

THE PURPOSE IN LIFE TEST: WHAT DOES IT MEASURE?

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ORIGIN OF THE TEST

The Purpose in Life Test was developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1963) and designed to measure Viktor Frankl's concepts of meaning and purpose in life. The Purpose in Life Test has been used extensively, but inconsistent findings and inconsistent interpretations have been generated. One reason for this seems to be that the users have attributed various meanings to what the scale measures. Frankl's concept of purpose in life was based on a religious existential foundation which proclaimed that the essence of human motivation was the *will to meaning*. Human existence is characterized by factors of spirituality, freedom, and responsibility. Ideas central to the purpose in life concept are distributed in Frankl's writings, as illustrated by these excerpts.

The spirituality of man is no epiphenomenon. It cannot be derived from and causally explained by something not spiritual; it is irreducible and indeducible. Spiritual life may very well be conditioned by something without therefore being caused by it. (Frankl 1955a 22)

Freedom means freedom in face of three things: 1) the instincts, 2) inheritance, and 3) environment ... We have nothing against the acceptance of drives, but we are concerned with man's freedom in the face of them ... Thus man is by no means a product of inheritance and environment ... the decision-man ultimately decided for himself. (Frankl 1955a 23)

Man is not free from conditions, be they biological, psychological, or sociological in nature. But he ... remains free to take a stand toward these conditions; he always retains the freedom to choose his attitude toward them. Man is free to rise above the plane of somatic and psychic determinants of his existence. (Frankl 1967 3)

The freedom to take a stand is never complete if it has not been converted and rendered into the freedom to take responsibility. The specifically human capacity to will remains empty as long as it has not yet been complimented by its objective counterpart, *to will what I ought*. What I ought, however, is the actualization of values, the fulfillment of the concrete meaning of my personal existence. (Frankl 1961 9)

Meaning and value or fulfillment is attached to the person's work as a contribution to society, not to the actual occupation ... (Frankl 1955b 135)

Frankl noted three areas which yield a great deal of meaning to man: suffering, love, and work. The key to suffering is the attitude one takes to one's suffering. Suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds meaning. Love is the only way that a person can grasp another human being in the innermost core of the personality. To come to realize a person as a unique human being is love to Frankl. The meaning of work arises from the awareness of a unique personal task, that is, the person's *mission*. This is stimulated not only from a realization of creative values, but also from a contribution to society and maintaining a sense of independence. It is not the particular occupation on which fulfillment depends, but the way one does the work.

We interpret Frankl's purpose in life to mean that the individual has the responsibility to find a purpose in life within society's bounds by making free responsible choices among society's set alternatives. This would imply some type of religious beliefs as well as adherence to middle class values. It is this viewpoint which we assume to be measured by the Purpose in Life Test. This viewpoint of purpose in life is quite different from that of some existentialists such as Sartre.

To what degree does the Purpose in Life Test measure Frankl's concepts, as we have interpreted them? If our interpretation of Frankl is valid, we would expect the Purpose in Life Test to be highly interrelated with religiosity and middle class values. Hence, we measured these three concepts and analyzed the resulting data with factor analysis, a comprehensive technique used to determine the presence of a general dimension underlying a set of items, as well as the independence of subscales within a general dimension. The Crumbaugh Maholick Purpose in Life Test includes 20 items. The *religiosity scale* includes six items constructed by Fagin (1973). Its purpose is to identify the degree to which religious beliefs guide the respondent's daily behavior.

TABLE 1: FACTOR LOADINGS BY ITEM ON PURPOSE IN LIFE TEST

(1* is unrotated factor; Religiosity, No 6 is reverse-scored.)

Scale Items	Factors:	Rotated factor matrix					
		1*	1	2	3	4	5
Middle Class Values							
1 Pursue productive activity giving satisfying experience		.44	.14	-.15	-.33	-.51	-.01
2 Some type of spiritual experience		.44	-.04	-.74	-.12	-.31	.07
3 Establishment of your own family		.46	.23	-.24	.01	-.71	.13
4 Enjoyment of sexual relations		.33	.16	.02	-.18	-.79	.06
5 Concern for others less fortunate or needing help		.34	.07	-.26	-.74	-.20	.05
6 Believe everyone should have a fair chance in life		.24	.02	-.13	-.72	-.06	.16
7 Trying new ways of thinking and doing things		.27	.16	.06	-.69	-.04	.05
8 Importance of formal education		.25	.03	-.19	-.23	-.26	.54
9 Loyalty to society of which you are member		.46	.25	-.26	-.19	-.21	.56
10 One should think for self, not always depend on others		.14	-.04	.02	-.31	-.31	.02
Religiosity							
1 Often feel close to God in prayer, worship, vital times		.45	.08	-.86	-.06	-.05	.04
2 Try hard to carry my religion into all other dealings		.51	.15	-.86	-.04	-.04	.01
3 I know that God answers my prayers		.50	.14	-.86	-.08	-.02	.08
4 Religion important: answers questions of life's meaning		.53	.14	-.90	-.06	-.02	.08
5 Religious beliefs underly my whole approach to life		.51	.17	-.89	-.00	.02	.05
6 Psychiatrists explain religion better than theologians		.31	.14	-.40	-.10	.01	.04
Purpose in Life							
1 I am usually (exuberant—bored)		.68	.81	-.02	-.04	-.10	-.03
2 Life seems to me (exciting—boring)		.71	.84	.01	-.13	-.05	-.02
3 In life I have (clear goals—no goals)		.62	.48	-.07	.02	-.19	.12
4 My existence is (meaningful—meaningless)		.69	.65	-.05	.04	-.09	.17
5 Every day is (new—the same)		.67	.71	-.07	-.30	.04	-.04
6 If choosing I would like (the same—not to be born)		.68	.75	-.06	.02	-.10	.24
7 After retiring I would (do things—loaf)		.44	.32	-.04	-.28	.09	.49
8 In achieving life goals I (progressed—no progress)		.51	.41	-.09	.01	-.02	-.11
9 My life is (exciting—empty)		.76	.83	-.07	-.11	-.08	.02
10 Dying today, my life was (worthwhile—worthless)		.80	.77	-.19	-.04	-.15	-.01
11 In thinking of my life, I (reason—question)		.69	.64	-.26	.16	-.09	.06
12 For my life the world (fits meaningfully—confuses)		.58	.58	-.18	-.02	.19	.01
13 I am (responsible—irresponsible)		.26	.10	-.03	.02	-.12	.07
14 In freedom of choice, man is (free—bound)		.36	.29	-.09	-.26	.29	.10
15 With regard to death, I am (prepared—afraid)		.38	.32	-.41	-.08	-.05	-.57
16 I have (thought—not thought) about suicide		.49	.56	-.13	.31	-.08	.34
17 My ability to find meaning in life is: (great—none)		.70	.68	-.15	-.09	-.08	-.03
18 My life is (in my control—not in my control)		.35	.29	.14	-.21	-.09	-.02
19 Facing my daily tasks is (pleasure—pain)		.72	.74	-.11	-.20	-.04	.01
20 I have discovered: (goals—no goals)		.73	.64	-.16	.10	-.27	.07

Examples are: 1) I frequently feel very close to God in prayer, during public worship, or at important moments in daily life. 2) I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life. 3) My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.

Middle class values were measured by a 10-item scale developed by Traub and Dodder (1974). The scale was designed to represent dominant values in American society and to measure the degree to which the respondent believed in these values as a guide for daily behavior. Examples are: 1) Pursuit of productive activity which provides you with a satisfying experience. 2) Establishment of

your own family. 3) Importance of a formal education. 4) Loyalty to society of which you are a member.

All three scales provided seven possible responses per item as an index of the strength of agreement with each statement, as part of a larger questionnaire mailed to a random sample of college students at a large midwestern university which had previously been sampled in a study four years earlier. A total sample of 278 was obtained.

In the ideal case, we were expecting to find all items measuring the three concepts to have substantial loadings on the first factor, and for a substantial amount of the variance

to be explained by the first factor. Then on rotating the extracted factor structure, we were expecting to find the Purpose in Life Test items to load heavily on one factor, the Religiosity items to load heavily on another factor, and the Middle Class Values items to make up a third factor. If the ideal case were found, it would suggest that the Purpose in Life Test measures Frankl's concepts as we have interpreted them.

The structure of the first unrotated factor, 1* is shown in the first column of loadings in Table 1. This unrotated factor accounted for 28 percent of the variance of the items and 51 percent of the variance is explained by the factor analysis. These percentages together with the observation that only 5 of the 36 items failed to reach a loading of 0.30 on the factor offered support for the presence of a generalized dimension. The data suggested a reasonable amount of common variance among the items since 31 of the 36 items reached or exceeded the .30 loading criterion.

On rotation, five main factors appeared as shown in the rotated matrix columns of Table 1. Factor One consisted mainly of the Purpose in Life Test items, and 17 of the 20 items loaded heavily, and accounted for 35 percent of the variance. Factor Two was comprised of the Religiosity scale items, an item from the Purpose in Life Test, "with regard to death", and one from the Middle Class Values scale, "with some type of religious experience" both of which pertained to religious ideas. Factor Two accounted for 24 percent of the variance. Factor Three consisted mainly of the Middle Class Value items and two Purpose in Life Test items. This factor accounted for 11

percent of the variance. Factors Four and Five mainly included Middle Class Values items and some Purpose in Life Test items. These two factors, combined, accounted for 16 percent of the variance.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data offered evidence that the Purpose in Life Test could be a part of a larger dimension as well as being a scale in itself. However, because the Purpose in Life Test related as well as it did with the Religiosity scale and the Middle Class Values scales, it seemed to reflect Frankl's concepts of meaning and purpose in life by our interpretation.

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