

## **The Comprehensive Measure of Meaning**

Our proposed measure, the Comprehensive Measure of Meaning (or CMM) is primarily intended to incorporate the results of philosophical discussion into an established framework coming to predominate the psychological literature on measuring meaning. The CMM principally makes use of a wide variety of items, or their adaptation, already in use from previous scales, but categorizes these in ways consistent with important distinctions derived from the philosophical literature. The CMM thus refines a growing consensus that meaning is experienced along three dimensions: cognitive coherence, affective significance, and motivational purposive direction (George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steger, 2016; Reker & Wong, 1998).

A sense of coherence, or an understanding of the meaning of life, may pertain to the world as a whole (“Global Coherence”) or one’s own life (“Individual Coherence”) (Martela & Steger, 2016; Debats, Drost, & Hansen, 1995; Metz, 2013; Seachris, 2013; Reker & Wong, 1998). A sense of significance, or meaning in life, may pertain to one’s own subjective assessment (“Subjective Significance”) or to what is truly valuable or is at least perceived as such by the relevant community (“Objective Significance”) (Wolf, 2010; Brogaard & Smith, 2005; Metz, 2013; Seachris, 2013). A sense of direction, or purpose in life, may pertain to one’s shorter-term goals and aims (“Goals”), or to one’s purposes or broader life-aims that generate and organize goals (“Purposes”), or to the whole of one’s life shaped by a singular sense of calling, mission, or vocation (“Mission”) (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Emmons, 1999; McAdams, 2001; Rudd, 2012).

# The Comprehensive Measure of Meaning

## 1. Coherence

### A. Global

- i. I have a clear understanding of the ultimate meaning of life.<sup>i</sup>
- ii. The meaning of life in the world around us is evident to me [modified].<sup>ii</sup>
- iii. I have a framework that allows me to understand or make sense of human life [modified].<sup>iii</sup>

### B. Individual

- i. I understand my life's meaning.<sup>iv</sup>
- ii. I can make sense of the things that happen in my life.<sup>v</sup>
- iii. I have a philosophy of life that helps me understand who I am.<sup>vi</sup>

## 2. Significance

### A. Subjective

- i. I am living the kind of meaningful life I want to live [modified].<sup>vii</sup>
- ii. Living is deeply fulfilling.<sup>viii</sup>
- iii. I feel like I have found a really significant meaning in my life.<sup>ix</sup>

### B. Objective

- i. The things I do are important to other people [modified].<sup>x</sup>
- ii. I have accomplished much in life as a whole [modified].<sup>xi</sup>
- iii. I make a significant contribution to society.<sup>xii</sup>

## 3. Direction

### A. Mission

- i. I have been aware of an all-encompassing and consuming purpose toward which my life has been directed [modified].<sup>xiii</sup>
- ii. I have a sense of mission or calling.<sup>xiv</sup>
- iii. I have a mission in life that gives me a sense of direction.<sup>xv</sup>

### B. Purposes

- i. I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.<sup>xvi</sup>
- ii. I can describe my life's purposes [modified].<sup>xvii</sup>
- iii. My current aims match with my future aspirations.<sup>xviii</sup>

### C. Goals

- i. In my life I have very clear goals and aims.<sup>xix</sup>
- ii. I have goals in life that are very important to me.<sup>xx</sup>
- iii. I have definite ideas of things I want to do.<sup>xxi</sup>

## Comprehensive Measure of Meaning Appendix

The following additional, and sometimes more generic, items are some of the more commonly used items in past measures, for which it may be of interest, for research purposes, to see how these are correlated with the seven categories of meaning above.

(Appendix 1.)

Integrated Significance:

- i. I find it satisfying to think about what I have accomplished in life.<sup>xxii</sup>
- ii. When I think about what I have done with my life I feel worthwhile.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- iii. I find fulfillment in the work I am engaged in or for which I am preparing myself.<sup>xxiv</sup>

(Appendix 2.)

General Meaning:

- i. My life is meaningful.<sup>xxv</sup>
- ii. My purpose in life is clear.<sup>xxvi</sup>
- iii. Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?<sup>xxvii</sup>
- iv. I feel my life has a sense of meaning.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Citation and Background

For citation and further details on the conceptual background of the measure see:

Hanson, J.A. and VanderWeele, T.J., The Comprehensive Measure of Meaning: psychological and philosophical foundations. In: M. Lee, L.D. Kubzansky, and T.J. VanderWeele (Eds.). *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities*. Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

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<sup>i</sup> Item #38 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale. Erci, B. (2008). Meaning in life for patients with cancer: Validation of the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(6), 704-711. See also "I think about the ultimate meaning of life," Item #1 on the Seeking of Noetic Goals Test. Reker, G. T., & Cousins, J. B. (1979). Factor structure, construct validity and reliability of the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) and Purpose in Life (PIL) tests. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 35(1), 85-91. See also "I believe that life has an ultimate purpose and meaning," Item #5 on the Personal Meaning Profile. Wong, P. T. P. (1998). Implicit theories of a meaningful life and the development of the Personal Meaning Profile. In Wong, P. T. P., & Fry, P. S. (Eds.) *The Human Quest for Meaning: A Handbook of Psychological Research and Clinical Applications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>ii</sup> Item #7 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale, originally phrased as "The meaning of life is evident in the world around us." Erci, 2008.

<sup>iii</sup> Item #29 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale, originally phrased as "I have a framework that allows me to understand and make sense of my life." Erci, 2008. See also "I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive," Item #11 on the Meaningful Life Measure. Morgan, J., & Farsides, T. (2009). Measuring meaning in life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10, 197-214. Item appears verbatim as Item #28 on the Life Regard Index. Debats, D. L., van der Lubbe, P. M., & Wezeman, F. R. A. (1993). On the psychometric properties of the Life Regard Index (LRI): A measure of meaningful life. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 14(2), 337-345.

<sup>iv</sup> Item #1 on the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. Steger, M., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(1), 80-93.

<sup>v</sup> Item #8 on the Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale. George, L. S. & Park, C. L. (2017). The Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale: A tripartite approach to measuring meaning in life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 126, 613-627.

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- <sup>vi</sup> Item #4A2. Krause, N. (2004). Stressors arising in highly valued roles, meaning in life, and the physical health status of older adults. *Journal of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 59(5), S287-S297.
- <sup>vii</sup> Item #18 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale. Erci, 2008.
- <sup>viii</sup> Item #2 on the Life Regard Index. Debats et al., 1993.
- <sup>ix</sup> Item #3B on Krause, 2004.
- <sup>x</sup> Item #3 under "Self-Worth" on the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving, originally phrased as "The work I do is important for other people." Su, R., Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2014). The development and validation of the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT). *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 6(3), 251-279.
- <sup>xi</sup> Item #9 on the Meaningful Life Measure, originally reverse coded as "I have failed to accomplish much in life." Morgan & Farsides, 2009.
- <sup>xii</sup> Item #49 on the Personal Meaning Profile. Wong, 1998. See also "The things I do contribute to society," Item #2 under "Self-Worth" on the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving. Su et al., 2014.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Item #18 on the Seeking of Noetic Goals Test, originally phrased as "I have been aware of an all-powerful and consuming purpose toward which my life has been directed." Reker & Cousins, 1979.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Item #19 on the Personal Meaning Profile. Wong, 1998.
- <sup>xv</sup> Item #37 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised. Erci, 2008.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Item #4 on the Purpose in Life Subscale. Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081. Item appears verbatim as Item #4C2. Krause, 2004.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Item #28 on the Sense of Purpose Inventory, originally phrased as "I can describe my life's purpose." Sharma, G. (2015). *Sense of Purpose Inventory: Development, psychometric examination, and construct validation*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations Publishing (3715563). The Pennsylvania State University, State Park, PA.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Item #12 on the Sense of Purpose Inventory. Sharma, 2015.
- <sup>xix</sup> Item #2 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale. Erci, 2008. Item is repeated verbatim as #16 on the Meaningful Life Measure. Morgan & Farsides, 2009. See also "In life, I have: (7) clear goals and aims," Item #3 on the Purpose in Life Test. Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1964) An experimental study in existentialism: The psychometric approach to Frankl's concept of *noogenic* neurosis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 20(2), 200-207.
- <sup>xx</sup> Item #9 from the Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale. George & Park, 2017.

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- <sup>xxi</sup> Item #3 on the Life Purpose Questionnaire. Hutzell, R. R. (1989). Institute of Logotherapy Press. In Jeffries, L. L. (1995) *Adolescence and meaning in life*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations Publishing (9542604). University of Houston, Houston, TX.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Item #6 on the Meaningful Life Measure. Morgan & Farsides, 2009. Item appears verbatim as #13 on the Purpose in Life Subscale. Ryff, 1989. Item appears verbatim as Item #4D2. Krause, 2004.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Item #11 on the Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes. Kass, J. D., Friedman, R., Leserman, J., Caudill, M., Zuttermeister, P. C., & Benson, H. (1991). An Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes with potential relevance to health outcomes: Validation and preliminary testing. *Behavioral Medicine, 17*(3), 121-129.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Item #3 on the Logo-Test Revised. Thege, B. K., Martos, T., Bachner, Y. G., & Kushnir, T. (2010) Development and psychometric evaluation of a revised measure of meaning in life: The Logo-Test-R. *Studia Psychologica, 52*, 133-145.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Item #7 on the Spiritual Meaning Scale. Mascaro, N., Rosen, D. H., & Morey, L. C. (2004). The development, construct validity, and clinical utility of the Spiritual Meaning Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 37*, 845-860.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Item #1 on the Sense of Purpose Inventory. Sharma, 2015.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Item #2 on the UK's Annual Population Survey's Four-Question Survey of Subjective Wellbeing. Allin, P., & Hand, D. J. (2017). New statistics for old?—Measuring the wellbeing of the UK. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A: Statistics in Society, 180*(1), 3-43.
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