

Faith, Hope, Love, and Understanding?

An Empirical Examination of the Factorial Structure of “Meaning Made” After a Stressful Event

Presented by: Andrea M. Despotes

Introduction

Under meaning-making theory (Park, 2010), distress following a stressful event stimulates meaning-making processes aimed at reducing the discrepancy between one’s appraisal of the event and one’s “global meaning.” If this process leads to new “meaning made,” the discrepancy is reduced, resulting in positive adjustment.

Method

A Mechanical Turk sample ($N = 372$) of mostly middle-aged ($M = 39.58$, $SD = 9.99$) and White (82.8%) participants, half of whom were female (50.3%), identified their most stressful lifetime event, and then completed 27 scales from six measures:

- Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale (Holland et al., 2010);
- Posttraumatic Growth and Depreciation Inventory-50 (Baker et al., 2008; Tedeschi et al., 2017);
- Perceived Benefit Scales (McMillen & Fisher, 1998);
- Changes in Outlook Questionnaire (Joseph et al., 1993; Joseph et al., 2005);
- Cognitive Processing of Trauma Scale (Williams et al., 2002); and
- Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (Gillies et al., 2015).

Results

EFA of the scales, performed on a random half of the sample, suggested that “meaning made” is comprised of four factors: Disillusionment, Resilience, Connectedness, and Understanding.

The derived factor structure was supported by CFA performed on the remaining data, with three of the four factor indices demonstrating good internal consistency (α s ranging from .84 to .89). The internal consistency of the Understanding factor index was marginally acceptable ($\alpha = .67$).

Discussion

The derived factor structure represents an advance in the measurement of “meaning made,” covering the expected content areas of this domain in a parsimonious way.

Limitations include the study’s cross-sectional, correlational design and the sample’s homogeneity.

Future research should explore whether the four-factor structure of “meaning made” holds across varied age and demographic groups and in studies with longitudinal designs.

Meaning that is made after trauma, loss, or extreme stress typically falls in four categories: Disillusionment, Resilience, Connectedness, and Understanding.



Tables

Factor Loadings and Communalities for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Oblimin Rotation of 4-Factor Solution Using 22 Candidate Meaning Made Measures

Candidate Measure	I	II	III*	IV	<i>h</i>
PTGDI-Growth					
New Possibilities			.79		.75
Appreciation of Life	.38		.53		.67
Personal Strength			.84		.80
Spiritual/Existential Change	.48		.48		.73
Relating to Others	.63		.33		.75
PTGDI-Depreciation					
New Possibilities		.83			.72
Appreciation of Life		.84			.63
Personal Strength		.80			.67
Spiritual/Existential Change		.57		-.31	.60
Relating to Others	-.36	.48	.39	-.31	.64
ISLES					
Comprehensibility				.81	.70
Footing in the World		-.48		.50	.72
Perceived Benefit Scales					
Enhanced Self-Efficacy			.66		.77
Increased Community Closeness	.69				.48
Increased Spirituality	.59				.37
Increased Compassion	.66				.61
Increased Faith in People	.93				.81
Lifestyle Change	.45		.45		.68
Enhanced Family Closeness	.68				.65
CPOTS					
Positive Cognitive Restructuring			.32	.53	.51
Resolution/Acceptance				.53	.52
Downward Comparison				.53	.25
Factor Correlations					
II - Disillusionment/Belief	-.09	—			
III - Resilience/Rigidity	.57	-.06	—		
IV - Understanding/Confusion	.11	-.52	-.03	—	

Note: Factor loadings > .30 are presented, with primary factor loadings (i.e., loadings > .40 where no other loading > .30) presented in boldface. Factor I = Connectedness/Isolation; Factor II = Disillusionment/Belief; Factor III = Resilience/Rigidity; Factor IV = Understanding/Confusion; PTGDI-Growth = Posttraumatic Growth and Depreciation Inventory-50, growth items; PTGDI-Depreciation = Posttraumatic Growth and Depreciation Inventory-50, depreciation items; ISLES = Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale; CPOTS = Cognitive Processing of Trauma Scale. $N = 177$.

*All loadings were multiplied by -1, and the factor was interpreted accordingly.

Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Factor Solutions Suggested by Exploratory Factor Analyses

Proposed Solution	χ^2	<i>df</i>	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA [95% CI]
4 factors, 22 scales	150.08***	71	.92	.90	.06	.08 [.06, .10]
4 factors, 27 scales	321.92***	113	.84	.81	.09	.10 [.09, .12]
2 factors, 22 scales	819.44***	169	.69	.65	.10	.15 [.14, .16]
2 factors, 27 scales	1151.26***	274	.70	.67	.10	.13 [.13, .14]

Note: CFI = Comparative Fit Index; SRMR = standardized root-mean-squared residual; RMSEA = root-mean-squared error of approximation; CI = confidence interval.

$N = 177$.

*** $p < .001$.



Northern Illinois University

Andrea M. Despotes and David P. Valentiner
Department of Psychology
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Northern Illinois University