



## Personality and Individual Differences

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# The development, construct validity, and clinical utility of the spiritual meaning scale

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## Abstract

The authors constructed a measure of spiritual meaning, defined as *the extent to which an individual believes that life or some force of which life is a function has a purpose, will, or way in which individuals participate*, to supplement measures of personal meaning (mindfulness to a framework or philosophy of life) and implicit meaning (engaging in activities and valuing attitudes that people typically report as comprising an ideally meaningful life). Using a sample of 465 undergraduates, the authors selected 14 Likert-format items that exhibited desirable psychometric characteristics to constitute the Spiritual Meaning Scale (SMS). Along with measures of personal meaning, implicit meaning, and the Big Five personality dimensions, the SMS was analyzed in relationship to mental health measures (hope, depression, anxiety, and antisocial features) that had also been administered to the aforementioned sample. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that each of the meaning variables explained variance in hope and depression beyond the variance explained by the Big Five personality factors.

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## Introduction

Meaning is often conceptualized as the *ideas* that underlie an object or event (Klinger, 1998). Related to human action, this concept involves the intentions underlying behavior, that is, the reason or the “why” for behavior (as opposed to “how’s” or causes, with which reasons are often confused). So when outlining his concept of meaning and its relationship to suffering, Frankl (1984, p. 84) references Nietzsche’s observation that “If we have our own why of life, we shall get along with almost any how” (1976, p. 468). Nietzsche’s observation implies that having meaning in life could affect one’s mental health. While copious studies have followed such an intuition and explored meaning’s relationship with mental health variables, the extent to which meaning can tell us something about mental health and personality beyond what other personality constructs can tell us (i.e. the incremental utility of assessing meaning) has not been so well explored. The current study investigated the incremental clinical utility of three distinct, meaning-related constructs relative to the Big Five personality factors. Two of these constructs (*personal* meaning and *implicit* meaning) are already well assessed by existing measures. But because we could not find a satisfactory gauge of the third meaning-related construct, that of spiritual meaning, the current study highlights the development of such a measure.

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## Section snippets

### Personal meaning

One of the more well studied, psychometrically evaluated operationalizations of personal meaning involves the construct of positive life regard, elaborated by Battista and Almond (1973). Battista and Almond defined positive life regard as having a framework or philosophy for viewing one’s life as well as a sense of fulfillment related to living in accord with that framework. They constructed the life regard index (LRI) to assess this construct. The LRI has two sub-scales, one measuring an...

### Spiritual meaning

Note that the concept of positive life regard involves viewing one's individual life, but not necessarily life itself, as having meaning. This is why Yalom (1980) describes the prior definition of meaning as terrestrial meaning. The latter sort of meaning, which he calls cosmic, is a potentially related but distinct construct. When Frankl, 1984, Frankl, 1988 discussed meaning, he talked about it not as something that can be created or constructed by an individual, but something given to the...

## Implicit meaning

Wong (1998) labels as *implicit meaning* the construct people imply when they say "meaning". Using qualitative and then factor analytic techniques, he isolated seven factors that are normatively viewed as "comprising an ideally meaningful life." These factors are achievement (pursuit and attainment of significant life goals), relationship (or general social adeptness), religion (having affirmative beliefs about relationship with the divine), self-transcendence (engagement in selfless pursuits),...

## Clinical utility of the LRI-framework, SMS, and PMP

Within various populations, the LRI-framework has been found to be positively related to elation, happiness, positive affect, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and spiritual well-being; and negatively related to anxiety, depression, psychological distress, negative affect, agoraphobia, somatization, interpersonal sensitivity, sleep disturbance, hopelessness, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988b; Debats, 1990; Debats et al., 1993; Harris & Standard, 2001; ...

## Participants

Four hundred and sixty five undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology courses at Texas A&M University completed the listed self-report measures for course credit. The resultant sample was relatively young and homogeneous. The mean age was 19.12 years, 389 participants (84%) were Caucasian, 47 (10%) were Hispanic, 11 (2%) were African-American, 7 (2%) were Asian-American, 3 (<1%) were Native-American, and 8 (2%) were of other unspecified ethnicity. Regarding spiritual orientation, 418...

## SMS reliability and validity

**Reliability.** The 14 items constituting the final version of the SMS form a single scale inventory, which had a coefficient alpha of 0.89. When these items were subjected to principal components analysis, two factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than one, but a scree test and parsimony suggested the extraction of only one factor. This factor accounted for 41% of the variance in item responses. As seen in Table 1, all items loaded at 0.55 or above on this factor. Descriptive statistics for...

## SMS construct validity

Several characteristics of a group of items comprising a new measure called the Spiritual Meaning Scale (the SMS) have been analyzed that attest to the scale's construct validity. The SMS's internal consistency and homogeneity are evinced by its high Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the factor loadings for the principal components analysis of its items. Face relevance of item content to our definition of spiritual meaning is supported by the fact that items selected for inclusion in the SMS had to have...

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...They constructed a scale that was partly based on Glicksohn (1990) scale. Henningsgaard and Arnau (2008) found a covariation between some Big Five factors such as consciousness with the Spirituality Meaning Scale (Mascaro et al., 2004). Consciousness also correlated with Tobacyk's RPBS in a study by Williams and Roberts (2016)....

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...Indeed, there are several lines of research suggestive of a link between existential distress and aggression. People who perceive life as lacking in meaning show higher levels of aggression and hostility (Mascaro, Rosen, & Morey, 2004; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). Furthermore, the existential threat of mortality salience triggers intergroup biases, stereotyping, materialism, and cognitive rigidity (Castano, Yzerbyt, PaSamoni, & Sacchi, 2002; Harmon-Jones, Greenberg, Solomon, & Simon, 1996; Jost, Glaser, & Kruglanski, 2003; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Schimel et al., 1999; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2011b), alongside acts such as outgroup derogation, racism, and hurting those who are considered to be a threat to dominant beliefs (Greenberg et al., 1990; Maher, Van Tilburg, & Van Den Tol, 2013; McGregor et al., 1998; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2011a; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2016)....

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