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 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.\textsuperscript{i}
   ii. The meaning of life in the world around us is evident to me [modified].\textsuperscript{ii}
   iii. I have a framework that allows me to understand or make sense of human life [modified].\textsuperscript{iii}

B. Individual
   i. I understand my life’s meaning.\textsuperscript{iv}
   ii. I can make sense of the things that happen in my life.\textsuperscript{v}
   iii. I have a philosophy of life that helps me understand who I am.\textsuperscript{vi}

2. Significance

A. Subjective
   i. I am living the kind of meaningful life I want to live [modified].\textsuperscript{vii}
   ii. Living is deeply fulfilling.\textsuperscript{viii}
   iii. I feel like I have found a really significant meaning in my life.\textsuperscript{ix}

B. Objective
   i. The things I do are important to other people [modified].\textsuperscript{x}
   ii. I have accomplished much in life as a whole [modified].\textsuperscript{xi}
   iii. I make a significant contribution to society.\textsuperscript{xii}

3. Direction

A. Mission
   i. I have been aware of an all-encompassing and consuming purpose toward which my life has been directed [modified].\textsuperscript{xiii}
   ii. I have a sense of mission or calling.\textsuperscript{xiv}
   iii. I have a mission in life that gives me a sense of direction.\textsuperscript{xv}

B. Purposes
   i. I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.\textsuperscript{xvi}
   ii. I can describe my life’s purposes [modified].\textsuperscript{xvii}
   iii. My current aims match with my future aspirations.\textsuperscript{xviii}

C. Goals
   i. In my life I have very clear goals and aims.\textsuperscript{xix}
   ii. I have goals in life that are very important to me.\textsuperscript{xx}
   iii. I have definite ideas of things I want to do.\textsuperscript{xxi}
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. xxii
ii. When I think about what I have done with my life I feel worthwhile. xxiii
iii. I find fulfillment in the work I am engaged in or for which I am preparing myself. xxiv

(Appendix 2.)

General Meaning:

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

Citation and Background

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

References


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2 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.


Item #18 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised Scale. Erci, 2008.

Item #2 on the Life Regard Index. Debats et al., 1993.

Item #38 on Krause, 2004.

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.

Item #9 on the Meaningful Life Measure, originally reverse coded as “I have failed to accomplish much in life.” Morgan & Farsides, 2009.

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.

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.


Item #37 on the Life Attitude Profile-Revised. Erci, 2008.


Item #12 on the Sense of Purpose Inventory. Sharma, 2015.


Item #1 on the Sense of Purpose Inventory. Sharma, 2015.
