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## Implicit Theories of Meaningful Life and the Development of the Personal Meaning Profile

Paul T. P. Wong  
Trinity Western University

Since the beginning of recorded history, people have always wondered about such questions as: What is the purpose of being here? Is there any ultimate meaning to human existence? What happens when someone dies? Why do bad things happen to good people? How can one live a meaningful, fulfilling life? Meaning seeking is assumed to be a primary motivation, deeply rooted in human nature (Frankl, 1963; Wong, chap. 19, this volume).

Philosophers and psychologists have wrestled with existential questions and have developed different theories of meaning. Readers are referred to various chapters in this volume for a review of both the historical roots and recent developments in the conceptualization of personal meaning.

This chapter reports the implicit theories approach to studying personal meaning. Implicit theories are laypeople's conceptions and beliefs about various psychological constructs as compared to more formal models developed by psychologists. For example, according to implicit personality theories (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979), people tend to perceive that certain personality traits go together. Thus, if people are intelligent, they are also likely to be beautiful. Such tendencies in person perception may stem from the activation of a prototype, or schema, that individuals have already developed (Schneider & Blankmeyer, 1983). In other words, the results of implicit theories research may help reveal the internal prototypical structures laypeople have developed regarding personality and other constructs. This methodology is



similar to prototype analysis, which seeks to identify prototypical structures by asking respondents to describe attributes or features of psychological concepts such as love and commitment (Fehr, 1988).

The implicit theories approach has been applied to a number of areas of psychological research, including intelligence (Sternberg, 1985), stress (Fernandez & Perrewé, 1995), prejudice (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994), and leadership (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990). The present series of studies investigated people's conceptions about an ideally meaningful life with a view to identifying the prototypical structure of meaning. This chapter presents the results of these studies and describes the development of the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP). It also discusses the theoretical implications and heuristic values of prototypical structures in the study of meaning seeking and personality constructs.

### STUDY 1: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

In this exploratory study, 60 subjects were drawn from different walks of life, although most had a university education. This convenient sample included graduate students from the University of Toronto and undergraduate students from Trent University. It also included professors, teachers, clergy, secretaries, accountants, physicians, nurses, and salespeople. They were simply asked to describe their own conceptions of the attributes or characteristics of an ideally meaningful life.

The main advantage of this approach is that focusing on the ideal frees respondents from their preoccupations with their present life circumstances, which may have curtailed their meaning seeking. Once liberated from the narrow confines of real life, people are able to move beyond financial worries and basic survival needs and write about their ideals and aspirations. As a result, they are likely to reveal a broader spectrum of what really makes life meaningful.

Their responses exceeded expectations in terms of both the richness and complexity of the data. Several respondents actually wrote a short essay on their reflections. For example, one respondent wrote:

To experience meaning, people need faith in a deity, a god—something that gives them strength for today and hope for tomorrow. Religion of a sort is very important. Friends and family are also crucial, because they give one a sense of who one is; besides, no one likes living as a hermit. Self-confidence makes a person feel good about oneself. One must set goals for oneself and strives to see them actualized by a given time. Self-knowledge is also important. Without self-knowledge, one cannot love oneself. If people are not able to love themselves, they will not be able to make necessary changes and lead a meaningful life.

Another respondent wrote:

Life is meaningful only when it is lived out in fulfilling the vocation or calling as ordained by God or a Higher Being. It is also important for people to give of themselves to help others. One discovers true meaning, only when one can share one's love, joy, sorrows and all that encompass life's experiences with other people.

However, most respondents simply listed the characteristics of an ideally meaningful existence. One respondent gave a comprehensive list:

There are numerous sources of meaning in life—Love for others. Respect from peers. Doing good for others. Have aspirations and worthy goals. Have a healthy self-concept. Satisfied with past accomplishments. Strong ties with family and friends. Have good morals and a clear conscience. Knowing that you are needed and wanted by others. Being highly regarded by others. Have good health. Have a religion (i.e., have faith in a personal God.). Have knowledge and good education. Follow one's dreams (i.e., striving for ideals). Have enough wealth to meet one's needs.

The majority of respondents listed only five or six attributes. One respondent listed: "Religious beliefs. Developing self-growth. Career aspirations and achievement. Look forward to the future. Help others." Another wrote: "Work and achievement. Family, friends, and spouse. Something a person enjoys, such as sports and music. Sense of accomplishment. Sense of being part of a group or a community."

Even though they used different words and expressions, there were recurrent themes and considerable overlap in the ideas they represented. The first task of making sense of the data was to combine and rewrite the linguistically similar statements. The result was a list of 102 items as listed in Appendix A.

Laypeople's conceptions of a meaningful life appear to be more complex than formal models (e.g., Maddi, chap. 1) and broader than the sources of meaning reported in prior research (e.g., Ebersole, chap. 9). For example, the study discussed here identifies fair treatment as a characteristic of meaningful existence, indicating that an individual's experience of meaning may be affected by systemic, structural factors such as discrimination and oppression. In other words, it is difficult for individuals to find life meaningful when they are rejected or discriminated against by society.

Another interesting finding is that personal meaning also depends on certain personal attributes, such as being creative, flexible, adaptive, intelligent, inquisitive, and responsible. This finding suggests that meaning seeking depends not only on *what a person thinks or does*, but also on *who the person is*. In other words, the whole is more than the sum of its parts—people are more than their beliefs, life goals, or personal projects. Even though these are important preconditions for meaningful living,



personality makeup is also important. If people are closed-minded, self-centered, dogmatic, and irresponsible, they may not discover meaning, even when it is dancing right in front of their faces. On the other hand, if they are inquisitive, reaching out to help others, and open to new experience, they are more likely to find meaning in their lives.

The present results provide some support of an earlier conceptual analysis that meaning consists of three components: cognitive, motivational, and affective (Reker & Wong, 1988; Wong, 1989). The *cognitive component* included such items as "Believes that there is an ultimate purpose of life," "Believes that one can have a personal relationship with God," "Believes in afterlife," and "Believes in moral laws." There were 19 cognitive items. The *motivational component* encompassed both goal striving and goal attainment. It included such items as "Pursues worthwhile goals," "Is successful in attaining important life goals," "Seeks to actualize one's potential," and "Strives towards personal growth." There were 25 motivational items. The *affective component* reflected feelings of contentment and fulfillment and includes such feeling statements as "Feels content with who one is and what one is doing," "Feels satisfied with life," "Feels fulfilled about what one has accomplished," and "Feels good about the way things are going." There were 17 affective items.

But the study also revealed two additional dimensions of personal meaning, namely, relational and personal. There are 17 items that may be classified as the *relational component*. Some items reflected the importance of maintaining a good relationship and being part of a community: "Is sincere and honest with others," "Has a number of good friends," and "Relates well to others." Other items emphasized the importance of being caring and altruistic: "Contributes to the well-being of others" and "Brings happiness to others." Another category may be regarded as the *personal component*. It included many items that describe certain personal qualities or personality attributes such as "Likes challenge," "Takes initiative," "Is open-minded and inquisitive," "Accepts one's limitations," and "Has a healthy self-concept." The personal component also included terms related to the person's status in life: "Is financially secure," "Is well educated," and "Has a good family." There were altogether 24 items in the personal component category.

To determine whether the previous classification was reliable, two "judges" (psychology students) were given a description of each the five categories, and then were asked to place the 102 items into the appropriate categories. The interjudge agreement was 82%.

Overall, the results provide a preliminary answer to the crucial question regarding the prototypical structure of personal meaning. This structure involves more than thoughts, feelings, and motivated activities. It also entails relationship and certain personal qualities. These two additional components recommend a more holistic approach to the study of personal

meaning. A fuller understanding of individuals' meaning systems requires looking beyond cognitive, affective, and motivational processes; it will also be necessary to examine individuals' personality makeups, socioeconomic status, interpersonal styles, cultural/racial histories, and systemic factors, such as prejudice and discrimination. In other words, personal meanings are not entities that reside in individuals; they are intertwined with individuals' personal histories and social/cultural experiences.

## STUDY 2: IDEAL VERSUS SELF-RATINGS OF MEANINGFUL LIFE

The pilot study yielded a list of 102 characteristics of an ideally meaningful life. Some items included in the list were based on responses from many individuals, whereas other items were generated by only one or two respondents. The main purpose of Study 2 was to determine the average ratings of these items as being characteristic of an ideally meaningful life. A very low average rating on an item would indicate that most respondents do not consider it a central feature of a meaningful life.

All respondents were also asked to indicate whether the same 102 items characterized themselves. Because these statements were about an ideally meaningful life, Self-ratings of these "ideal" statements provided an indirect indicator of the meaningfulness of the respondent's own life. In addition, all subjects were given Criterion Measures designed to provide a direct and explicit indicator of the meaningfulness of respondents' life experience.

It was hypothesized that Self-ratings should be significantly correlated with the Criterion Measure. Because Ideal ratings reflect respondents' implicit theories of a meaningful life, it was also hypothesized that Ideal ratings should be correlated with Self-ratings. Finally, Ideal ratings should be significantly higher than Self-ratings because the latter should be an approximation of the former.

There were 62 male and female subjects drawn from Trent University. All respondents completed the Ideal ratings, the Self-ratings, as well as the Criterion Measures. The order of presentation of the three measures was randomized. For the Ideal condition, the respondents were asked to indicate on a 9-point scale whether each of the statements was characteristic or uncharacteristic of an ideally meaningful life, with "1" indicating extremely uncharacteristic, "9" indicating extremely characteristic, and "5" indicating undecided. In the Self condition, subjects were given the same set of statements but were asked to indicate to what extent these statements were characteristic or uncharacteristic of themselves. For the Criterion Measures, all subjects were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale whether they agreed or disagreed with the 8 statements regarding



the meaningfulness of their present, past, future, and overall life. The Criterion score was based on the total of these 8 ratings. A copy of the Criterion Measure is included in Appendix B.

To determine which items were not considered as characteristic of an ideally meaningful life, the mean ratings of each ideal item were calculated. Because a rating of "5" indicated undecided, a minimum rating of "6" indicated affirmation that the item was characteristic of a meaningful life. Therefore, any item with a mean rating lower than 6.0 could not be considered as a defining characteristic of meaning. A total of 8 items had a mean rating lower than 6.0. Most of these items had to do with religious beliefs and practices, such as "Seeks to glorify God" and "Believes that one can have a personal relationship with God." The sample consisted of young people between 18 and 25, so it is not surprising that they did not consider religion to be an important arena for meaning seeking. What is surprising is that "Satisfy all one's wants" and "Seeks pleasures" were also rated below the cutoff point of 6.0, suggesting that hedonic pursuit was not considered pivotal to meaning seeking.

The mean was also calculated for each of the five components of personal meaning. The affective component had the highest average (7.63), followed by motivational (7.31), relational (7.23), personal (7.00), and cognitive (6.63). The main reason for the low ratings on the cognitive component is that many of the items in this category are religious in nature. These ratings confirm the observations based on the pilot study that meaning systems consist of five components.

Consistent with the hypothesis, Total Self-ratings were highly significantly correlated with Total Criterion scores,  $r = .7163, p < .001$ . This finding indicates that even though the 102 statements did not have any direct reference to personal meaning, Self-ratings on these statements still indicated the level of meaningfulness in a person's life. In contrast, Ideal ratings were only weakly correlated with Total Criterion,  $r = .3202, p < .05$ .

Consistent with prediction, Self-ratings were significantly correlated with Ideal,  $r = .4760, p < .001$ , indicating that self-perception of meaning is an approximation of the ideal prototype. Consequently, Self-ratings should be significantly lower than Ideal ratings ( $\bar{x} = 6.99$  for Self-ratings,  $\bar{x} = 7.37$  for Ideal ratings). This result was also confirmed by a significant dependent  $t$  test,  $t = -3.50, p < .001$ .

### STUDY 3: AGE DIFFERENCES IN IMPLICIT THEORIES OF MEANINGFUL LIFE

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether people in different age groups have different implicit theories of meaning. Another

purpose was to determine the prototypical structure of ideal ratings through factor analysis.

A sample of 289 subjects took part in the study. There were 96 (46 males, 50 females) subjects in the Young Adult Group (age 18–29), 107 subjects (49 males and 58 females) in the Middle Age Group (age 30–59), and 86 (43 males and 43 females) in the Elderly Group (age 60+). They all rated the 102 items in terms of the characteristics of an ideally meaningful life. A subsample of 60 respondents also completed Self-ratings and the Criterion Measure in order to replicate the major findings of Study 2.

Several criteria were used to eliminate redundant and unrepresentative items from the original 102 items. A total of 43 items were eliminated due to low item–total correlations, failure to meet the cutoff point (6.0) in any one of the age groups, or shared loadings on a preliminary factor analysis. Many of the eliminated items belonged to the broad category of personal characteristics, such as "Has intelligence," "Has talents," and "Has a good education"—these items tend to have shared loadings. Another group of eliminated items had to do with hedonic pursuit.

Factor analysis of the remaining 59 items using a Varimax rotation resulted in a 9-factor solution, accounting for 63% of the variance:

1. *Achievement Striving*, which accounted for 32.2% of the variance, included 15 items (e.g., "Successful in achieving one's aspirations," "Seeks to achieve one's potentials," and "Striving to do one's best in whatever one is doing").

2. *Religion* accounted for 8.8% of the variance and consisted of 10 items (e.g., "Is at peace with God," "Seeks to glorify God," and "Believes that one can have a personal relationship with God").

3. *Relationship* had 6 items and accounted for 4.6% of the variance. This factor focused on attitudes and skills necessary to build up relationships and community (e.g., "Cares about other people," "Relates well to others," and "Is trusted by others").

4. *Fulfillment* accounted for 4.3% of the variance. It represented the affective component of fulfillment and contentment, and consisted of 10 items (e.g., "Feels fulfilled about what has been accomplished," "Feels good about the way things are going," and "Is satisfied with life").

5. *Fairness-Respect* accounted for 3.5% of the variance. It had 5 items (e.g., "Is treated fairly by others," "Is highly regarded by others") indicative of living in a supportive, empowering, and nondiscriminative community.

6. *Self-confidence* accounted for 2.7% of the variance. It included 4 items: "Has a positive outlook," "Feel confident," "Is enthusiastic about what one does," and "Feels optimistic."



7. *Self-integration* accounted for 2.5% of the variance. It included 4 items: "Has a sense of coherence and continuity in one's life," "Is at peace with one's past," "Does not give up," and "Engaged in creative work."

8. *Self-transcendence* accounted for 2.5% of the variance. It included three items: "Believes that one can make a difference in this world," "Strives to make this world a better place," and "Seeks higher values—values that transcend self-interests."

9. *Self-acceptance* accounted for 2.3% of the variance. It included two items: "Accepts one's limitations" and "Accepts what cannot be changed."

It is worth noting that three of the nine factors focused on the self—Self-confidence, Self-integration, and Self-acceptance—indicating the importance of having the right attitude toward self. Together, these three factors suggest that individuals are more likely to discover meaning if they are able to integrate their past mistakes and personal limitations with commitment to their present work and confidence in the future.

Three of the factors highlighted the importance of community. Relationship emphasized the skills and attitudes necessary for working together and community building, Self-transcendence focused on the value of serving others, and Fairness-Respect indicated the need for individuals to receive fair treatment and respect from society. Together, these three factors underscore the vital partnership between individuals and community in meaning seeking.

The Achievement factor had to do with what the individual has accomplished or strives to achieve. Regardless of how success is defined, it involves attainment of significant life goals and the fulfillment of aspirations.

The Religion factor referred to individuals' beliefs in a higher power and a personal relationship with God. This factor indicates that the spiritual dimension is an integral part of laypeople's conception of a meaningful life. For those who take religion seriously, their finest and most meaningful life is to serve God and live in His presence continually.

Finally, a meaningful life is necessarily a fulfilling life. When all of the previous eight factors are major sources of meaning seeking, the inevitable result is a sense of contentment and happiness.

So, what is the prototypical structure of an ideally meaningful life? It requires that individuals have positive and mature attitudes toward life and self and that they lead a purposeful and productive life. However, there are limits to meaning seeking if individuals are alienated from their community and the spiritual realm. Therefore, individuals need to get involved in and contribute to a community. They also need religious faith that makes sense of the larger and difficult issues about life, suffering, and

death. The prototypical structure sounds like a simple and sensible road map for meaning seeking, but why do so few people actually follow it? What are the external and internal obstacles that prevent people from following their inner map? These are interesting questions for future research.

The mean "ideal" ratings based on all 289 subjects shown in Fig. 6.1 demonstrate the relative importance of the nine factors. It is interesting to note that Self-confidence has the highest rating, whereas Religion has the lowest average. The main reason for the low rating of Religion is that only the Elderly Group rates it high. Therefore, it is necessary to look at age differences in the prototypical structure.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) confirmed that there is a significant Age main effect,  $F(18, 550) = 5.24, p < .001$ . Univariate  $F$  tests showed that the main effect of Religion was significant,  $F(2, 283) = 20.52, p < .001$ , with the Elderly Group having the highest rating (7.2). The Elderly Group also had the highest rating of Self-acceptance. These age differences are shown in Fig. 6.2.

MANOVA failed to reveal a Gender main effect. However, Univariate  $F$  tests revealed a significant Gender effect in Religion,  $F(1, 283) = 7.07, p < .01$ , with females giving Religion a higher rating than their male counterparts (6.65 vs. 6.10). Females also valued Relationship more than males,  $F(1, 283) = 3.80, p < .05$  (7.67 vs. 7.43).

The correlations between Ideal and Self-ratings on the 59 items and the Criterion Measures were calculated. Results showed that Self-ratings were significantly correlated with Ideal ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ) and with the

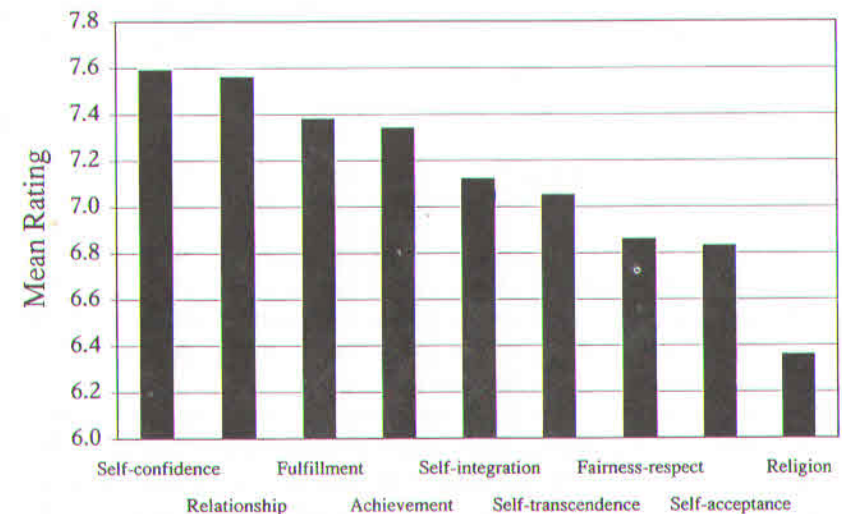


FIG. 6.1. Profile of an ideal meaningful life.





FIG. 6.2. Age differences in meaning seeking.

Criterion Measure ( $r = .67, p < .001$ ), thus confirming the results of Study 2. Self-ratings were significantly lower than Ideal ratings (6.55 vs. 6.89),  $t(1, 59) = -5.42, p < .001$ , thus replicating Study 2's finding that Self-ratings only approximate Ideal ratings.

#### STUDY 4: PROFILES OF PERSONAL MEANING

The previous three studies confirmed that laypeople have implicit theories of meaning, and a prototypical structure can be extracted from their conceptions about an ideally meaningful life. These studies have also demonstrated that Self-ratings of meaning seeking tend to approximate the idealized prototypical structure.

The previous studies identified a prototypical structure, which serves as a blueprint for a perfect, meaningful life, therefore it was predicted that the more individuals approximate this ideal structure, the more meaning they would experience. In other words, the greater their Self-ratings on the PMP, the greater their scores would be on the Criterion

Measures as well as on various well-being measures. The main purpose of this final study was to test this hypothesis. A second purpose was to identify the factor structure of Self-ratings. Because there is more variability in Self-ratings, it was of interest to find out whether a similar factor structure would emerge.

A sample of 335 subjects (153 males and 182 females) took part. The young adult group was mostly drawn from university populations. Middle-age subjects were recruited from universities and hospitals as well as from the community at large. Older subjects were solicited from seniors' organizations. All subjects completed the Self-rating version of the 59-item PMP.

Factor analysis with a Varimax rotation produced 8 interpretable factors accounting for 67% of the variance. The eight factors were *Achievement Striving* (18 items), *Religion* (9 items), *Fulfillment* (7 items), *Relationship* (9 items), *Self-transcendence* (7 items), *Intimacy* (3 items), *Self-acceptance* (3 items), and *Fair Treatment* (2 items). One item was eliminated because of shared loadings. As a result, the eight factors were based on 58 items.

This factor structure was somewhat different from the factor structure based on Ideal ratings reported in Study 3. For example, the original Relationship factor split into two factors—Community Relationship and Intimate Relationship—with the former focusing on friends and community and the later focusing on family and intimate relationships. The original Self-integration factor disappeared; its items were split between Self-transcendence and Achievement striving. Achievement striving and Fulfillment factors absorbed the original Self-confidence items. The original Fairness-Respect factor became Fair Treatment only, because items related to respect from others were now loaded on the Relationship factor.

Meaning ratings of the eight factors are shown in Fig. 6.3. Relationship (i.e., Community Relationship) had the highest average rating, and Religion again had the lowest. Fair Treatment had the second highest rating, indicating its importance in personal meaning systems. Together with the Relationship factor, Fair Treatment suggests that a meaningful life depends not only on a supporting community, but also on a just society. Any form of discrimination, whether systemic or personalistic, is likely to undermine a person's meaning seeking, because unfair treatment tends to dehumanize individuals and deprives them of their sense of personal worth and dignity.

The intercorrelations between the factors and the total PMP are shown in Table 6.1. It is worth noting that Achievement, Self-transcendence, and Fulfillment have relatively high correlations with the total PMP, with correlation coefficients in the .80s. With respect to the intercorrelations between all factors, Achievement and Fulfillment appear to have higher correlations with other factors.





FIG. 6.3. Profile of personal meaning.

Consistent with the hypothesis, total ratings on the PMP were indeed significantly correlated with Criterion Measures, as shown in Table 6.2. In fact, all individual PMP factors were significantly correlated with Criterion Measures, with the highest correlation (.73) between total PMP and total Criterion. The pattern of correlations between the Total Source (which is the sum of all factors except Fulfillment) and Criterion Measures was almost identical to that between total PMP and Criterion Measures. Overall, the results indicate that self-ratings on the items that make up the idealized prototypical structure do provide a valid index of meaningful living. In other words, the greater the total PMP score, the more successful in meaning seeking.

To demonstrate the mediating role of personal meaning in well-being, most of the subjects also completed Reker and Wong's (1984) Perceived Well-being scale (PWB), which consisted of a perceived Physical well-being (PHY) and Psychological well-being (PSY) subscales. A smaller subset completed Beck's depression scale. Table 6.3 shows that Total PMP was positively correlated with all well-being measures and negatively correlated with Beck's depression scale. All PMP factors were positively correlated with Psychological well-being, suggesting that meaning, regardless of its source, is an important mediator of Psychological well-being. This finding confirms that happiness is an inevitable by-product of meaningful living. With respect to perceived Physical well-being, the impact of personal meaning was much less: Only Achievement, Fulfillment, and Self-transcendence seemed to account for an appreciable amount of the

TABLE 6.1  
Intercorrelations Between Factors of the PMP

|               | Religion | Achievement | Relationship | Intimacy | Transcendence | Acceptance | Fairness | Fulfillment |
|---------------|----------|-------------|--------------|----------|---------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| Religion      |          |             |              |          |               |            |          |             |
| Achievement   | .38      |             |              |          |               |            |          |             |
| Relationship  | .35      | .64         |              |          |               |            |          |             |
| Intimacy      | .27      | .49         | .40          |          |               |            |          |             |
| Transcendence | .60      | .74         | .59          | .48      |               |            |          |             |
| Acceptance    | .29      | .49         | .49          | .58      | .48           |            |          |             |
| Fairness      | .37      | .49         | .42          | .53      | .55           | .50        |          |             |
| Fulfillment   | .36      | .78         | .63          | .61      | .68           | .63        | .63      |             |
| Total PMP     | .68      | .88         | .74          | .63      | .88           | .64        | .64      | .84         |

Note.  $n = 335$ ,  $p < .001$ .



TABLE 6.2  
Correlations Between the PMP and Criterion Measures

|               | Past  | Future | Present | Overall | Total Criterion |
|---------------|-------|--------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Religion      | .3497 | .3571  | .3962   | .5050   | .4785           |
| Achievement   | .4856 | .55326 | .6488   | .5003   | .6443           |
| Relationship  | .4228 | .4228  | .4159   | .3467   | .4813           |
| Intimacy      | .5117 | .2710  | .4304   | .4013   | .4891           |
| Transcendence | .5364 | .5245  | .6281   | .6045   | .6838           |
| Acceptance    | .4933 | .2593  | .4611   | .3892   | .4848           |
| Fairness      | .4313 | .2829  | .4804   | .3922   | .4766           |
| Fulfillment   | .5240 | .4874  | .6812   | .5206   | .6598           |
| Total PMP     | .5914 | .5557  | .6886   | .6204   | .7330           |
| Total Source  | .5854 | .5510  | .6701   | .6191   | .7240           |

Note.  $n = 326$ ,  $p < .001$ .

TABLE 6.3  
Correlations Between the PMP and Outcome Measure

|                 | PHY               | PSY               | PWB               | BECK              |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Religion        | -.0599<br>(225)   | .2208***<br>(225) | .0487<br>(225)    | -.3712*<br>(41)   |
| Achievement     | .2510***<br>(225) | .4444***<br>(225) | .3852***<br>(225) | -.5928***<br>(41) |
| Relationship    | .0505<br>(225)    | .2423***<br>(225) | .1433*<br>(225)   | -.2158<br>(41)    |
| Fulfillment     | .2714***<br>(225) | .5743***<br>(225) | .4567***<br>(225) | -.7441***<br>(41) |
| Transcendence   | .2617***<br>(225) | .4338***<br>(225) | .3888***<br>(225) | -.6392***<br>(41) |
| Intimacy        | .0880<br>(225)    | .4379***<br>(225) | .2564***<br>(225) | -.5738***<br>(41) |
| Acceptance      | .0044<br>(225)    | .2764***<br>(225) | .1228<br>(225)    | -.1401<br>(41)    |
| Fairness        | .1555*<br>(225)   | .4366***<br>(225) | .3080***<br>(225) | -.6441***<br>(41) |
| Total PMP       | .1716*<br>(225)   | .4882***<br>(225) | .3426***<br>(225) | -.7012***<br>(41) |
| Past            | .0626<br>(225)    | .3812***<br>(225) | .2124***<br>(225) | -.5321***<br>(41) |
| Future          | .2273***<br>(225) | .3663***<br>(225) | .3332***<br>(225) | -.6200***<br>(41) |
| Present         | .2635***<br>(225) | .5727***<br>(225) | .4500***<br>(225) | -.7311***<br>(41) |
| Overall         | .1870**<br>(225)  | .5348***<br>(225) | .3746***<br>(225) | -.7623***<br>(41) |
| Total Criterion | .2147***<br>(225) | .5525***<br>(225) | .4036***<br>(225) | -.7708***<br>(41) |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

variance of Physical well-being. The overall pattern of correlations between the PMP and various outcome measures was consistent with the hypothesis that the greater a person's self-ratings approximate the idealized prototype, the higher this person's well-being measures.

As predicted, a high level of personal meaning is also related to a low level of depression. This relation holds for most of the factors of the PMP, except for Relationship and Self-acceptance. A negative correlation in the magnitude of  $-.70$  between total PMP and Beck's depression scale is quite impressive, suggesting that meaning seeking may be an effective antidote to depression.

The validity of the Criterion Measure was also demonstrated in that they were all significantly and positively correlated with well-being but negatively correlated with depression measures, except for the lack of association between the criterion of Past meaning and Physical well-being. It is worth noting that the magnitude of correlations between total Criterion Measure and Perceived well-being measures was only marginally greater than that between Total PMP and Perceived well-being measures. These results, coupled with the finding of significant correlations between the PMP and Criterion Measures, suggest that the amount of meaning individuals experience can be indirectly measured by looking at how they rate themselves on a number of characteristics of an ideally meaningful life.

To provide further evidence of the validity of the PMP, a subset of the sample also completed the Life Attitudes Profile (LAP). The LAP is a multidimensional measure of life attitudes, with four dimensions (Life Purpose, Life Control, Will to Meaning, and Future Meaning) indicating positive meaning, and three dimensions (Death Attitude, Goal Seeking, and Existential Vacuum) indicating the absence of positive meaning. The Meaning Balance Index (MBI) means the sum of the positive dimensions minus the negative dimensions. Table 6.4 shows that PMP measures were positively correlated with the four positive dimensions and the MBI, but negatively correlated with the three negative dimensions of the LAP. This pattern of correlations provides evidence of discriminative validity.

Remember that, in this study, respondents were simply asked to indicate to what extent the items in the PMP were characteristic or uncharacteristic of their lives. These respondents did not complete the idealized version of the PMP, nor were they told that the PMP was supposed to measure meaningfulness. It is remarkable that Self-ratings on the PMP items with no reference to meaning are able to provide a valid measure of individuals' meaning seeking. This finding suggests that somehow PMP items indeed constitute a relatively universal prototypical structure of personal meaning.

The correlation between the total PMP and well-being measures may be criticized for the fact that the Fulfillment factor was confounded with



TABLE 6.4  
Correlations Between the PMP and Life Attitudes

| Sources           | LP     | LC                        | WM     | FM     | DA                    | EV      | GS     | MBI    |
|-------------------|--------|---------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| Religion          | .44*** | -.02                      | .58*** | .27*   | .00                   | -.02    | -.02   | .37**  |
| Achievement       | .67*** | .37**                     | .26*   | .53*** | -.32**                | -.40*** | -.11   | .68*** |
| Relationship      | .51*** | .35**                     | .23    | .42*** | -.16                  | -.25*   | -.03   | .51*** |
| Intimacy          | .43*** | .20                       | .12    | .14    | -.13                  | -.24    | -.026* | .42*** |
| Transcendancy     | .61*** | .35**                     | .53*** | .54*** | -.20                  | -.23    | .00    | .63*** |
| Acceptance        | .43*** | .22                       | .24    | .16    | .25*                  | -.30*   | -.30*  | .49*** |
| Fairness          | .45*** | .28*                      | .23    | .23    | -.22                  | -.19    | -.25*  | .47*** |
| Fulfillment       | .77*** | .41***                    | .09    | .41*** | -.27*                 | -.52*** | -.36** | .72*** |
| Total PMP         | .80*** | .37***                    | .46*** | .54*** | -.23                  | -.38**  | -.18   | .76*** |
| Total Source      | .77*** | .34**                     | .51*** | .54*** | -.21                  | -.33**  | -.14   | .76*** |
| LP Life Purpose   |        | LC Life Control           |        |        | WM Will to Meaning    |         |        |        |
| FM Future Meaning |        | DA Death Acceptance       |        |        | EV Existential Vacuum |         |        |        |
| GS Goal Seeking   |        | MBI Meaning Balance Index |        |        |                       |         |        |        |

Note.  $n = 61$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the outcome measures. Furthermore, some items in the Achievement factor, such as "Feeling optimistic about the future" may also have been confounded with the well-being measure. Therefore, all affect-related statements were eliminated, resulting in 48 items. Factor analysis with a Varimax rotation resulted in a 6-factor solution, as shown in Table 6.5. Note that Intimacy and Relationship merged as a single factor. This 6-factor solution has been replicated with an independent sample of 100 subjects.

To investigate the mediating role of personal meaning as measured by these 48 items, Rennie (1992) pitted this short version of the PMP against a number of well-established psychological variables such as locus of control, optimism, and attribution styles. Regression analyses revealed that meaning seeking was the best predictor of the absence of depression.

### PROGRESS REPORT ON THE LATEST VERSION OF THE PMP

Research to improve the psychometric properties of the PMP continues. One of the main weaknesses of the PMP was that Intimacy, Self-acceptance, and Fair Treatment factors had too few items. Therefore, new items were added to each of these three factors. As a result, a 57-item version of the PMP was developed. In this version, all items are stated in first-person singular. There were also minor stylistic changes to a couple of items to improve clarity. Some changes were made in the instructions to respondents. In addition to asking people to rate themselves on the extent the descriptors are characteristic of themselves, they were also informed that these descriptors have been found to be potential sources of a meaningful life. This explicit reference to meaning would provide greater face validity that individuals' factors scores on the PMP clearly reflect the extent these factors serve as sources of personal meaning. In other words, it is now possible to discuss the PMP ratings as indicators of meaning seeking without relying on the criterion measures of meaningfulness, as in previous studies.

Appendix C shows the revised PMP and the scoring key. Preliminary studies on this latest version of the PMP have restored Intimacy as an independent factor apart from Relationship, thus resulting in a 7-factor solution. These studies have also demonstrated good 3-week test-retest reliability ( $r = .85$ ) for the PMP and significant correlations with a number of meaning and well-being measures. The results of these studies will be published elsewhere.

A number of theses have also demonstrated the reliability and validity of the 57-item PMP. For example, Lang (1994) reported that Total PMP



TABLE 6.5  
Factor Structure of the PMP

| Item                                      | Factor 1<br>Achievement/<br>Striving | Factor 2<br>Relationship | Factor 3<br>Religion | Factor 4<br>Self-<br>Transcendence | Factor 5<br>Self-<br>Acceptance | Factor 6<br>Fair<br>Treatment |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| "Strives to achieve one's life goals"     | .69344                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Likes challenge"                         | .69235                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Makes full use of abilities"             | .68786                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Strives to do one's best"                | .66063                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Takes initiative"                        | .65697                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Achieves one's aspirations"              | .65177                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Pursues worthwhile objectives"           | .64521                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Believes in the value of one's pursuits" | .61938                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Committed to one's work"                 | .61794                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Values one's work"                       | .61383                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Enthusiastic about what one does"        | .60850                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Does not give up"                        | .58806                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Strives towards personal growth"         | .58321                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Engaged in creative work"                | .53965                               |                          |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Liked by others"                         |                                      | .78716                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Brings happiness to others"              |                                      | .73384                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Trusted by others"                       |                                      | .69311                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Relates well to others"                  |                                      | .67754                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Has good friends"                        |                                      | .67363                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Cares about others"                      |                                      | .66557                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Contributes to others' well-being"       |                                      | .65657                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Altruistic and helpful"                  |                                      | .62035                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |
| "Highly regarded by others"               |                                      | .61855                   |                      |                                    |                                 |                               |

|  |       |       |        |        |        |        |
|--|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| "Has a personal relationship with God"   |       |       | .90422 |        |        |        |
| "Seeks to glorify God"                   |       |       | .88719 |        |        |        |
| "Seeks to do God's will"                 |       |       | .88674 |        |        |        |
| "At peace with God"                      |       |       | .84398 |        |        |        |
| "Believes in afterlife"                  |       |       | .80562 |        |        |        |
| "Believes in an ultimate purpose"        |       |       | .58395 |        |        |        |
| "Believes in order and purpose"          |       |       | .55956 |        |        |        |
| "Believes in moral laws"                 |       |       | .46048 |        |        |        |
| "Makes a difference in the world"        |       |       |        | .66067 |        |        |
| "Makes this world a better place"        |       |       |        | .60357 |        |        |
| "Contributes to society"                 |       |       |        | .55835 |        |        |
| "Leaves behind a good lasting legacy"    |       |       |        | .53450 |        |        |
| "Transcends self-interests"              |       |       |        | .52811 |        |        |
| "Has a sense of mission"                 |       |       |        | .48017 |        |        |
| "Has a purpose and direction"            |       |       |        | .46630 |        |        |
| "Has coherence and continuity"           |       |       |        | .45989 |        |        |
| "Accepts one's limitation"               |       |       |        |        | .78983 |        |
| "Accepts what cannot be changed"         |       |       |        |        | .78158 |        |
| "At peace with oneself"                  |       |       |        |        | .54305 |        |
| "At peace with one's past"               |       |       |        |        | .41165 |        |
| "Treated fairly by others"               |       |       |        |        |        | .77219 |
| "Received a fair share of opportunities" |       |       |        |        |        | .71157 |
| "Has a mutually satisfying relationship" |       |       |        |        |        | .52631 |
| Eigenvalue                               | 17.46 | 4.38  | 2.57   | 2.29   | 1.46   | 1.14   |
| PCT of VAR                               | 36.40 | 9.10  | 5.40   | 4.80   | 3.00   | 2.40   |
| Cum PCT                                  | 36.40 | 45.50 | 50.90  | 55.60  | 58.70  | 61.10  |



was positively correlated with Ellison's (1981) Spiritual Well-being ( $r = .64$ ) and Reker and Wong's (1984) Perceived Well-being scale,  $r = .29$ ,  $p < .05$ . She also reported an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93. The alpha values of subscales were as follows: Self-acceptance (.54), Fair Treatment (.54), Intimacy (.78), Relationship (.81), Self-transcendence (.84), Religion (.89), and Achievement (.91). More recently, Giesbrecht (1997) found that the PMP was positively related with several Meaning of Work measures, but negatively correlated with job stress measures.

## CONCLUSIONS

The implicit theories approach has led to a series of studies of personal meaning over the past few years. The results seem to warrant the following conclusions.

Laypeople indeed entertain certain theories regarding what constitutes an ideally meaningful life. Factor analytical studies of laypeople's descriptive statements have identified several sources of personal meaning. Past studies on theory-based dimensions (Reker & Wong, 1988; Reker & Peacock, 1981) are limited to psychologists' own theoretical ideas. Studies on respondents' self-reports of what makes their life meaningful (see Ebersole, chap. 9) are limited by the constraints of their present life circumstances. Implicit theories, which focus on the ideal, free people from the aforementioned limitations and enable them to reflect on the ideally meaningful life.

It may be concluded that the implicit theories approach reveals laypeople's idealized prototypical structure of a meaningful life, relatively uncontaminated by their current life situations. Therefore, the PMP may serve as a criterion to measure how each individual measures up to this ideal prototype—the more individuals' lives approximate this prototype, the more they should find life meaningful. This hypothesis has been supported by the positive correlations between Self-ratings and Prototypical ratings, as well as between Self-ratings and the Criterion Measures reported in the aforementioned studies.

The major factors of the PMP, such as Religion, Relationship, Achievement, and Self-transcendence, have been identified by prior research (e.g., Ebersole, chap. 9; Reker & Wong, 1988). Self-acceptance has been identified by Ryff and Singer (chap. 11) as one of the components of psychological well-being. The other three components are meaning and purpose, self-realization, and positive relationships. In the studies, self-acceptance emerged as an integral part of the prototypical structure. Earlier research identified self-acceptance as one of the two components of existential coping (Peacock & Wong, 1996; Wong, 1993). Self-acceptance is a neces-

sary attitude to soften the blow when achievement striving fails to materialize. One may conclude that accepting what one cannot change is a sign of wisdom and one of the keys to meaningful living.

Another interesting finding is that Fair Treatment has emerged as an important source of personal meaning. This finding highlights society's responsibility to promote justice and equity. It seems warranted to conclude that individuals cannot achieve a fully meaningful life in an unjust, discriminating, and oppressive society.

It is worth noting that hedonic pursuit is not part of an idealized meaningful life. This suggests that happiness does not depend on the pursuit of pleasurable activities, but comes in through the "back door" as people engage in meaning seeking as defined by the PMP.

Up to this point, most of the writings on the pursuit of meaning have suggested that the experience of meaning is highly idiosyncratic (e.g., Frankl, 1963; Ebersole, chap. 9, Little, chap. 10, and Maddi, chap. 1). However, the present series of studies suggest that there may be a general prototypical structure of a meaningful life, which provides a relatively objective frame of reference to assess whether an individual's pursuit is meaningful.

Even though individuals have very idiosyncratic ways of pursuing meaning, the present findings suggest that for some people, their meaning seeking may be misguided and they need to pursue personal projects and life goals approximating the ideal prototypical structure. According to this view, Hitler's campaign to commit genocide against the Jews, no matter how important it was to him, cannot be considered meaningful, because it does not conform to the prototypical structure. For example, it violates the basic requirement of fair treatment, community relationship, and self-transcendence. In other words, the present conceptual analysis suggests that there is a prototypical structure, which serves as a blueprint for building a meaningful life. The seven factors may be hypothesized as the *seven royal roads for meaning seeking*. Fortunately, this hypothesis can be subjected to empirical testing. In fact, every one of the seven factors of prototypical meaning can be evaluated in terms of its universality and importance in contributing to meaningful living.

The role of personal meaning as a mediator of well-being has been clearly demonstrated in the series of studies presented. This corroborates prior research on the adaptive benefits of personal meaning (e.g., Ryff & Singer, chap. 11; Wong, chap. 19). Given this critical mass of evidence, it can be concluded that personal meaning plays a major role in maintaining positive mental health. Systematic research is needed to specify the boundary conditions within which a given source of personal meaning exerts a positive impact on mental and physical health. Because the PMP appears to be a valid and reliable measure of meaning seeking, this instrument



may be used to study meaning as a moderator along the same lines as prior research on locus of control and optimism.

On the one hand, it has been shown that fulfillment or happiness is an important factor of prototypical personal meaning. On the other hand, Ryff and Singer (chap. 11) have discovered that personal meaning is one of the components of psychological well-being. Therefore, meaning and well-being appear to be two sides of the same coin. In order to gain a better understanding of the relation between meaning seeking and outcome measures, it is imperative that the affective component be removed from the meaning measure and the meaning component be removed from the outcome measure.

McAdams (1993) proposed that there are three levels of analysis in personality research: trait analysis, contextually sensitive task analysis, and personal narratives or stories. What about a fourth level of analysis, based on abstracting the generalized meaning structures from the narratives? For example, on the basis of life stories, recurrent themes that have different functional significance have been identified (Wong & Watt, 1991). These themes constitute the generalized structure of reminiscence. The present sources of meaning seeking are extracted from factor analyses of laypeople's descriptors or narratives of an ideally meaningful life. This fourth level of analysis is an intermediate unit between the trait perspective and the task approach.

Consider how this intermediate level of analysis contributes to the study of both traits and tasks. For example, having identified a positive relation between the PMP and some trait measures of meaning, it is possible to identify which components of the PMP contribute most to the trait measure of meaning. According to the correlation matrix in Table 6.3, Achievement and Self-transcendence appeared to be the key contributors to the MBI, and Religion had the least impact.

With respect to personal projects, individuals can be asked to classify their projects according to the PMP, as well as to alternative sources, such as maintenance activities, pleasure seeking, or sensation seeking.

One of the reasons why the meaning dimensions of personal projects in Little's study (chap. 10) fails to predict well-being is that these personal projects may not belong to the prototypical meaning structure. Some of the personal projects reported by Little (such as "Maintaining repair of family vehicle," "Change oil in girlfriend's car," and "Clean my room up") are clearly examples of maintenance activities. "Letting my fingernail grow" sounds like a self-absorbed trivial pursuit. Little seems perplexed by the findings of a recent metaanalysis of studies on the relations between personal project dimensions and well-being. The results show that personal meaning dimensions were among the worst predictors of well-being. One explanation is that most of the personal projects in these studies might have belonged to maintenance activities or trivial pursuits.

If the focus was on personal projects that are ideally prototypical rather than idiosyncratic and trivial, then the meaning dimensions of personal projects would be significantly associated with global well-being measures. The reason for this hypothesis is that prototypical sources of meaning seeking are concerned with personal significance and individuals' core values, which are vital to a person's identity and self-esteem.

If subjects are directed to pursue prototypical rather than trivial activities, they are more able to experience fulfillment or recover from depression. Finally, subjects would rearrange the priority of their personal projects and focus on the prototypical life tasks, if they were asked: "If you only had one month to live, what would your personal projects be?" These are just some of the intriguing research questions that involve an interface between personal projects and the prototypical structure of meaning seeking.

Little's personal project research is reminiscent of an earlier attempt to study the relation between commitments and well-being (unpublished pilot study). *Commitments* are simply defined as projects, events, and activities to which individuals invest their time and energy pursuing. Individuals were asked to list as many commitments they had, although, on average, they only generated about four to five items. This study demonstrated a positive relation between the number of commitments and psychological well-being. Content analysis revealed that many of these commitments were related to prototypical meaning seeking—such as religion, achievement, and relationship—although some of the commitments were related to leisure and maintenance activities.

There is a need to clarify overlapping concepts such as personal projects, life tasks, commitments, goals, and meaning seeking. All of these concepts are related to meaningful living. Meaning seeking seems to be a useful umbrella construct, because it incorporates concepts of commitment and pursuit of personal projects, life tasks, and goals that have personal significance. Meaning seeking also implies the involvement of motivational, cognitive, and behavioral processes, which can be investigated scientifically.

One advantage of the PMP is that it provides at least three different indices of meaning seeking: magnitude, breadth, and balance. The total PMP score is an index of magnitude—the greater the score, the more successful a person is in approximating the ideally meaningful life. The number of sources involved indicates the breadth of meaning seeking; thus, individuals who seek meaning from all the sources of the PMP have a broader basis than other people who derive meaning from only one or two sources. The relative difference in factor scores reflects balance. For example, if individuals score extremely high in Achievement, but very low in all other factors, they lack balance in meaning seeking. It would be interesting to determine how these different indices affect well-being.



The main advantage of the PMP is that it specifies the sources of meaning seeking. In other words, it indicates the specific domains wherein individuals seek and experience personal meaning. Therefore, it can be readily used to study meaning seeking in different populations and to investigate how different sources of meaning seeking are related to various psychological constructs.

There are also limitations to the PMP. For example, the idealized prototypical structure reported in this chapter may be culture specific—it is based on the implicit theories of a predominantly White, educated sample. It remains an empirical question whether individuals from cultures with very different sets of values and assumptions would yield different kinds of prototypical structures of meaning.

Another limitation is that the PMP is based on self-ratings of a restricted set of items—there may be other meaning-laden items. This is a common problem of all standardized questionnaires that do not make provision for additional items.

However, in spite of these limitations, the PMP appears to be a very promising instrument for meaning research and clinical diagnosis. It has already been demonstrated how the PMP is significantly related to various well-being measures. My experience in counseling students has also demonstrated that merely discussing with clients their profiles on the PMP helps them gain a broader perspective of available options for meaning seeking.

#### APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IDEALLY MEANINGFUL LIFE

1. Makes the best use of life's opportunities.
2. Believes in one's own worth.
3. Has zest for life.
4. Respects other people's feelings and rights.
5. Believes that one has made a difference in this world.
6. Feels content with who one is.
7. Has a good family life.
8. Is grateful for what one has.
9. Believes one can make a difference in this world.
10. Is satisfied with life.
11. Is happy with what one is doing
12. Is at peace with God.
13. Cooperates with others.

14. Seeks pleasures.
15. Feels fulfilled about what has been accomplished.
16. Believes in the sanctity of life.
17. Has intelligence.
18. Believes in an ultimate purpose of life.
19. Engages in creative work.
20. Leads a balanced life.
21. Has good self-control.
22. Enjoys life.
23. Believes that one's own life has meaning and purpose.
24. Has talents.
25. Is successful in achieving one's aspirations.
26. Pursues worthwhile objectives.
27. Feels secure.
28. Strives to achieve one's life goals.
29. Cares about other people.
30. Is adaptive.
31. Is a responsible person.
32. Believes that there is a God.
33. Has wisdom.
34. Has a positive outlook.
35. Is satisfied with what one has.
36. Believes in the value of one's pursuits.
37. Seeks to actualize one's potentials.
38. Has satisfied all one's wants.
39. Is able to devote time and energy to meaningful pursuits.
40. Strives to make this world a better place.
41. Is at peace with oneself.
42. Feels good about the way things are going.
43. Relates well to others.
44. Has a sense of mission or calling.
45. Is sincere and honest with people.
46. Seeks to do God's will.
47. Likes challenge.
48. Believes that human life is governed by moral laws.
49. Is flexible.
50. Has an integrated personality.



51. Has good self-discipline.
52. Takes initiative.
53. Is able to make full use of one's abilities.
54. Strives to do one's best in whatever one is doing.
55. Has a number of good friends.
56. Is outgoing and sociable.
57. Is trusted by others.
58. Is free to make decisions about one's own life.
59. Is committed to one's work.
60. Believes that one can achieve a sense of harmony with a higher reality.
61. Has a healthy self-concept.
62. Is inquisitive and open-minded.
63. Has good mental health.
64. Has a purpose and direction in life.
65. Believes that things don't just happen by chance.
66. Has financial security.
67. Seeks higher values—values that transcend self-interests.
68. Is highly regarded by others.
69. Is willing to sacrifice in order to accomplish one's life goals.
70. Feels confident.
71. Seeks to glorify God.
72. Is enthusiastic about what one does.
73. Feels optimistic.
74. Accepts one's limitations.
75. Has a mutually satisfying loving relationship.
76. Is at peace with one's past.
77. Believes that there is coherence and continuity in one's life.
78. Has a good education.
79. Puts things in proper perspective.
80. Does not give up when encounters setbacks or obstacles.
81. Is altruistic and helpful.
82. Has the right amount of mental stimulation.
83. Is liked by others.
84. Has a vision about what can be accomplished.
85. Has good physical health.
86. Strives toward personal growth.

87. Maintains a proper balance in various activities.
88. Brings happiness to others.
89. Accepts what cannot be changed.
90. Is persistent and resourceful in attaining one's goals.
91. Values one's work.
92. Makes a significant contribution to society.
93. Is willing to listen to others' opinions and suggestions.
94. Maintains a sense of humor when things are going rough.
95. Contributes to the well-being of others.
96. Believes in afterlife.
97. Believes that one can have a personal relationship with God.
98. Attempts to leave behind a good and lasting legacy.
99. Has all one's basic needs met.
100. Believes that there is order and purpose in the universe.
101. Is treated fairly by others.
102. Has received one's fair share of opportunities and rewards.

#### APPENDIX B: CRITERION MEASURES: PERCEIVED PERSONAL MEANING

|  | <i>Strongly<br/>Disagree</i> |   | <i>Moderately<br/>Disagree</i> |   | <i>Undecided</i> |   | <i>Moderately<br/>Agree</i> |   | <i>Strongly<br/>Agree</i> |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|
|  | 1                            | 2 | 3                              | 4 | 5                | 6 | 7                           | 8 | 9                         |   |
| 1. My life as a whole has meaning.   |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 2. I am able to spend most of my time in meaningful activities and pursuits. |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 3. I led a meaningful life in the past.                                      |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 4. My entire existence is full of meaning.                                   |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 5. At present, I find my life very meaningful.                               |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 6. I look forward to a meaningful life in the future.                        |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 7. I derive a great deal of personal meaning from my past life.              |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |
| 8. I derive a great deal of personal meaning from my future expectations.    |                              |   |                                |   |                  |   | 1                           | 2 | 3                         | 4 |

#### APPENDIX C: PERSONAL MEANING PROFILE

This questionnaire measures people's perception of personal meaning in their lives. Generally, a meaningful life involves a sense of purpose and personal significance. However, people often differ in what they value



most, and they have different ideas as to what would make life worth living.

The following statements describe potential sources of a meaningful life. Please read each statement carefully and indicate to what extent each item characterizes your own life. You may respond by circling the appropriate number according to the following scale:

| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4          | 5 | 6 | 7            |
|------------|---|---|------------|---|---|--------------|
| Not at all |   |   | Moderately |   |   | A great deal |

For example, if going to parties does not contribute to your sense of personal meaning, you may circle 1 or 2. If taking part in volunteer work contributes quite a bit to the meaning in your life, you may circle 5 or 6.

It is important that you answer honestly on the basis of your own experience and beliefs.

1. I have a good family life ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 2. I believe I can make a difference in the world ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I am at peace with God ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I have learned that setbacks and disappointments are an inevitable part of life ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I believe that life has an ultimate purpose and meaning ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I engage in creative work ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I am successful in achieving my aspirations ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I pursue worthwhile objectives ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. I strive to achieve my life goals ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I care about other people ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 11. I have someone to share intimate feelings with ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I believe in the value of my pursuits ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. I seek to actualize my potentials ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. I have found that there is rough justice in this world ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 15. I strive to make this world a better place ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. I am at peace with myself ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. I have confidants to give me emotional support ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. I relate well to others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. I have a sense of mission or calling ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 20. I seek to do God's will ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 21. I like challenge ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. I believe that human life is governed by moral laws ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. It is important to dedicate my life to a cause ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 24. I take initiative ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. I am able to make full use of my abilities ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I strive to do my best in whatever I am doing ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 27. I have a number of good friends ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 28. I am trusted by others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. I am committed to my work ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. I have a purpose and direction in life ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. I seek higher values—values that transcend self-interests ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32. I am highly regarded by others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 33. I seek to glorify God ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34. I am enthusiastic about what I do ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 35. Life has treated me fairly ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 36. I accept my limitations ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
37. I am at peace with my past ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 38. I have a mutually satisfying loving relationship ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
39. I have a sense of coherence and continuity in my life ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
40. I do not give up when I encounter setbacks or obstacles ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
41. I am altruistic and helpful ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 42. I am liked by others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 43. I have found someone I love deeply ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
44. I strive toward personal growth ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
45. I bring happiness to others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 46. I accept what cannot be changed ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 47. I am persistent and resourceful in attaining my goals ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
48. I value my work ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 49. I make a significant contribution to society ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
50. I contribute to the well-being of others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
51. I believe in afterlife ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 52. I believe that one can have a personal relationship with God ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
53. I attempt to leave behind a good and lasting legacy ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
54. I believe that there is order and purpose in the universe ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 55. I am treated fairly by others ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 56. I have received my fair share of opportunities and rewards ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- ✓ 57. I have learned to live with suffering and make the best of it ..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

#### Scoring Key

1. *Achievement* (16 items): 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 34, 40, 44, 47, 48.
2. *Relationship* (9 items): 10, 18, 27, 28, 32, 41, 42, 45, 50.
3. *Religion* (9 items): 3, 5, 19, 20, 22, 33, 51, 52, 54.
4. *Self-Transcendence* (8 items): 2, 15, 23, 30, 31, 39, 49, 53.
5. *Self-Acceptance* (6 items): 4, 16, 36, 37, 46, 57.
6. *Intimacy* (5 items): 1, 11, 17, 38, 43.
7. *Fair Treatment* (4 items): 14, 35, 55, 56.

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## II

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## RESEARCH IN PERSONAL MEANING