

SC

Male, 26, married, lived in Sweden 2 ½ years	
MIND	worrying, happiness, reading, spirituality
BODY	health, exercise, body shape, looks, aging
WORK	paid employment, studying, household chores, cooking, shopping, retirement
PEOPLE	family, friends, relatives
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant, I should deal with this, I am lazy about this</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, I should deal with this but time is lacking and will,</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not significant, but a more structured academic programme might help</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant, I am not good at dealing with this dimension of life</p> <p>Yes, I find it useful to have snapshot of my recent experiences, the dimensions are helpful but they could be expanded perhaps. The technique resonates and reminds me diary writing: it is useful to examine the gaps.</p>

SD

Female, 26, live alone, born in Sweden	
MIND	joy, happiness, intellectual activities, thinking, worrying
BODY	health, exercise, looks, strength, pain
WORK	responsibility for others, paid employment, cleaning, household chores
PEOPLE	family, friends, relatives, community, colleagues
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, not enough exercise, unhealthy food, back pains, I need to close this gap by my efforts, some public programmes for exercise would help, I travel to work as accessible housing is unavailable so less time for exercise: public policies might address these issues</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>People</i>: significant as I away from family, I have not met friends and I expect his gap will persist even if I might wish to close it</p> <p>I find the 4 dimensions suitable: perhaps 'people' could be 'relations' Lived experiences is a difficult concept to grasp, it is personal view of life. It is good idea to stop and think about gaps: I will reflect further on this and would like more time to contemplate the exercise.</p>

SE

Female, 38, married with children, live with husband, born in Denmark, 9 years in Sweden	
MIND	intellectual activities, worrying, reflection, reading pleasure
BODY	health, medical condition, exercise, clothes, body shape
WORK	studying, paid employment, responsibility for others, cleaning, cooking
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, club activities, children
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant, my responsibility, no public policies feasible, it is good to thing but also to live in 'real time'</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, my responsibility, some public policy assistance may help, I cannot control my medical issues</p> <p><i>Work</i>: not significant, but my responsibility if I wish to close gap</p> <p><i>People</i>: good interaction because of recent holidays</p> <p>It can be useful to reflect on what you want in life and remember this from time to time: but external issues work and relationships can restrict desired choices perhaps</p>

SF

Female, 30, single, alone, born in Finland, 10 years in Sweden	
MIND	thinking, moral and ethical considerations, acceptance, hope
BODY	exercise, health aging, body shape, looks
WORK	paid employment, studying, unpaid employment, cleaning, cooking
PEOPLE	family, friends, colleagues, community, virtual friends
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant</p> <p><i>Body</i>: significant, my responsibility, work keeps me too busy for exercise</p> <p><i>Work</i>: significant, my responsibility</p> <p><i>People</i>: not significant</p> <p>Observing gaps for various activities is a useful exercise</p>

SG

Male, 30, married, children 1 and 1 expected soon, 5 years in Uppsala	
MIND	pleasure, acceptance, anxiety, wellbeing
BODY	diet, health, looks, clothes
WORK	paid employment, responsibilities for looking after others, household chores
PEOPLE	children, friends, colleagues, family
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: significant to be closed by me <i>Body</i>: significant to be closed by me <i>Work</i>: not significant <i>People</i>: not significant</p> <p>No public policy applications would assist in my case; there are already some economic incentives to do exercise. Gaps exist for me because of my poor planning and priority setting. A helpful exercise, the dimensions fit well and in my case I have high level of satisfaction with not too significant gaps. It is hard for me to separate out mind from work.</p>

SH

Female, 28, in relationship, living together with partner 'sambo', born Stockholm, in Uppsala about 6–7 years	
MIND	worrying, imagination, morals and ethics, hope, sadness
BODY	medical condition, gender/sex, skin colour, body shape, age
WORK	paid employment, household chores, cleaning, caring, studying
PEOPLE	friends, strangers, family, colleagues, community
Gaps	<p><i>Mind</i>: not significant <i>Body</i>: significant, but I will never reach my expectations to close gap,; my responsibility, but gym card paid by employer would help as would access to gym at work, but I do not make much effort to go to the gym as my priority for this is 'incorrect' <i>Work</i>: significant and it should partially closed; my responsibility, but I do not expect to reach my expectations as I am not as efficient as I would like and I have high expectation for myself on what I should accomplish <i>People</i>: not significant</p> <p>With respect to body and work the gaps identified help me to understand my lived experiences, but the words like 'body' and 'mind' are hard to grasp as they cover so much and it is hard to make connections to my actual life.</p>

Summary Notes: Sweden data

- The PhD students participating in the survey are/were currently participating in a qualitative research methods course in which topics such as survey and questionnaire design are addressed. The students engaged in the exercise enthusiastically and with a critical eye on how and why the exercise was being conducted.
- The students considered the exercise to be helpful overall but have some questions about the origin and effectiveness of the 4 dimensions.
- Interestingly for graduate students ‘work’ was not often a significant gap.
- Overall, people consider themselves responsible for addressing gap but there is some mention of ways in which the government or the university could help.
- There are slight differences between males and females. Females have more gaps with respect to work, and they look to public policies more to address their gaps.
- As the protocol describes the interviewer avoided making any mention of traditional QOL language before the exercise. He could tell the respondents were curious as to why they were doing the survey but the term ‘lived experience’ seemed to resonate with them. After the data were collected I explained the purpose of the study, the limitations other ways of probing QOL and that this exercise was somewhat of a methodological experiment. The respondents were interested in this idea and a good discussion as a group followed. We suspect, however, that they were more engaged with the logic and design of the study because of their engagement in the methods course, and because many of them are currently designing their own research projects for their PhD.

Concluding remarks

The main focus of this book is to present and test a new procedure to describe 'lived experiences': the term 'lived experiences' has been elaborated in an earlier section. Selected literature has been presented which links lived experiences to the concepts of QOL, happiness, the good life and living well. Empirical work was undertaken using the new procedure and it involved interviewing a small sample of students in four countries: Canada, Mexico, Poland and Sweden. The students are similar in certain respects, for example they all have academic familiarity with matters relating to policy making (urban/social/economic) and geographical aspects of societies. However, the four countries provide significantly different contexts within which each respondent lives their unique life. We begin this section by offering brief comments about the four countries to provide the reader with some background as to the social/economic/political contexts of the students. It is not suggested that the socio-economic and political contexts of each country directly cause specific types of lived experiences, but we feel it is important to have some understanding of each country when we try to interpret the expected and hoped-for levels of experiences in life which create gaps between lived experiences and desired levels, the significance of the gaps as well as the ways the gaps might be closed are also probably influenced by the situations in each country. We will leave close examination of these aspects of the work to future research. We will also offer a summary and remarks about the empirical results. Finally we will present an overview of the merits of the procedure and possible ways it could be applied in future research on QOL.

Canada is a diverse multi-ethnic society with a stable economy: there are some challenges regarding opportunities that confront students as they seek employment. Mexico is a large country with long and rich historical traditions. There are significant disparities of wealth and opportunities in Mexico. Mexico is a country with a long Catholic tradition as is Poland. Poland is the largest post-Communist state in Europe (post 1989) and this country is finding its feet within the European Union. Sweden presents a well established and perhaps the finest example of a welfare state with high levels of living standards and opportunities for all.

Using the Human Development Report of 2011 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/>) we offer a brief comparison of the four countries: the full report defines all terms used in the chart below.

	Canada	Mexico	Poland	Sweden
Population	34m	114m	38m	9.5m
HDI Rank	6	57	39	10
Level of HDI	Very High	High	High	Very High
Life expectancy	81	77	76	81
Education index	.927	.726	.822	.904
Income index	\$35,166	\$13,245	\$17,451	\$35,837

Selected extracts from Wikipedia capture some basic elements of the four countries.

'Canada is the world's eleventh-largest economy, with a 2011 nominal GDP of approximately US\$1.74 trillion. It is a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the G8, and is one of the world's top ten trading nations, with a highly globalized economy. Canada is a mixed economy, ranking above the US and most western European nations on the Heritage Foundation's index of economic freedom.'

'The economy of Mexico is the 13th largest in the world in nominal terms and the 11th by purchasing power parity, according to the World Bank.'

'Sweden has achieved a high standard of living under a mixed system of high-tech capitalism and extensive welfare benefits. Sweden has the second highest total tax revenue behind Denmark, as a share of the country's income.'

'Sweden has one of the most highly developed welfare states in the world. The country has a higher level of social spending to GDP than any other nation. Additionally it provides equal as well as comprehensive access to education and health care.'

'The Economy of Poland is a high income economy and is the sixth largest in the EU and one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, with a yearly growth rate of over 3.0% before the late-2000s recession. It is the only member country of the European Union to have avoided a decline in GDP, meaning that in 2009 Poland has created the most GDP growth in the EU. As of December 2009 the Polish economy had not entered recession nor contracted. According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, in 2010 the Polish economic growth rate was 3.9 %, which was one of the best results in Europe.'

The last section provided graphical and textual summaries of the data for each student in each of the four countries and also summary remarks. From this information we have constructed three tables of results. Table 1 presents information about the significance of the gaps identified on each figure. Table 2 describes the ways that the gaps could possibly be closed as suggested by each student, and in Table 3 we summarize comments about the perceived utility of the procedure. Following each Table we offer a set of specific points regarding the results.

Significance of gaps

Table 1

What gaps are significant?	Canada			Mexico			Poland			Sweden		
	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)
Mind	6	3	3	8	4	4	3	1	2	4	2	2
Body	6	3	3	8	4	4	6	2	4	7	3	4
Work	5	3	2	8	4	4	5	2	3	2	0	2
People	5	3	2	6	3	3	6	3	3	4	2	2
Total number of significant gaps	22	12	10	30	15	15	20	8	12	17	7	10
Age: Max	47	32	47	19	21	25	37	36	37	38	30	38
Age: Min	23	23	23	25	19	19	24	24	25	26	26	26
Age: Ave	28.7	26.5	31	22	19.5	21.5	29.1	29	29.2	29	28	29.6

- There does not appear to be any significant difference in terms of the number or type of gaps between male and female respondents across the samples
- The most significant gap across the samples is for the 'body' dimension
- In Canada and Mexico the gap for 'people' is slightly lower than the other three gaps
- In Poland the gap for 'mind' was the lowest
- In Sweden the gap for 'work' was the lowest
- If we compare the gap for 'work' between Mexico and Sweden we find total scores of 8 vs. 2 respectively.
- Overall, the total number of gaps as they vary among countries may be significant. Whereas respondents in Sweden reported 17 total gaps those in Mexico report a total of 30. Canada and Poland reported 22 and 20 respectively.
- In terms of age the notable difference in the sample comes from Mexico where the respondents were about 6 years younger.
- The gaps may indicate too much e.g. 'work' and the desire is to reduce: 'body' is too low and the desire is to increase: 'mind' is typically not enough and the desire is to increase performance on this dimension, but if 'mind' involves worries and anxiety then the desire is to reduce it: with respect to 'people' and especially friends, if there are too few then the desire is to increase.
- Do younger people in Mexico have higher expectations and hence larger gaps than in the other three countries? This is a tentative suggestion to be examined in further research with more data, larger sample and stratified sampling design by age.

Who is responsible for closing gaps?

Table 2

Responsibility for closing gaps	Canada			Mexico			Poland			Sweden		
	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)	Total	Male (4)	Female (4)
Self Help	8	4	4	8	4	4	8	3	5	7	3	4
Raise Awareness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public Policies	5	3	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	4	1	3
Family/Friends	2	1	1	1	0	1	3	0	3	0	0	0
Employer	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	1	3	2	1	1

- Within the samples and the question about ‘who’ should be responsible for closing the gap, females were slightly more concerned with public policies than males.
- In Poland 3 females looked to family and friends to close the gap but no males did
- Interestingly, across the samples individual responsibility was most significant with 31 out of 32 respondents reporting that they are responsible for closing the gaps
- Moreover, whereas Canada (5), Sweden (4) and Poland (3) looked to public policies, respondents in Mexico (1).
- Whereas in Canada (0) and Mexico (1) respondents did not look to employers to close gaps, respondents in Sweden (2) and Poland (4) suggested roles for employers

Overall appreciation of procedure

Table 3

	Canada	Mexico	Poland	Sweden
Dimensions are clear and meaningful	8	8	6	5
Dimensions are unclear	0	0	2	2
Dimensions : no opinion	0	0	0	1
Technique is useful	8	8	7	8

- Overall 31 out of 32 respondents felt that the procedure and exercise are useful to organize information and opinions, present them in a way that helps think about lived experience and suggest ways to improve QOL by identifying possible strategies to close the gaps
- 27 out of 32 respondents found the dimensions clear and meaningful and only 4 out of 32 respondents reported some confusion

The comments we offer after each table are general observations, and because the sample size is small we do not offer any formal statistical tests. However, we suggest that in future research sample sizes should be increased and data collection be organized to produce systematic and stratified samples so that formal hypotheses could be tested statistically. For example, it might be instructive to collect data to examine relationships between the significant gaps and a set of variables such as age, gender, and country of origin/residence, level of education, socio-economic status, immigrant status, health, and employment record.

We also suggest it may be useful to examine the trends in the opinions of the respondents over a longer period of time by collecting repeat sets of data at interval of some weeks over a longer period of about a year for example. This would allow a clearer picture to emerge of the enduring strength of the opinions from each respondent.

As noted, the individuals in our sample feel a strong sense of personal responsibility for closing the gaps, and this reflects wider societal trends toward the individualization of responsibility and decision-making. In the 'Risk Society' (1992) the German sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that individuals, regardless of class and human capital, now engage in elective and do-it-yourself biography construction. As the state 'rolls back' traditional supports and certainties, and firms become flexible, responsibility is being downloaded to individual workers who are being encouraged to be self-reliant and self-governing. Thus, new freedoms to shape and coordinate one's own life are accompanied by new trapdoors that can lead to exclusion, risk and uncertainty.

The identification, and causes of the phenomenal growth of the number of individuals who live alone and the social consequences have been explored in the provocative new book by Klinenberg (2012). 'In addition to economic prosperity and social security, the extraordinary rise in living alone stems from the world-historic cultural change that Emile Durkheim, a founding father of sociology, called the

cult of the individual.’ ‘The four countries with the highest rates of living alone are Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark, where roughly 40–45% of all households have just one person. By investing in each other’s social welfare and affirming bonds of mutual support, the Scandinavians have freed themselves to be on their own. (Klinenberg 2012, 9–10). Clearly self-reliance is seen as the most appropriate way to deal with lived experiences and as demonstrated in this empirical study the preferred way to close gaps on all the four dimensions we have used.

With respect to the protocol we feel that in general it worked well. Possibly more time should be devoted in the early stages of the interview session to encourage each respondent to explore their unique lived experiences, in order to derive a list of attributes for each of the four dimensions, and so reduce reliance on words suggested by the interviewer. This exploration could be undertaken by asking each respondent to identify Type 1, 2 and 3 lived experiences as discussed in the Introduction.

Possibly some introductory comments on the purpose of the procedure would be appropriate to introduce the notion that the work is part of a larger project on ways to examine QOL, and to search for ways to improve and maintain a high QOL for individuals.

The matter of which public policies may help improve QOL is worth exploring further, especially with those who felt there was a role for governments in helping to close the gaps. We suggest that following the initial interview sessions the researchers examine the data and prepare the figures to identify the gaps, then a second session be held with all the respondents to allow each respondent to look closely at the results for the whole group and to consider specific ways to close gaps in the light of the opinions of all members of the group. Such an exercise may produce specific public policy recommendations as well as more specific comments as to ways for individuals to take responsibility to close the gaps, and roles for family member, friends as well as employees could perhaps be defined.

We suggest that the procedure may have a useful role to play in dealing with specific groups in society who have special needs to improve their QOL, for example, senior citizens, new immigrants, and unemployed persons.

Our final comment is that we strongly recommend this procedure as a suitable complementary way to the more traditional numerical methods for defining and measuring QOL. As we mentioned in the introduction the earlier methods relied on asking people how good your life is and the responses were used as an indication of their QOL. We owe a debt to Kahneman (2011) for pointing out the consequences of this approach, and its inherent weaknesses which we hope are now acknowledged by researchers in the field of QOL research. The search continues for more appropriate ways to identify and measure the elusive notion of QOL so as to improve lived experiences of all as part of the challenge to lead good life and to live well and we offer this procedure as way to proceed.

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He was born in Michoacan State, and grew up on the coast of Jalisco State. He studied at primary school in his native state and he completed secondary and high school in Jalisco. After finishing high school he went to Colima City to study at the university in Business Administration. He completed a master degree at the University of Guadalajara, in the Centro Universitario de la Costa. In October 2010 he was awarded a PhD in Education from the University of Tijuana.

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