

# The Effects of the Levels of Optimism and Self-monitoring on Meaning in Life

Altan Ayan

**Abstract**—In this current study, firstly, the concepts of optimism, self-monitoring and meaning in life are expressed. The aim of this study is to examine the levels of optimism and self-monitoring on meaning in life. To put it another way, the research tries to investigate the factors affecting the level of meaning in life. In addition, the effect of the level of optimism on self-monitoring is scrutinized. The research sample comprises a total of 240 students from a school of applied sciences at a state university in the Marmara region. In this context, the data are obtained from 240 students. Thus, the population of the research covers all students studying at this state university. In this current study, factor analysis, reliability test and multiple regression tests were carried out. Consequently, it has been seen that the sub-dimensions of optimism scale have a significant effect on existent meaning. Last but not least, it is observed that the sub-dimensions of self-monitoring scale have a significant positive effect on existent meaning as well.

**Index Terms**—Optimism, self-monitoring, meaning in life.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today, especially during individuals' youth, the topics of optimism and meaning in life are carefully considered. Educational institutions play a fundamental role in educating people with high levels of optimism and meaning in life. The factors such as meaning, purpose and goal of life are of huge importance, especially during people's youth. It should be noted that the examination of the effect of optimism and the level of self-monitoring on meaning in life is a matter of importance within this context. This case is examined by the current study conducted upon university students. This study sets out to investigate the effect of optimism and self-monitoring on meaning in life. Thus, the effect of the level of optimism on self-monitoring is examined as well.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Optimism

Optimism is the state, in which we have positive expectations for the occurrence of good developments in the future by focusing on the positive side of a variety of situations and events. On the other hand, pessimism is the exact opposite state of optimism. Pessimism is a situation increasing the tendency for depression that is associated with the conditions in which people feel themselves sad and anxious [1]. Optimism is the way of showing tendency for

the detection of positive situations rather than negative ones surrounding people. In addition, optimism is seen as a cognitive process [2]. It can be said that optimist people are more capable of being promoted as well as being more satisfied, more patient and more active, considering work life [3]. Moreover, optimism is described as facing positive expectations for the future, while pessimism states the opposite. The concept of optimist personality is expressed on the basis of people's positive expectations for the future [4]. Further, optimism is important to ensure much success and longevity along with positive emotions and high morale. By contrast, pessimism is a reflection of social disability, lack of success and diseases accordingly [5].

### A. Self-monitoring

People having the ability of self-monitoring show behavior that they consider effective by evaluating the tips in the environment where they are present and therefore act according to the environment [6]. It should be noted that people with high levels of self-monitoring organize and modify their behavior according to social norms. Further, people with high levels of self-monitoring influence their behavior properly based on group norms, roles and social status as well. These people can control and shape their behavior according to social expectations. Thus, controlling people's own behavior makes them more cautious [7]. Conversely, people with lower levels of self-monitoring act based on their own expectations. These people are affected slightly by the attitude of the group and act on the basis of their characteristics and needs as well [8]. As far as self-monitoring is concerned, it can be seen as acting according to the feelings and thoughts of others. Hence people having high levels of self-monitoring display their positive emotions clearly and hardly show their negative emotions as a result [9].

### B. Meaning in Life

The meaning in life is the concept of a versatile structure. The concept of meaning in life usually stresses the value, the purposes and the important objectives of life accordingly. A common definition of the concept of meaning in life is not available. It is important to know that this issue sees the growing interest in recent years. The meaning in life can be seen as a matter of positive psychology. In addition, this concept is a positive variable [10]. People with higher levels of meaning in life also possess higher levels of self-esteem and happiness. It can be said that these people have purposes in life, spend their lifetime in more rewarding activities and show more resistance to stress and problems as a result. On the other hand, people with lower levels of meaning in life, people who cannot find any meaning in their lifetime display higher levels of depression and suicidal tendencies [11]. In the early years of young adulthood, the meaning in life, meaning referring to the future and objectives in life are frequently questioned [12].

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Altan Ayan is with Trakya University, Uzunköprü School of Applied Sciences, Uzunköprü, Edirne, Turkey (e-mail: altanayanayan@gmail.com).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Aim of the Study, Model and Hypotheses

The aim of this study is to examine whether or not the levels of optimism and self-monitoring have any amount of influence over meaning in life. In addition, the effect of the level of optimism on self-monitoring was also investigated.

Research model is shown in Fig. 1 below. According to the research model, firstly, the effect of the level of optimism on meaning in life was examined. In this context, two multiple regression models were tested. The sub-dimensions of optimism scale were discussed as the independent variable, while the sub-dimensions of meaning in life were discussed separately as the dependent variable and two hypotheses (H1 and H2) were tested within this context.

According to the research model, next, the effect of the level of self-monitoring on meaning in life was examined. In this context, two multiple regression models were tested. The sub-dimensions of self-monitoring scale were discussed as the independent variable, while the sub-dimensions of meaning in life were discussed separately as the dependent variable and two hypotheses (H3 and H4) were tested within this context.

According to the research model, finally, the effect of the level of optimism on self-monitoring was investigated. Two multiple regression models were tested here. In this context, the sub-dimensions of optimism scale were discussed as the independent variable, while the sub-dimensions of self-monitoring were discussed separately as the dependent variable and two hypotheses (H5 and H6) were tested.

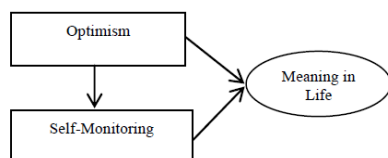


Fig. 1. Research Model

#### Hypotheses:

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of optimism has no significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>1</sub>: The level of optimism has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>1a</sub>: The level of optimistic tendency has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>1b</sub>: The level of pessimistic tendency has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>1c</sub>: The level of social tendency has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of optimism has no significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>2</sub>: The level of optimism has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>2a</sub>: The level of optimistic tendency has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>2b</sub>: The level of pessimistic tendency has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>2c</sub>: The level of social tendency has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of self-monitoring has no significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>3</sub>: The level of self-monitoring has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>3a</sub>: The level of awareness to others' behavior has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>3b</sub>: The level of ability to modify self-behavior has a significant effect on requested meaning.

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of self-monitoring has no significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>4</sub>: The level of self-monitoring has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>4a</sub>: The level of awareness to others' behavior has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>4b</sub>: The level of ability to modify self-behavior has a significant effect on existent meaning.

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of optimism has no significant effect on awareness to other's behavior.

H<sub>5</sub>: The level of optimism has a significant effect on awareness to other's behavior.

H<sub>5a</sub>: The level of optimistic tendency has a significant effect on awareness to other's behavior.

H<sub>5b</sub>: The level of pessimistic tendency has a significant effect on awareness to other's behavior.

H<sub>5c</sub>: The level of social tendency has a significant effect on awareness to other's behavior.

H<sub>0</sub>: The level of optimism has no significant effect on ability to modify self-behavior.

H<sub>6</sub>: The level of optimism has a significant effect on ability to modify self-behavior.

H<sub>6a</sub>: The level of optimistic tendency has a significant effect on ability to modify self-behavior.

H<sub>6b</sub>: The level of pessimistic tendency has a significant effect on ability to modify self-behavior.

H<sub>6c</sub>: The level of social tendency has a significant effect on ability to modify self-behavior.

#### B. Sample, Population and Scales

The research sample comprises a total of 240 students from a school of applied sciences at a state university in the Marmara region. The data were obtained from these 240 students. Thus, the population of the research covers all students studying at this state university.

In this present study, a 12-item scale was utilized to measure optimism. The original one of this scale was developed by Scheier and Carver (1985) and its adaptations were processed by Aydın and Tezer (1991) [13], [14]. The scale consists of positive and negative questions. To measure the level of self-monitoring, a 13-item scale developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984) was used [15]. Questions number 4 and number 6 were reverse scored on self-monitoring scale. To measure the level of meaning in life, a 10-item scale was used, which originally developed by Steger et al. (2006) [16]. The adaptation of meaning in life scale was processed by Akın and Taş (2011) [17]. The meaning in life scale consists of two dimensions so-called 'existent meaning' and 'requested meaning'. The dimension of existent meaning consists of questions number 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9 respectively. As for the dimension of requested meaning, questions number 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10 are scored on the scale [10].

Scoring procedure was implemented and responses were on the scales of optimism, self-monitoring and meaning in life, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree = 1', 'Disagree = 2', 'Neutral = 3', 'I Agree = 4' and 'Strongly Agree = 5'. The survey was applied as a 5-point Likert-scale within this context.

### C. Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 21 software in our study. In this context, factor analysis and reliability tests were applied to the scales of optimism, self-monitoring and meaning in life, respectively. As a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of optimism, three sub-dimensions were emerged consistent with the literature. Similarly, as a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of self-monitoring, two sub-dimensions (consistent with the literature) were emerged. Moreover, as a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of meaning in life, two sub-dimensions (consistent with the literature) were determined as well.

Following this further, two multiple regression models has been tested regarding the effect of the level of optimism on meaning in life. Later, two separate multiple regression models were tested related to the effect of the level of self-monitoring on meaning in life. Finally, two separate multiple regression models has been tested regarding the effect of the level of optimism on self-monitoring. That is, a total of 6 separate multiple regression models were tested. Of the respondents, 97 students (40.4%) were male, while 143 students (59.6%) were female. A total of 240 students participated in the study accordingly.

Table I below displays the results of factor analysis regarding the scale of optimism.

TABLE I: FACTOR ANALYSIS RELATED TO THE SCALE OF OPTIMISM

	Questions	Factor Weights	Explanatory Factors (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Optimistic Tendency	e10	0.731	18.927	0.684
	e4	0.666		
	e2	0.603		
	e1	0.589		
	e5	0.560		
Pessimistic Tendency	e11	0.486	18.167	0.699
	e9	0.784		
	e12	0.768		
	e8	0.708		
Social Tendency	e7	0.849	17.287	0.653
	e6	0.818		
	e3	0.569		
KMO Value: 0.714; Bartlett's Test:0.000; Total Explained Variance: 54.381				

As a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of optimism, three sub-dimensions were emerged consistent with the literature. Factor 1, 2 and 3 were named as 'Optimistic Tendency, Pessimistic Tendency and Social Tendency' respectively. Factor 1 explained 18.927 % of the total variance, factor 2 explained 18.167 % of the total variance and factor 3 explained 17.287 % of the total variance. Thus, the explained variance in total was 54,381 %. Also, Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as 0.684 for factor 1, 0.699 for factor 2 and 0.653 for factor 3 accordingly.

Table II below shows the results of factor analysis regarding the scale of self-monitoring. Questions number 4 and number 6 were excluded from analysis, while factor analysis has been applied to the scale of self-monitoring.

TABLE II: FACTOR ANALYSIS RELATED TO SELF-MONITORING SCALE

	Questions	Factor Weights	Explanatory Factors(%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Awareness to Others'	s10	0.791	33.893	0.863
	s8	0.775		

Behavior	s9	0.721	25.224	0.780
	s13	0.702		
	s11	0.680		
	s12	0.602		
	s7	0.460		
Ability to Modify Self- Behavior	s3	0.819	25.224	0.780
	s2	0.773		
	s1	0.700		
	s5	0.557		
KMO Value:0.904; Bartlett's Test: 0.000 Total Explained Variance: 59.117				

As a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of self-monitoring, two sub-dimensions were emerged consistent with the literature. Accordingly, factor 1 was named as 'Awareness to Others' Behavior', while factor 2 was named as 'Ability to Modify Self-Behavior'. Factor 1 explained 33.893 % of the total variance and factor 2 explained 25.224 % of the total variance. Thus, the explained variance in total was 59,117 %. On the other hand, Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as 0.863 for factor 1 and 0.780 for factor 2 accordingly.

Table 3 below illustrates the results of factor analysis regarding the scale of meaning in life. Question number 9 was excluded from analysis, while factor analysis has been applied to the scale of meaning in life.

TABLE III: FACTOR ANALYSIS RELATED TO THE SCALE OF MEANING IN LIFE

	Questions	Factor Weights	Explanatory Factors (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Requested Meaning	m3	0.787	29.698	0.780
	m8	0.756		
	m10	0.703		
	m7	0.687		
	m2	0.649		
Existent Meaning	m6	0.791	28.016	0.765
	m5	0.773		
	m4	0.748		
	m1	0.686		
KMO Value: 0.803 Bartlett's test:0.000; Total Explained Variance: 57.714				

TABLE IV: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF THE LEVEL OF OPTIMISM ON REQUESTED MEANING

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.375	0.362		6.562	0.000
Optimistic Tendency	0.091	0.078	0.075	1.156	0.249
Pessimistic Tendency	-	0.061	-0.035	-	0.586
Social Tendency	0.235	0.063	0.238	3.721	0.000
Dependent Variable: Requested Meaning R:0.268; R <sup>2</sup> :0.072; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> :0.060; Std.Error: 0.85928; F: 6.067; p: 0.001					

As a result of factor analysis that was applied to the scale of meaning in life, two sub-dimensions were emerged consistent with the literature. In this context, factor 1 was named as 'Requested Meaning' and factor 2 was named as 'Existent Meaning'. Factor 1 explained 29.698 % of the total variance and factor 2 explained 28.016 % of the total variance. Thus, the explained variance in total was 57.714 %. Also, Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as 0.780 for factor 1 and 0.765 for factor 2 accordingly.

Two separate multiple regression models were tested regarding the effect of the level of optimism on meaning in life.

Table IV presents the results of multiple regression tests that show the effect of the sub-dimensions of optimism level on requested meaning. Thus,  $H_{1a}$  and  $H_{1b}$  were rejected ( $p>0,05$ ).  $H_{1c}$  was supported ( $p<0,05$ ). This means that social tendency has a positive significant effect on requested meaning ( $\beta=0.238$ ). Students' perceptivity of social tendency increases as the level of requested meaning increase. Exhibition of social tendency raises the requested meaning.

TABLE V: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF OPTIMISM LEVEL ON EXISTENT MEANING

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.585	0.347		7.452	0.000
Optimistic Tendency	0.283	0.075	0.227	3.767	0.000
Pessimistic Tendency	-0.273	0.059	-0.275	-4.648	0.000
Social Tendency	0.182	0.061	0.179	3.001	0.003
Dependent Variable: Existent Meaning R: 0.446; R <sup>2</sup> : 0.199; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> : 0.188; Std.Error: 0.82374; F: 19.422; p: 0.000					

Table V details the results of multiple regression tests related to the effect of the sub-dimensions of optimism level on existent meaning. According to this,  $H_{2a}$ ,  $H_{2b}$  and  $H_{2c}$  were supported ( $p<0,05$ ). Thus, the optimistic tendency has a positive significant effect on existent meaning ( $\beta = 0.227$ ). As students' perceptivity of optimistic tendency increases, their levels of existent meaning also increase. On the other hand, the pessimistic tendency has a negative effect on existent meaning ( $\beta=-0.275$ ). When students' perceptivity of pessimistic tendency increases, their level of existent meaning decreases. Therefore, the social tendency has a positive significant effect on existent meaning ( $\beta = 0.179$ ). Students' perceptivity of social tendency increases, while their levels of existent meaning increase. It should be noted that the effect of pessimistic tendency on existent meaning was greater than the influence of any other dimension.

Two separate multiple regression models were tested regarding the effect of the level of self-monitoring on meaning in life.

TABLE VI: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF SELF-MONITORING LEVEL ON REQUESTED MEANING

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.666	0.258		6.465	0.000
Awareness to Others' Behavior	0.334	0.085	0.309	3.939	0.000
Ability to Modify Self-Behavior	0.147	0.079	0.145	1.849	0.066
Dependent Variable: Requested Meaning R:0.420; R <sup>2</sup> :0.176; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> : 0.169; Std.Error:0.80612; F:25.353; p:0.000					

Table VI displays the results of multiple regression tests in relation with the effect of the sub-dimensions of self-monitoring level on requested meaning. Accordingly,  $H_{3a}$  was supported ( $p<0,05$ ) and  $H_{3b}$  was rejected ( $p>0,05$ ). This means that the level of awareness to others' behavior has a positive significant effect on requested meaning ( $\beta = 0.309$ ). That is, students' awareness to others' behavior increases their levels of requested meaning.

TABLE VII: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF SELF-MONITORING LEVEL ON EXISTENT MEANING

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.118	0.248		4.501	0.000
Awareness to Others' Behavior	0.279	0.082	0.251	3.423	0.001
Ability to Modify Self-Behavior	0.343	0.077	0.329	4.481	0.000
Dependent Variable: Existent Meaning R:0.530; R <sup>2</sup> : 0.281; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> :0.275; Std.Error:0.77722; F: 46.217; p:0.000					

Table VII shows the results of multiple regression models in connection with the effect of the sub-dimensions of self-monitoring level on existent meaning. In this context,  $H_{4a}$  and  $H_{4b}$  were supported ( $p<0,05$ ). This means that the level of awareness to others' behavior has a positive significant effect on existent meaning ( $\beta=0.251$ ). That is, students' awareness to others' behavior increases their levels of existent meaning. Similarly, the level of ability to modify self-behavior has a positive significant effect on existent meaning ( $\beta=0.329$ ). Students' ability to modify self-behavior increases their levels of existent meaning. It should be noted that the effect of ability to modify self-behavior on existent meaning was greater than the influence of any other dimension.

Two separate multiple regression models were tested regarding the effect of optimism level on self-monitoring.

TABLE VIII: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF OPTIMISM LEVEL ON AWARENESS TO OTHERS' BEHAVIOR

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.108	0.299		7.048	0.000
Optimistic Tendency	0.239	0.065	0.215	3.697	0.000
Pessimistic Tendency	-0.142	0.051	-0.161	-2.817	0.005
Social Tendency	0.341	0.052	0.374	6.528	0.000
Dependent Variable: Awareness to Others' Behavior R:0.508; R <sup>2</sup> : 0.258; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> : 0.248; Std.Error: 0.71027; F:27.185; p:0.000					

Table VIII presents the results of multiple regression models in connection with the effect of the sub-dimensions of optimism level on awareness to others' behavior. Accordingly,  $H_{5a}$ ,  $H_{5b}$  and  $H_{5c}$  were supported ( $p<0,05$ ). This means that the level of optimistic tendency has a significant positive effect on awareness to others' behavior ( $\beta = 0.215$ ). While students' perceptivity of optimistic

tendency increases, their awareness to others' behavior also increase. It should be noted that the level of pessimistic tendency has a significant negative effect on awareness to others' behavior ( $\beta = -0.161$ ). This means that awareness to others' behavior falls, while students' perceptivity of pessimistic tendency increases. On the other hand, the level of social tendency has a significant positive effect on awareness to others' behavior ( $\beta = 0.374$ ). That is, students' perceptivity of social tendency increases as their awareness to others' behavior grows. It should be noted that the effect of the level of social tendency on awareness to others' behavior was greater than the influence of any other dimension.

TABLE IX: MULTIPLE REGRESSION TEST RESULTS RELATED TO THE EFFECT OF OPTIMISM LEVEL ON ABILITY TO MODIFY SELF-BEHAVIOR

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.724	0.318		5.424	0.000
Optimistic Tendency	0.230	0.069	0.193	3.340	0.001
Pessimistic Tendency	-	0.054	-0.125	-	0.028
Social Tendency	0.406	0.055	0.416	7.313	0.000
Dependent Variable: Ability to Modify Self-Behavior R: 0.517; R <sup>2</sup> :0.268; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> :0.258; Std. Error:0.75502 F: 28.640; p:0.000					

Table IX illustrates the results of multiple regression tests in connection with the effect of the sub-dimensions of optimism level on ability to modify self-behavior. According to this, H<sub>6a</sub>, H<sub>6b</sub> and H<sub>6c</sub> were supported ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the level of optimistic tendency has a significant positive effect on ability to modify self-behavior ( $\beta = 0.193$ ). While students' perceptivity of optimistic tendency increases, their ability to modify self-behavior also increases. Conversely, the level of pessimistic tendency has a significant negative effect on ability to modify self-behavior ( $\beta = -0.125$ ). That is, ability to modify self-behavior falls, while students' perceptivity of pessimistic tendency increases. Thus, the level of social tendency has a significant positive effect on ability to modify self-behavior ( $\beta = 0.416$ ). This means that students' perceptivity of social tendency increases as their ability to modify self-behavior grows. It should be noted that the effect of the level of social tendency on ability to modify self-behavior was greater than the influence of any other dimension.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

According to the results of our research, H<sub>1c</sub>, H<sub>2a</sub>, H<sub>2b</sub>, H<sub>2c</sub>, H<sub>3a</sub>, H<sub>4a</sub>, H<sub>4b</sub>, H<sub>5a</sub>, H<sub>5b</sub>, H<sub>5c</sub>, H<sub>6a</sub>, H<sub>6b</sub> and H<sub>6c</sub> were supported ( $p < 0.05$ ) and other hypotheses were rejected as a result ( $p > 0.05$ ).

It was observed that social tendency has a significant positive effect on requested meaning. We also found that optimistic tendency and social tendency have significant positive effects on existent meaning. On the other hand, pessimistic tendency has a significant negative effect on existent meaning. It should be noted that social tendency has significant positive effect on both requested meaning and existent meaning. In this context, social tendency emerged as an important factor to increase the level of meaning in life.

According to another finding, the level of awareness to others' behavior has a significant positive effect on requested meaning. Similarly, the level of awareness to others' behavior and the level of ability to modify self-behavior have significant positive effects on existent meaning. It should be noted that the level of awareness to others' behavior has significant positive effect on both requested meaning and existent meaning. The level of awareness to others' behavior emerged as an important factor to increase the level of meaning in life within this context.

It was also observed that the level of optimistic tendency and social tendency have significant positive effects on awareness to others' behavior. It was found that the level of pessimistic tendency has a significant negative effect on awareness to others' behavior. Conversely, the levels of optimistic tendency and social tendency have significant positive effects on ability to modify self-behavior. Hence the level of pessimistic tendency was negatively effective for ability to modify self-behavior. It should be noted that the sub-dimensions of optimism level have significant effects on sub-dimensions of self-monitoring. Thus, the level of social tendency has great amount of influence over awareness to others' behavior and ability to modify self-behavior.

Consequently, the level of social tendency and awareness to others' behavior emerged as important factors to increase students' level of meaning in life. In this context, it can be recommended for students to incline towards social activities that may develop their awareness to others' behavior, thereby showing more social tendency. It is worth bearing in mind that students should perform higher levels of participation in social activities.

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**Altan Ayan** is a graduate in chemical engineering, a master (with thesis) in management and organization, additionally holds a Ph.D. degree in the field of business administration. He serves as an assistant professor in Public Relations and Advertising Department of Uzunköprü School of Applied Sciences at Trakya University. He has been working in the fields of management and organization, leadership, organizational behavior and strategic management and has publications in these areas.