

Measuring Purpose in Life: A Review

Danielle Schultz
Teachers College, Columbia University

Human beings are said to be unique in that we are the only meaning-making species. While purpose in life has long been a source of inquiry by religious figures, philosophers, and scholars alike, it has become an increasingly significant focus of psychological research, which has suggested that an individual's sense of purpose in life affects their mental health in a variety of ways. With the recent emergence of the positive psychology movement, a renewed interest in the subject of purpose in life has resulted in a rapidly growing body of literature on the topic. However, purpose in life has been defined and conceptualized in many different ways—giving rise to a large breadth of instruments seeking to measure the concept. This article is intended to provide a comprehensive guide to a wide and diverse array of measures to assist beginning researchers seeking to assess purpose in life and related constructs. Although these scales can be easily located in the literature, due to differences in methodology, construct, and defining of purpose in life, this review is the only article that attempts to review all these measurements in one place for the ease of accessibility. Furthermore, few resources exist outlining the science and measurement underlying the concept. An extensive review of 26 measures of purpose in life and related constructs was completed. Careful exploration revealed that although current measures have made significant contributions to the extant literature, many of these instruments suffer from discrepancies in how purpose in life is being defined, making it difficult to capture the full breadth and nuances of the purpose in life construct and potentially hampering research on mental health outcomes. Suggestions for further research and different methodological approaches to measurement construction are made.

The pursuit of purpose in life is a defining and universal feature of the human experience, regardless of age, gender, social-cultural background, economic status, or geographic location. It has long been a source of inquiry by religious figures, philosophers, and scholars alike and has gained increasing clinical relevance in the field of psychology, which has implicated the concept in the etiology of various psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and addiction(s) (Bronk, 2014; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Edwards & Holden, 2001; Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Kleftras & Psarra, 2012; Padelford, 1974; Phillips, 1980; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, & Buchanan, 2011; Shek, 1992). Psychological research has also identified purpose in life as an essential component of well-being and optimal human functioning, linking the concept to higher life satisfaction, improved physical health, and overall greater happiness (Bronk, 2014; Keyes, 2002; King, Hicks, Krull, & Gaiso, 2006; Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). More recently, purpose in life has begun to emerge in popular culture such as nationally recognized books (Warren, 2002), seminars, and topics of discussion on talk

shows and news broadcasts, resulting in a rapidly growing purpose-seeking industry (Bronk, 2014).

While the concept has been attracting more attention, very few resources exist that outline the science behind the concept, particularly in terms of measurement. This article is an attempt to provide researchers with a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of purpose in life and how it is being measured. It is in large part a review of instruments measuring purpose, beginning with a brief exploration of the history of the concept, followed by a thorough examination of instruments that measure purpose in life and related constructs. Suggestions for future directions in research are made.

Evolution of the Purpose Construct: Defining Purpose in Life and Theoretical Foundations

Western concepts of purpose in life draw much from early Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Bronk, 2014; MacDonald, Wong, & Gringas, 2012; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). Other early conceptualizations are mostly rooted in religion, with purpose functioning as a fulfillment of God's will, supernatural forces providing a sense of meaning to one's life, or that God is serving as the provider of sources through which one can derive meaning and purpose, such as relationships, work, or other activities (Bronk, 2014; Nozick, 1981).

Keywords: purpose in life, meaning in life, measurement, review, scale development, existential psychology, logotherapy, goals, commitment, self-transcendence

In the field of psychology, the beginnings of the purpose in life concept can be credited to existentialists such as Viktor Frankl, Salvatore Maddi, and Irvin Yalom, all of whom who believed that finding a sense of purpose in life was man's primary motivational force (Frankl, 1959) and an "ultimate concern" of existence (Yalom, 1980) that, if left unfulfilled, could result in significant, negative psychological consequences such as suicide (Yalom, 1970), or syndromes characterized by anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and boredom (Auhagen, 2000; Bronk, 2014; Frankl, 1959; Maddi, 1957; Reker et al., 1987; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Diverse perspectives and theories make it difficult to operationalize purpose in life, giving rise to numerous and evolving definitions of the concept among researchers. The broadest definitions imply that purpose in life is the recognition of goals or reasons for the process of living (Auhagen, 2000; Baumeister, 1991; Steger et al., 2006). One complication lies in distinguishing between purpose in life and the close-related concept, meaning in life. While some theorists have simply equated purpose with meaning (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Frankl, 1959), others have delineated purpose as one component of a larger meaning construct (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Bronk, 2014; Emmons, 2003; Makola & Berg, 2008; Reker & Wong, 1988). Other scholars give primacy to purpose as the larger concept subsuming meaning, defining purpose as a central life aim that fuels goals, influences behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning (McKnight and Kashdan; 2009). For the purposes of this review, we discuss purpose as a separate construct. As Bronk (2014) and Makola and Berg (2008) point out, the two constructs are inextricably related, if not synonymous.

Perhaps the clearest description of purpose comes from Bronk (2014), who notes three core elements present in both historical and modern definitions: goal-directedness, commitment, and personal meaningfulness. Each of these core elements is marked by a fourth element, self-transcendence. Each concept will be discussed in turn.

The presence of personal goals is seen as an important source of purpose in life, acting as incentives that govern behavior and daily functioning

(Emmons, 2003; Klinger, 1977; Pinquart, Silbereisen, & Fröhlich, 2009). Emmons (2003) emphasizes goal-directedness as an essential component of purpose in life, arguing that "goals are signals that orient a person to what is valuable, meaningful, and purposeful" (p.107). Purpose serves as a motivational framework, influencing both long-term and short-term goals. Bronk (2014) uses the following example to illustrate this point: "studying hard to get into medical school may represent a worthwhile short-term goal for an individual pursuing a long-term purpose of providing high quality healthcare" (p. 5). A sense of meaningfulness and purpose is reflected in the active pursuit and fulfillment of these goals.

Commitment is another common element found in definitions of the purpose in life construct (Battista & Almond, 1973). It has been noted that individuals often feel compelled or inspired by their life purpose, changing their behavior and directing their energy and resources to pursuing their own purpose. This is often accentuated by a strong sense of motivation and active engagement in pursuing one's goals (Bronk, 2014). In many cases, this high level of commitment manifests as one's career. In this context, one's career is referred to as a "calling," or the sense of purpose that their work is what they are meant to do (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This calling need not be religious, but implies a commitment to a value that one believes in.

While an individual may have goals they are committed to fulfilling, they may not have any long-term significance for meaning for the individual (Emmons, 2003). In the context of purpose in life, a third component of the purpose construct – and perhaps most salient – is personal meaningfulness. In terms of life purpose, meaning takes a central role to the individual, influencing thoughts, actions, actions, and emotions in one's life (Bronk, 2014; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Although what contributes to a personal sense of meaning varies and isn't necessarily straightforward, studies have identified several domains in which people strive for: work/achievements, relationships/intimacy, religion/spirituality, and self-transcendence/generativity (Emmons, 2003). While personal meaning is not limited to these domains, and sources of meaning can change throughout the lifetime, many authors agree that personal meaning

can be derived from anything that imbues life with personal significance. Other researchers expand this idea of personal meaning to be an individually-constructing cognitive system consisting of affective, motivational, cognitive, relational, and personal components (MacDonald, Wong, & Gingras, 2012; Wong, 1998). Regardless, personal meaning appears to be a regular component in definitions of purpose in life.

Finally, self-transcendence is a feature of all three core elements. While goals, commitments, and sources of meaning vary between individuals, all of these components are rooted in the idea of self-transcendence – originally defined by Victor Frankl as a human characteristic of being directed or oriented something other than itself (1966). Self-transcendence has been referred to as an expansion of one’s personal boundaries beyond the self. Although the topic of self-transcendence is beyond the scope of this paper, concepts of self-transcendence have emerged as a common theme in individual’s subjective sense of purpose in life. This encompasses goals such as leaving a legacy, contributing to society, caring for others, etc. In many cases, self-transcendence in the context of purpose in life involves a life goal of contributing something of value to others (Bronk, 2014).

Purpose in Life and Mental Health Outcomes

Numerous studies have suggested that purpose and meaning in life can function to influence mental health (Bronk, 2014; Reker et al., 1987; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) and offer empirical support for earlier theories put forth by Frankl, Maddi, and Yalom. Purposelessness has been associated with negative mood states and psychopathology such as boredom, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and drug/alcohol use (Bronk, 2014; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Edwards & Holden, 2001; Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Kleftras & Psarra, 2012; Padelford, 1974; Phillips, 1980; Schulenberg et al., 2011; Shek, 1992).

Conversely, a sense of purpose in life can help individuals cope with life challenges, fend off negative states, and serve as a moderator of stress effects (Krause, 2007), as well as protect against suicidal ideation (Edwards & Holden, 2001; Heisel & Flett, 2004), help prevent illness (Shek, 1992), and contribute to the promotion of health be-

havior (Garcini, Short, & Norwood, 2013).

A more recent line of research, growing out of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), has found many positive associations to purpose and meaning in life beyond protective and mitigating factors. A growing body of literature has identified meaning and purpose as vital elements of optimal human functioning and well-being (Bronk, 2014; Keyes, 2002; King, Hicks, Krull, & Gaiso, 2006; Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schulenberg et al., 2008; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Ryff and Singer (2008) included purpose in life as a leading component in their eudaimonic model of psychological well-being. Martin Seligman identified meaning and purpose in life as a core component of what constitutes a “balanced psychology and full life” and necessary for “authentic happiness” (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Seligman, 2002). Seligman sees meaning and purpose as not just an indicator of an individual’s well-being, but of their flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Other scholars in this tradition have linked life purpose to life satisfaction, quality of life, and subjective well-being, positive affect and happiness (Hughes, 2006; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005).

Purpose in life has also been associated with numerous physical health benefits, such as lower rates of Alzheimer’s disease and mild cognitive impairment (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, & Bennett, 2010), better cardiovascular health, reduced risk of mortality (Boyle et al., 2009), and less chronic pain (Kass, 1991).

The Present Study

The premise of this review stems from the lack of literature synthesizing psychological theory and empirical research on the topic of purpose in life, particularly in terms of measurement. Given the abstract, yet complex nature of life purpose, measuring the construct presents a challenge. While attempts to study purpose in life are abundant, conceptualizations of the subject are as numerous and varied, giving rise to over 25 different measures, ranging from self-report surveys and rankings, to interviews that seek to illicit one’s sense of life purpose or lack thereof. Despite the existence of many diverse methodical approaches measuring purpose in life, most research

on the topic has relied heavily on the Purpose in Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), followed by Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RPWB) Purpose in Life Subscale (Ryff, 1989). Although the PIL has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of life purpose (Bronk, 2014; Zika & Chamberlain, 1988, 1992), it has been subject to numerous criticisms related to its dimensionality, factor structure, and construct validity (Shek, 1988; Yalom 1980; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). It has also been argued that the PIL has confounding and value-laden variables (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988), and thus does not accurately or adequately measure the purpose in life construct. Dyck (1987) suggested that the PIL is an indirect measure of depression. The RPWB has also been criticized in terms of its dimensionality, with conceptual overlap being cited as a primary limitation of the scale. The purpose in life subscale was also found to be not as closely tied to pre-existing measures of well-being (Dierendonck, 2004; Springer & Hauser, 2006) and estimates of internal consistency were lowest in this subscale, suggesting that the full conceptual breadth of the purpose construct is less developed or full represented in by the scale (Ryff & Singer, 2006).

Neglect in the task of explicitly defining purpose in life has resulted in discrepancies that are potentially hampering research on mental health outcomes. Without a clear definition of the construct, measures will not identify accurate relationships between its components or other constructs. In order to conduct further research on life purpose, it is imperative that we look at the instruments that are being used to measure the concept. The following study is part of a larger aim to highlight the need for better tools and methods to assess purpose in life. Specifically, it is a review of current measures of purpose in life and related constructs in an effort to provide researchers with an overview how the construct is being measured, suggestions for future research, and to serve as a guide.

Methods

Search Methods

A literature search spanning 55 years (1959-2014) was conducted using Google Scholar and Clio because of their function as large aggregates of other major

databases. The following search terms were used: purpose in life, meaning in life, measuring purpose in life, measuring meaning in life, meaning instruments, purpose in life instruments. Additional sources were obtained from reference lists of retrieved articles.

Inclusion Criteria

Papers were included if they were a) published in English, b) discussed instruments to measure either purpose in life, meaning in life, or other constructs related to purpose in life and c) included at least some psychometrics of the instrument discussed.

Search Outcome

One hundred and forty eight sources were found that contained information about instruments measuring purpose in life, meaning in life, and related constructs. Articles were primarily survey studies spanning the field of psychological science and validation studies of purpose and meaning in life measurements, along with a small number of books serving as literature reviews on meaning in life. Only one book was centered strictly on purpose in life. This resulted in the retrieval of 26 measures: Nine instruments measuring purpose in life, three instruments measuring concepts similar to purpose in life, and fifteen scales measuring meaning in life and constructs related to purpose in life.

Review

The instruments were reviewed by the author for operational congruence with the intended purpose of the instrument (how well the instrument measured the intended concept), factor structure, reliability and validity. If a scale was cited in multiple articles, those articles were reviewed to gather additional information regarding the instrument, including background information such as development of the measure, psychometric properties, and other population samples to which it was administered.

Data abstraction

A summary overview is provided to orient the reader to the measures reviewed and to describe overall findings (observations, themes, how purpose in life was defined, etc.). Following the summary overview, a brief description is provided for each measure, along with relevant background information. Each instrument is placed in a table according to the type of measurement, as classified by the author (direct

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measures of purpose in life, measures of meaning in life and other life purpose-related constructs, and indirect measures of purpose in life). Data includes name of instrument, a brief description, a sample item, the theoretical framework or conception of purpose or meaning of life on which the scale is based, and common factor or dimensions that emerged.

Results

Summary

Overall, as observed by the author, the measures reviewed appear to fall into three broad categories: direct measures of purpose in life, measures of meaning in life and other life purpose-related constructs, and measures that indirectly measure purpose in life via subscales that designate the concept as a component of the construct being measured. Although purpose in life has been the subject of inquiry for centuries, it continues to be defined in different ways and assessed through different means and modalities, making it difficult to achieve a clear grasp on the concept. Consequently, these various conceptualizations of purpose in life are reflected in the instruments developed, potentially biasing results. For example, ten of the instruments were composed of domains that the authors believe reflect the theorized phenomenology of purpose and meaning in life constructs. Some measures, such as Personal Meaning Profile (PMP; Wong, 1998), the Meaning in Life Measurement (MLM; Morgan & Farsides, 2009), and the Meaning in Life Measurement Tool (MLMT; Lee et al., 2002) appear to be more successful in identifying domains in their scales that assess for concepts present in the extant literature. Even so, while multi-dimensional scales offer the advantage of evaluating different components of purpose in life at the same time, they are limiting insofar as they only measure the dimensions designated in the instrument; the concepts becomes defined by how it is measured. Other measures with a more open-ended format, such as the Schedule for Meaning in Life Evaluation (SMiLE; Fegg, Kramer, L'hoste, & Borasio, 2008), Revised Youth Purpose Survey (RYPS; Bundick et al., 2006), the Meaning Essay Document (MED; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981), and the Meaning in Life Depth Instrument (MiLD; DeVogler & Ebersole, 1981),

allow for more flexibility in subject responses and thus can give a more nuanced picture of life purpose.

Although the scope of existing instruments is large and varied, many contain similar and sometimes overlapping dimensions, which identify different components of the purpose in life construct. Most widely cited and intimately related to purpose in life is meaning. Virtually all purpose in life measures include meaning in life in some way, and all meaning in life instruments designate purpose as a factor, highlighting the centrality of meaning in the purpose in life. However, the relationship between the two components is not straightforward. Much like the proverbial chicken or the egg question (“which comes first?”), it is not clear whether purpose creates meaning, meaning contributes to purpose, or if both conditions must be met. Also consistent with the pre-existing literature is the pursuit of goals. Eleven instruments implicate or directly refer to goal-directness as a measurement domain or identify the pursuit of goals as a factor that promotes purpose in life. Another observation that supports previous theoretical conceptualizations of purpose in life is the frequent reference to self-transcendence. Nine scales either identified self-transcendence as a domain of purpose or meaning in life or incorporated transcendent values such as religiosity, spirituality, altruism, service to others or dedication to a larger societal or political cause. Other overlapping, but less cited concepts, include coherence, relationships, knowledge, and existential vacuum/meaninglessness. None of the survey measures contain all dimensions of the purpose construct as delineated by Bronk (2014): goals, commitment, meaning, and self-transcendence.

The most promising measures related to purpose in life represent good methodological approaches to the development of scales that assess the purpose construct. These include the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP; Wong, 1998), the Schedule for Meaning in Life Evaluation (SMiLE; Fegg et al., 2008), and the Meaning in Life Measurement Tool (MLMT; Lee et al., 2002). The PMP was constructed beginning with a bottom-up approach, in which lay-people's conceptions of the meaning in life construct was studied, allowing researchers to understand common beliefs about meaning in life without influences from the-

oretical biases. Similarly, the SMiLE probes for implicit theories of meaning by allow respondents to identify areas of their life that gives them meaning. Alternatively, the MLMT was created after an extensive review of meaning in life literature and interviews with professionals in psychology, philosophy, theology, and nursing. Given that purpose in life is a construct that spans many domains, this type of approach allows researchers to create measures that represent and capture and potentially measure a wider breadth of the concept. Other instruments, such as the Meaning Essay Document (MED; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981), utilize a qualitative approach in the measurement of meaning and purpose in life by asking participants to describe and rank their three most important sources from which they derive meaning. For each source of meaning, they were then asked to describe a concrete experience associated with each one, allowing for more theoretical flexibility.

Review of the measures also revealed that different scales are suited to examining different conceptual elements of purpose and meaning in life. Surveys such as the Frankl Questionnaire (FQ; Frankl, 1959), the Purpose in Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), The Life Purpose Questionnaire (LPQ; Hablas & Hutzell, 1982), the Life Engagement Test (LET; Scheier et al., 2006), the Existence of Purpose in Life Scale (EPIL; Law, 2012), and Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-being Purpose Subscale (RPWB; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) all assess the degree to which a sense of purpose in life is present in an individual. Measures such as the Personal Meaning Index (PMI; Reker, 1992), the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP; Wong, 1998), the Meaning in Life Scale (ML; Warner & Williams, 1987), the Meaning in Life Measurement Tool (MLMT; Lee et al., 2002), and the Meaningful Life Measure (MLM; Morgan & Farsides, 2009) assess the degree to which meaning is present in one's life. These measures are appropriate for those looking to simply evaluate the level of perceived purpose or meaning in one's life. It should be noted that although the MLM was designed to measure different components of meaning, it appears to assess a construct that more closely resembles purpose than meaning, given that the instrument was derived from scales meant to measure pur-

pose in life (PIL, LAP-R, RPWB-purpose subscale). Here, it is evident how a lack in clarity in the definition of purpose in life can influence measurement.

The Seeking of Noetic Goals scale (SONG; Crumbaugh, 1997), takes a different approach in measurement by assessing the degree to which individuals are actively searching for purpose in their lives. However, according to Dyck (1987), the SONG is conceptually inconsistent with Frankl's conceptualization of purpose in life and contains confounding variable that assess the cognitive components of depression. A recent factor analysis by Schulenberg et al. (2014) sheds more light on Dyck's critique, finding that those items of the SONG assessing search for meaning were psychometrically unrelated to either the Center for Epidemiologic Studies' Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977), or the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). If the search for meaning does not correlate with depression or perceived meaning in life, then evidence does not support Frankl's assumption that people who achieve meaning will stop searching for it. The relationship between will to meaning and the motivation to discover meaning is more nuanced than logotherapy predicts (Schulenberg et al., 2014). We can imagine, for example, that those who experience life ad meaningful may simply have the desire to seek even deeper levels of meaning. It should also be noted that, like the PIL, the SONG is based on the conceptualization that purpose and meaning are synonymous. Additionally, Frankl referred to the motivation to find purpose as noetic, meaning spiritual. While this term implies a focus on self-transcendence, items in the SONG do not appear to assess for this. This is another example that calls attention to the need for developing measures that more clearly reflect the purpose in life construct and differentiate it from meaning.

Other measurement tools such as the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006), assesses for the presence and search for meaning in individuals' lives. The MLQ has been found to have high internal consistency and it has been suggested that the MLQ-S subscale reflects Frankl's Will to Meaning theory that the search for meanings is man's greatest motivation (Frankl 1959; MacDonald et al., 2012). Additionally, the instrument is less likely to be con-

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founded because it allows respondents to use their own criteria for what they considered meaningful, as opposed to what researchers decided is meaningful (MacDonald et al., 2012). Researchers have also suggested that with MLQ, Steger et al. (2006) were able to disentangle the meaning in life construct from confounding factors such as depression, life satisfaction, anxiety, and religion (Bellin, 2012; Steger et al., 2006). The two-factor structure of the MLQ also allows the search for and presence of meaning to be measured independently, allowing for better exploration of the relationship between the presence and search for meaning in life (Bellin, 2012; Steger & Kashdan, 2007). The MLQ would be a good scale to administer in conjunction with measures of purpose in life to explore the relationship between purpose and meaning.

The Daily Meaning Scale (DMS; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008), like the MLQ, assesses the presence of meaning, but differs in that it is designed to capture changes in meaning. Despite the small empirical basis of the DMS, scores have shown good daily reliability, convergent validity and high internal consistency. The instrument has also been highly correlated with the MLQ-Presence subscale (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008). Consisting of two items, the brevity of the DMS enables it to be easily administered via different modalities such as e-mail or text. Given its psychometric soundness, low response burden and ease of administration, the DMS would be ideal to use in longitudinal studies that involve assessing fluctuations in meaning.

Measurement tools such as Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (SoMe; Schnell, 2009), the Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP; Reker & Wong, 1988), the Schedule for Meaning in Life Evaluation (SMiLE; Fegg et al., 2008), the Meaning Essay Document (MED; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981), and the Meaning in Life Depth Instrument (MiLD; DeVogler & Ebersole, 1981) are appropriate for those interested in exploring the sources from which individuals derive meaning. The SoMe was developed over four years of quantitative and qualitative research on meaning in life, undergoing several evolutions before its final form. It has consistently been found to be a reliable indicator of where people generate and find meaning in their lives (Damàsio

et al., 2013b; Schnell, 2009). While the SoMe carries advantages over other measures of meaning because it covers a wide breath of meaning sources, purpose in life in life in not included in any of the higher-order dimensions that the scale evaluates. The SoMe could be useful in probing for dimensions of purpose in life and perhaps better elucidate the relation between purpose in meaning if administered with a purpose in life measure. Similar to the SoMe, the SOMP assesses the sources and degree of meaning in one's life by asking participants to rate how important each source of meaning is to them. These items were selected based on an extensive review of extant literature through which commonly cited sources of meaning were identified (Reker, 2000) in order to represent individuals' implicit theories of what makes life meaningful in their daily lives under ideal circumstances. However, the SOMP has not been widely accepted in psychological circles, most likely due to the limited amount of meaning domains (Damàsio et al., 2013b). Those looking to probe for more implicit theories of meaning would be wise to utilize the scales like the SMiLE, MED, or the MiLD, all of which require participants to list and rank areas that provide meaning to their lives. The SMiLE, a self-report measure, also asks participants to rate the importance and current level of satisfaction with each meaning source and satisfaction. In scoring, levels and weights are assigned independently of each index. This allows for a nuanced understanding of the role sources of meaning play in individuals' lives. For example, a person may be satisfied in a particular life meaning domain and assign little importance to it, while they may assign a lot of importance and have high satisfaction in another area of their life. Similarly, The MED and the MiLD ask participants to identify and rank sources of meaning, but differ in that they are interview protocols that can provide richer data without the restrictions designated categories of meaning via an open-ended format.

The remaining measures reviewed have different uses in terms of investigating purpose and meaning in life. The Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC; Antonovsky, 1983, 1987), the Life Regard Index (LRI; Battista and Almond, 1973; Debats et al., 1995), and the Life Attitude Profile –Revised (LAP-R; Reker, 1992) mea-

sure constructs similar to purpose in life and would be useful in evaluating the roles of different components of purpose in life such as goals and meaning. Other scales such as the Constructed Meaning Scale (CMS; Fife, 1995) and the Meaning in Suffering Test (MiST; Starck, 1983) assess meaning in specific contexts such as individuals coping with serious illness. These scales would be useful in understanding how other factors such as negative life circumstances affect one's sense of meaning in life. Although not a direct measure of purpose in life, the Self-Transcendence Scale (STS; Reed, 1991) explores a concept that has been consistently implicated in the purpose construct. The STS has been used empirically in diverse populations, demonstrating widespread applicability. If administered with a measurement assessing purpose in life, the STS could provide more about the relationship between self-transcendence and life purpose.

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Table 1: Measures of Purpose in Life

Instrument Name	Description	Sample Items	Theoretical Framework	Constructs Explored
Frankl Questionnaire (FQ; 1959)	Self-report, 13 items, 3-point Likert scale; designed to assess the degree of presence of purpose among patients and to test the Will to Meaning Assumption	“Do you feel like your life is without purpose?”: (1) <i>no or very low level of purpose</i> —(3) <i>high purpose in life present</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption (1959)	Purpose in life, meaning in life
Purpose in Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh and Maholick 1964)	Self-report, 20 items, 7-point Likert scale; different response anchors for each item	“My life is...”: (1) <i>empty, only filled with despair</i> —(7) <i>running over with exciting things</i> “In achieving life goals, I...”: (1) <i>made no progress whatsoever</i> —(7) <i>progressed to complete fulfillment</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Quality of life, goals, death, choices, and retirement (Frankl, 1959) Purpose in life, goal seeking, goal achievement, contentedness with life, existential vacuum, search for adventure, futuristic aspirations, internal-external locus of control, self-fulfillment, life view (Shek, 1988)
Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG; Crummaugh 1977)	Self-report, 20-items, 7-point Likert scale; designed to be a unidimensional measure of motivation to find purpose in life	“Over my lifetime I have felt a strong urge to find myself”: (1) <i>never</i> —(7) <i>constantly</i> “I seem to change my objective in life”: (1) <i>never</i> —(7) <i>constantly</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Purpose in life, goal seeking, goal achievement, contentedness with life, existential vacuum, search for adventure, futuristic aspirations, internal-external locus of control, self-fulfillment, life view (Frankl, 1959)
Life Purpose Questionnaire (LPQ; Hablas & Hutzell, 1982)	Self-report, 20 items, dichotomous response format (agree/disagree); designed for geriatric, neuro-psychiatric patients, and special populations	“I am not prepared for death”: <i>agree</i> — <i>disagree</i> “I have discovered many reasons why I was born”: <i>agree</i> — <i>disagree</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Unidimensional measure of life purpose and meaning
Ryff’s Scales of Psychological Well-being Purpose Subscale (Ryff 1989; Ryff and Keyes 1995)	Self-report, 20-,14-,9-, and 3-items versions, 6-point Likert scale; measure of purpose in life representing one of six dimensions of psychological well-being	“I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality”: (1) <i>strongly disagree</i> —(6) <i>strongly agree</i>	Purpose in life – positive functioning with the presence of goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful (1989)	Purpose in life
Purpose in Life Scale (PILS; Robbins & Francis, 2000)	Self-report, 12 items, 5-point Likert response format	“My life seems most worthwhile”: (1) <i>agree strongly</i> —(5) <i>disagree strongly</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Purpose in life
Life Engagement Test (LET; Scheier et al., 2006)	Self-report, 6 items (3 positive, 3 negative), 5-point Likert scale	“There is not enough purpose in my life”: (1) <i>strongly disagree</i> —(5) <i>strongly agree</i>	Purpose in life – extent to which a person engages in activities that are personally valued (p.291)	Purpose in life
Revised Youth Purpose Survey (RYPS; Bundick et al., 2006)	Semi-structured interview protocol	“What are some of the things that really matter to you? Imagine you’re 40 years of age, what will you be doing? What will be important to you? Why?”	Purpose - “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self” (Damon et al., 2003)	Values, beliefs, faith, career, service, family, political/social interests, other hobbies or leisure, country
Existence of Purpose in Life Subscale (EPIL; Law, 2012)	7 items selected from the PIL based on relevance to lives of early adolescents	“My life is...”: (1) <i>empty, only filled with despair</i> —(7) <i>running over with exciting things</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Existence - whether life is perceived to be enthusiastic versus boring, exciting versus monotonous, or new versus unchanged

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Table 2: Measures of Constructs Similar to Purpose in Life

Instrument Name	Description	Sample Items	Theoretical Framework	Constructs Explored
Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC; Antonovsky 1983, 1987)	29 and 13 item versions, 7-point Likert scale, 3 dimensions	<p>“When you think about your life, you very often...”: (1) <i>feel how good it is to be alive— (7) Ask yourself why you exist at all</i></p> <p>“Do you have the feel that you are in an unfamiliar situation and don’t know what to do?”: (1) <i>very often— (7) very seldom or never</i></p>	Sense of coherence – a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (p.19)	comprehensibility, manageability, and meaning
Life Regard Index (LRI; Battista and Almond 1973; Debats et al. 1995)	28 items, 2 subscales: framework – measures presence of life goals, fulfillment subscale - measures progress towards life goals	<p>“I have a very clear idea of what I’d like to do with my life”: (1) <i>disagree, (2) I have no option, (3) I agree</i></p> <p>“I don’t really value what I’m doing”: (1) <i>disagree, (2) I have no option, (3) I agree</i></p>	Positive life regard - an individual’s belief that he is fulfilling a life-framework or life-goal that provides him with a highly valued understanding of his life	<p>framework – a meaningful life framework or goal by which people understand the purpose of their existence</p> <p>fulfillment – the sense of fulfillment that accompanies realizing framework</p>
Life Attitude Profile-Revised (LAP-R; Reker, 1992)	48 items, 7-point Likert scale, yields 6 dimensions and 2 composite scores	<p>“I have a mission in life that gives me a sense of direction”:</p> <p>(1) <i>strongly disagree— (7) strongly agree</i></p>	Will to Meaning Assumption	<p>purpose, coherence, choice/</p> <p>responsibleness, goal seeking, death acceptance and existential vacuum</p>

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Table 3: Measures of Meaning in Life

Instrument Name	Description	Sample Items	Theoretical Framework	Constructs Explored
Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006)	10 items, 7-point Likert scale, 2 subscales: presence of meaning (MLQ – P) & search for meaning (MLQ-S)	<p>“I am seeking a mission or purpose for my life:” (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>absolutely</i></p> <p>“I understand my life’s meaning”: (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>absolutely</i></p>	Meaning - the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence (p. 81).	Level of presence and search for meaning
Daily Meaning Scale (DMS; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008)	2-item and 4-item versions, 7-point Likert scale, 2 subscales presence of meaning and search for meaning	<p>“How meaningful does your life feel?: (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>absolutely</i>”</p> <p>“How much do you feel like your life has purpose?”: (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>absolutely</i>”</p>	Meaning - the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence	level of presence and search for meaning
Personal Meaning Index (PMI; Reker, 1992)	16-items scale derived from the summation of the Purpose and Coherence dimensions of the LAP-R	“I have a mission in life that gives me a sense of direction”: (1) <i>strongly agree</i> — (7) <i>strongly disagree</i>	Meaning - the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence	sense of purpose and coherence
Personal Meaning Profile (PMP; Wong 1998)	57 items with 7 subscales, assesses one’s sense of personal meaning in their life	<p>“I engage in creative work: (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>a great deal</i></p> <p>“I seek to glorify God”: (1) <i>not at all</i>— (7) <i>a great deal</i></p>	<p>meaning - cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of</p> <p>worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment</p>	achievement, religion, self-transcendence, relationship, intimacy, fairness, and self-acceptance
Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (SoMe; Schnell, 2009)	151 items measuring 26 sources of meaning and Positive and negative dimensions of meaning: 1) meaningfulness, a sense of fulfillment, based on significance, coherence, and belonging, and 2) crisis of meaning, the view that life is empty and has no meaning; 4 higher order dimensions, 6-point Likert scale	“I feel pain from finding no purpose in my life”: (1) <i>totally disagree</i> — (5) <i>totally agree</i>	<p>meaningfulness – a fundamental sense of meaning, Based on an appraisal of one’s life as coherent, significant, directed, and belonging</p>	<p>self-transcendence: explicit religiosity, spirituality, unison with nature, social commitment, generativity, care, health; self-actualisation: individualism, challenge power, development, freedom, knowledge, achievement, creativity, self-knowledge; order: reason, morality, tradition, practicality; well-being and communality: fun, wellness, harmony, attentiveness, love, community</p>
Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP; Reker & Wong, 1988)	17-items assessing the sources and degree of meaning in one’s life evaluating four different domains of meaning: self-transcendence, collectivism, individualism, self-preoccupation; 7-point Likert scale	<p>“Being of service to others”— (1) <i>not at all important</i>— (7) <i>very important</i></p> <p>“Leaving a legacy for the next generation”—(1) <i>not at all important</i>—(7) <i>very important</i></p>	Meaning as made through making choices, taking actions, and entering into relationships	<p>self-transcendence: sources that transcend the limits of the self, ultimately involving cosmic or ultimate meaning; collectivism: sources that focus on the betterment of the group, with an emphasis on service to others and dedication to a larger societal or political cause; individualism: sources that focus on self-growth, development, and the realization of one’s potential; self-preoccupation: sources that meet and satisfy the immediate needs of the respondent</p>
Schedule for Meaning in Life Evaluation (SMiLE; Fegg et al., 2008)	Self-report measure that assesses individual meaning in life; three-part process: 1) asks participants to list three to seven areas that provide meaning to their lives, 2) rate the importance of each area on a 5-point Likert scale, 3) respondents indicate on a 7-point Likert scale their current level of satisfaction (3 satisfaction indexes)	<p>(1) <i>somewhat important</i>— (5) <i>extremely important</i></p> <p>(-3) <i>very unsatisfied</i>— (+3) <i>very satisfied</i></p>	<p>Will to Meaning Assumption</p> <p>Meaning = cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment (Reker & Wong, 1988, p. 221)</p>	Respondent-generated; family, leisure time, friends, partner, animals/nature, work, pleasure, spirituality, health, well-being, altruism, house/garden, finances, altruism, hedonism

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Meaning in Suffering Test (MiST; Starck, 1983)	Assesses perception of the degree of meaning found in unavoidable experiences of suffering; 2 parts: 1) 20-item self-report measure, 7-point Likert scale, yielding 3 subscale scores 2) open-ended response format	“I believe suffering causes a person to find new and more worthwhile life goals”: (1) <i>never—</i> (7) <i>constantly</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	Subjective characteristics of suffering
Constructed Meaning Scale (CMS; Fife, 1995)	11 items related to impact of illness on respondents’ sense of identity, interpersonal relationships, and perceived future; 4-point Likert scale	“I feel my experience with cancer has made me a better person”: (1) <i>strongly agree—</i> (4) <i>strong disagree</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption Meaning - the individual’s perception of his/her ability to accomplish future goals, to maintain the viability of relationships, and to sustain a sense of personal vitality, competence, and power within the context of everyday living as it has been altered by occurrence of an event.	Sense of identity, interpersonal relationships, perceived future
Meaning in Life Measure (MLM; Morgan & Farsides, 2009)	23 items with 5 subscales encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavior components of the meaning in life concept; 7-point Likert scale	“I find it satisfying to think about what I have accomplished in life”: (1) <i>strongly disagree—</i> (7) <i>strongly agree</i> “I really value my life”: (1) <i>strongly disagree—</i> (7) <i>strongly agree</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	purposeful life: a sense of having clear goals, aims, and intentions; valued life: a sense of life’s inherent value; accomplished life: a sense that personal goals are being achieved or fulfilled; principled life: a sense of having a personal philosophy or framework through which to understand life; exciting life: an enthusiastic orientation that views life as exciting, interesting, or engaging
Meaning in Life Scale (ML; Warner & Williams, 1987)	15-items, self-report, 5-point Likert scale; interview consisting of life satisfaction and other life measures	“Believing in God is...”: (1) <i>not at all meaningful to me—</i> (5) <i>the most meaningful thing in my life</i>	Meaning in life - a sense of purpose, beliefs, and statements of faith enhanced through personal commitment and emotional support from others, religious affiliations, and/or purposeful activities in life	believing in God, being around people, coming to terms with illness, looking forward to each new day, participating in religious activities, giving affection to loved ones, receiving love and support, life is useful and worthwhile, activities and hobbies, doing things for myself, support from other- patients, life full of good times, setting daily and long-term goals, philosophy
Meaning in Life Measurement Tool (MLMT; Lee et al., 2002)	63-items, 4-point Likert scale; intended to measure meaning in life	“I think I have more virtues than drawbacks”: 4 <i>Likert points not labeled</i>	Will to Meaning Assumption	self-awareness, self-acceptance, futuristic aspiration, valuelessness, purpose in life, contentedness with life, role awareness, experience of love, love in family, commitment and self-transcendence
Meaning Essay Document (Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981)	Open-ended format, participants to describe and rank 3 most important sources of meaning, as well as to list experiences associated with each meaning source	N/A	No definition; instrument designed to clarify the meaning in life concept	understanding: trying to gain more knowledge; relationship: an interpersonal orientation including family, friends, and romantic relationships; service: a helping, giving orientation dealing with people in the abstract); belief: Living according to one’s beliefs—religious, political, or social; expression: expressions of self through such things as art, athletics, music, writing, etc.; obtaining: emphasizes obtaining possessions, respect, and responsibility; growth: emphasizes a striving towards developing potentials, obtaining goals; existential-hedonistic: includes general expressions that pleasure and daily life are most meaningful

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Meaning in Life Depth Instrument (DeVogler & Ebersole, 1981)

Participants rank a list of 8 commonly cited sources of meaning from most to least personal importance and write a brief essay about the level of significance of most importance meaning source has to them

(1) "Write in detail about the thing that you find gives you greatest meaning in your life. Use the back of the page if necessary. Tell why this is meaningful to you and try to provide an example of it."
(2) "Support to the best of your ability why you feel your meaning in life is deep or not deep. Use examples, tell how much you are involved (or not); in general, try to convince me that you know what you are talking about."

No definition; instrument designed to clarify the meaning in life concepts

5 levels of depth in meaning: highest, above average, average, below average, lowest

Discussion

The field of psychology provides a structured approach to studying the ambiguous and subjective concept of purpose in life. Probing how purpose in life is measured through the exploration of instruments that seek to explore this construct may enhance our understanding. Given the sheer volume of scales and instruments developed to measure life purpose and related concepts, this review is a testament to the increasing focus on the topic in psychology and its relevance to physical and emotional well-being.

Limitations

While these efforts to understand purpose in life have been numerous and comprehensive, there are nevertheless many flaws and shortcomings that make the construct difficult to fully capture. Some researchers question the dimensionality of certain scales, such as Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RPWB; Ryff, 1989), claiming that the dimensions are flawed due to conceptual overlap. Other measures, such as the Purpose in Life Test (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), have been criticized for having confounding and value-laden variables. These and infrequent use of some measures which could hinder generalizability to other populations, demonstrate the need for the development and thorough reconsideration of how measures of purpose in life are constructed and how it is assessed.

Implications

The extant literature provides us with ample information concerning purpose in life and how it

functions to affect mental health and its role in optimal human development. However, the discrepancies in conceptual clarity and measurement of defining purpose in life hold vast implications. Better measurement tools could help parse out different dimensions of the construct and potentially identify new ones. Enhanced measures could also enable researchers to better understand the relationships between these dimensions and the larger purpose construct (e.g. meaning vs. purpose). More sophisticated tools could also perhaps differentiate between external sources of purpose and internally derived-sense of purpose (created vs. found) or explore different types of purpose such as career, familial, religious, or service-oriented purposes. Obtaining a more nuanced understanding of purpose in life would help better understand how it affects mental health. Given the increasing clinical significance of purpose in life, these implications should not be ignored.

Future Research

Renewed interest in the topic of purpose in life is certainly encouraging, especially given the substantial impact and role it plays in physical and mental well-being. However, rapidly growing literature based on various definitions and measures of purpose in life can create more questions than answers. Given the discrepancies in how purpose in life is defined, it can leave one wondering how an ambiguous concept can be measured. First, it would be wise for researchers and theorists to work towards a consensus on a more succinct definition of purpose and life and meaning in life to allow for better operationalization of the concept. Accordingly, more longitudinal studies

should be conducted in order to develop better models of purpose in life and how it potentially changes over time. While purpose in life has been studied in different age populations, such as children (Damon, 2009), adolescents (e.g. Bronk 2011, 2012; Damon, 2009; Francis & Burton, 1994), adults, the elderly (e.g. Boyle et al., 2009), and the oldest-old (e.g. Nygren et al., 2005), few longitudinal studies exist. As noted by Bronk (2014), these span only a few weeks or a few months. To date, only one study spans over five years (Bronk 2011, 2012; Damon, 2009), which followed youth through adolescence to emerging adulthood. Additionally, as observed by the author, a majority of purpose in life research appears to have occurred in Western populations; purpose in life can be manifested much differently in Eastern cultures. Additionally, while some instruments have been translated into different languages (e.g. Brazilian Sources of Meaning in Life Questionnaire, SoMe-BR; Damásio et al., 2013; Chinese Purpose in Life test, C-PIL; Shek et al. 1987), their administration has been minimal, necessitating further cross-cultural research to account for cultural differences. Additional directions for research include further exploring the relationship between purpose and meaning in life, investigating the role of life events and circumstances in the development or change in purpose in life, or analyzing whether different items of measurements load the components of purpose in life outlined by Bronk (2014).

While it should be noted that instruments suffer from discrepancies and lack of clarity of the purpose in life construct, improvements to measures can be made. The development of measures of purpose in life could also benefit from a multimodal approach in which both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are employed. This integration would allow for researchers to bridge the gap between theories of life purpose and the subjective, lived experiences of individuals. Additionally, more sophisticated scales that have the ability to capture more dimensions of purpose in life at the same time. This sentiment is echoed by Bronk (2014), who claims that while some existing survey measures assess for the meaning, commitment, and goal-pursuit dimensions of purpose in life, many leave out the self-transcendence component of the construct because it can be dif-

ficult to capture. The development of measures that include more dimensions of purpose in life would give researchers further insight into the concept.

Conclusion

This review has several limitations. First, a formal meta-analysis was not performed due to inconsistencies of measurement and limited quantitative data. Additionally, the author was the sole reviewer of articles. Multiple reviewers may enhance the review by providing different perspective, enhancing the rigor of the study, and establish inter-rater reliability.

The instruments reviewed represent a considerable effort to explore a complex topic that has been the source of inquiry for centuries. While it is clear that that more research needs to be done, the field holds great promise. It is hoped that better and more consistent measurement will yield more specific information on how purpose in life functions to impact health and well-being, ultimately resulting in the development of new mental health interventions.

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