

The Development of a Culturally Sensitive Measure of Sources of Life Meaning

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The increasingly popular concept of hermeneutics in the humanities and use of life story narratives in qualitative research have brought about a return to meaning as an area of phenomenological exploration and understanding of the aging process. The question of meaning appears to be universal. There is no area that is not touched by this theme (Peseschkian, 1983).

It is through meanings that individuals experience, understand, and manipulate themselves, each other, and their worlds (Ford, 1975). Deriving from the symbolic interaction and phenomenological perspectives is the helpful insight that it is individual interpretations rather than some objectively defined reality that are the bases for behavior and social interaction (Breytspraak, 1984). Personal meaning is an expression of the value people place upon the events and flow of life and the significance they attach to their existence (Reker & Wong, 1988). It is a tool for controlling the world, for self-regulation, and for belongingness. While life involves constant change, meaning is based on stability and permanence (Baumeister, 1991).

Kaufman (1987) contends that "old people ... maintain an ageless sense of self that transcends change by providing continuity ..." (p. 161). Consistent confirmation of such continuity comes from a variety of studies. Ebersole and DePaola (1989), in their investigation of meaning in the active married elderly, found no significant differences in depth of meaning between younger marrieds and older (65+) ones. Baum and Stewart (1990), studying 185 subjects, observed that the amount of

purpose in life did not vary with age or sex, and sources of meaning did not alter across time. In their study of mothers and elderly, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) found support for Yalom's (1980) position, namely that while the sources of meaning may change over a life span, the relation between the strength of life meaning and psychological health may remain consistent regardless of where meaning is embedded.

Personal meanings drive and/or are driven by the themes people create and the values they live by. For Kaufman (1987), themes, or cognitive areas of meaning, explain, unify, and give substance to people's perceptions of who they are and how they see themselves participating in social life. Values may be understood to be expressions of widely held ideals of human behavior, clearly locating the individual within a historical cultural cohort. Thus, a sense of personal meaning is derived from, or closely reflects the interaction between the macro level historically and culturally determined value system and its integration and the micro level life themes by which people know themselves and explain who they are to others.

Disparate explorations into the content of meaning have produced what appears to be a general consensus as to the major sources of meaning in life for individuals of all ages. Fiske and Chiriboga (1991) delineate seven goals: achievement and work; good personal relations; philosophical and religious goals; social service; freedom from hardship; seeking enjoyment; and personal growth. Closely paralleling these are the eight meaning categories found by DeVogler and Ebersole (1980): understanding (trying to gain more knowledge); service (a helping, giving orientation); relationship (interpersonal orientation); belief (living according to one's beliefs); expression (through art, athletics, music, writing); obtaining (respect, possessions, responsibility); growth (toward developing personal potentials, obtaining goals); and existential-hedonistic (the importance of the pleasures of daily life). Similarly, in studies by Thurner (1975), Hedlund and Birren (1984), Klinger (1977), Levi (1996), and others there seems to be a consensus around a few major sources of meaning, namely personal relationships, personal growth, success, altruism, hedonism, creativity, religion, and legacy.

During the period from 1993 to 1995, the first author interviewed more than 800 Australians and Israelis, using the Canadian-developed Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP; Reker, 1988). The SOMP was created to measure the sources and degree of personal, present meaning in one's life. As tempting as it was to look for similarities and/or differences between cultures in sources of meaning, the author encountered a number of instrument-related limitations that the current study attempts to address. First, for some populations the limited number of SOMP sources (16 or 17, depending upon the version) was constraining. A legitimate question goes to the issue of whether more diverse, comprehensive lists of meaning sources would produce similar or very different results. In both Australian and Israeli studies based upon the SOMP instrument (Prager, 1996, 1997), between 25% and 33% of the respondents wrote in additional sources of meaning, including personal and family health, personal honor, peace, and nature, among others.

Second, though translations of an original instrument may be faithfully rendered into the language of the respondents currently being studied, linguistic nuances of the original culture persist. Though care was taken to make necessary adaptations, some items by their phrasing (e.g., "everyday needs," "hedonistic activities") or the inclusion of compound statements (e.g., "personal relationships with family and/or friends") force a response to a question that may be perceived to mean one thing when it actually may mean another. Other items, such as "participation in religious activities" reflect, at the least, a narrowness in definition.

A third source of difficulty, related to the above two, pertains to the issue of cultural and ethnic specificity in research in general, and in instrument development in particular. The author was well aware of the fact that "the SOMP was designed as a culture-specific instrument" (Reker, personal communication, 1997). In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the need to anchor social and psychological research of minority or ethnic populations in the culture of the group under investigation (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Sasao & Sue, 1993; Seidman, 1993). Noting that culture affects every stage of the research process, researchers have called for the development of culturally sensitive research methods that take into account the values, belief systems, and behaviors of the population under study, as well as its place in, and its relationship with the dominant culture in whose midst it lives (Hines, 1993; Maton, 1993; Tran, 1992). It is therefore our view that, in studying personal meaning, while it may be important to compare young or old respondents *across* cultures on an item-by-item basis, it may be even more worthwhile an endeavor to study what sources of meaning are generated by specific cultures (culture-specific instrument conceptualization) and how those sources of meaning identify and differentiate between different groups *within* those cultures. In order to properly document how cultural norms, values, and experiences influence the relevance of a set of constructs to respondents, qualitative contextual comparisons of personal meaning may be much more valid than quantitative comparative measurements of magnitude of specific meaning sources.

The study undertaken by the authors, and still in progress at this writing, relates to the above issue of cultural specificity, as reflected in the construction of an instrument that we are tentatively calling the Sources of Life Meaning (SLM). The SLM examines the sources of meaning in life for younger and older Arab and Jewish Israelis. In this study, which focuses on the formulation and definition of meaning constructs, we attempted to represent our participants' reality as faithfully as possible. Qualitative research methods provided us with a broad-based description and deeper understanding of meaning phenomena from the participants' viewpoints and perspectives. At the same time, in our attempt to create a viable, parsimonious instrument validly measuring meaning-in-life sources, quantitative measures were used in order to obtain reliability estimates and assessments of other psychometric properties, including the factorial structure and distribution of the subscales.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE SOURCES OF LIFE MEANING SCALE

To develop the culturally sensitive SLM measure referred to in this study, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, in several stages. First, a concept mapping procedure (Trochim, 1989) was first employed in order to learn about the culturally specific sources of meaning in life from our young and elderly volunteer respondents. In the second stage, based on the information obtained from the first stage, a survey questionnaire was developed to learn about the properties of the instrument. In a third stage, SLM differences between younger and older Arabs and Jews were analyzed, with emphasis on cultural background, age, and gender.

Stage 1: Concept Mapping

The concept mapping procedure, selected in this study for identifying the sources of meaning in life, enables an individual or group to present their ideas pictorially or graphically and can be used to help articulate a theory, to provide the basis for measurement, or as a framework for analyzing research results (Trochim, 1989). Concept mapping involves several steps:

(1) Determining the focus for the mapping, which in this study was the observation of variables relevant to the meaning-of-life concept.

(2) Generating statements relevant to the focus. The first task addressed was the selection of methods and participants for generating variables relevant to the focus. Two methods were employed: focus groups and questionnaires. In this study, four focus groups were employed: one each for elderly Arab men and women ($N = 14$) and one each for elderly Jewish men and women ($N = 30$), all of whom were recruited from two community centers for the aged in Tel-Aviv. Participants' ages were similar for Jews and Arabs, ranging from 62 to 78 years. An open discussion was conducted on the questions: "What are the most important things in life?", "What are the things that you consider most meaningful and necessary in life?", and "What gives you a taste for life?" Two moderators, an experienced psychologist and social worker, and a recorder, all of whom were ethnically matched to the respective groups, were present in each of the four groups. Duration of each of the focus group meetings was approximately 90 minutes. These groups generated a sum of 72 different meaning items.

Due to problems of logistics, we were unable to conduct similar focus groups to generate statements from younger people. It was thus decided to employ a different method. One hundred and ten Israeli Arab and Jewish male and female students between the ages of 21 and 36 were recruited from the Tel Aviv University student body and were asked to respond to the open-ended question: "What are the things you consider most meaningful and necessary in life?" An additional 21 meaning items were obtained from the students and then added to the items obtained from the older group, rendering a total of 93 meaning items obtained from 154 individuals. Though SOMP data were also collected from the students, an analysis of those findings, including validation data for the SLM, is

beyond the scope of this chapter.

(3) Sorting of statements into groups. The researchers wrote all the meaning sources down on cards, one statement per card. We approached seven social workers, giving each one a complete set of cards with the instruction that they were to arrange them in piles, in whatever way made most sense to them, being sure that there was more than one pile.

(4) Analyzing the sorting, resulting in a visual mapping of concepts. To analyze the combined data obtained from the sorters, we used the Concept System software, developed by Trochim (1993), that performs two main analyses: multi-dimensional scaling and cluster analysis. The multi-dimensional scaling prepares a series of $[N \times N]$ matrices, yielding a two-dimensional dot map of the statements, with each dot on the map representing one statement. Statements that were frequently sorted together into the same group are located close to each other on the map and those that were not sorted together are far apart. The second analysis is a hierarchical cluster analysis (Andeberg, 1973; Everitt, 1980), grouping individual statements (dots) on the map into clusters of statements that presumably reflect similar concepts. The end products are two visual maps of the statements: a dot map and a cluster map (for more details on concept mapping, see Trochim, 1989).

(5) Interpreting the cluster or concept map. The cluster map may be interpreted on two levels. First, one examines the items comprising each cluster and attempts to discover their common denominator in order to identify and label the underlying concept. Second, the spread of the clusters in the two-dimensional space (north-south and east-west) is examined in an effort to understand the underlying meaning of the clusters' locations relative to each other.

The Dot and Cluster Maps. As mentioned above, in dot maps each of the statements is graphically represented by a dot on a map. Dots that are close together on the map represent items that were often sorted into the same category by the sorters, for example: "to find a suitable partner" and "to live with a partner." Dots that are farther apart were sorted into separate groups and represent dissimilar items, for example: "to gain social status" and "the satisfaction derived from helping others." Statements that all sorters placed in the same cluster appear as dots one on top of the other.

Cluster maps present the results of the cluster analysis. Statements within a cluster are those that were more often sorted into the same pile than the statements in the other clusters. Furthermore, clusters that are closer to each other will in general be more similar in content than clusters that are farther apart on the map. The program allows the researcher to determine how sensitive the analysis should be, and it is possible to generate solutions based on any number of clusters. The ultimate decision regarding the number of clusters to be retained for interpretation is made by the researcher based on conceptual and practical considerations. This process resulted in the identification of eight major clusters of sources of life meaning, as determined in the qualitative phase of this study. The following is a list

of the clusters with two examples of entries for each cluster.

1. *Being respected by others*: to be respected by family; to be respected by community.
2. *Closeness to family*: to feel enjoyment and satisfaction with family; to maintain good relationships with all close kin.
3. *Belonging to a social group*: to be with people; to enjoy good social relationships.
4. *Living according to values*: to preserve the honor of the family; to maintain values and traditions.
5. *Spiritual and mental/intellectual pursuits*: to participate in religious and spiritual activities; to participate in educational and cultural activities.
6. *Physical and mental health*: to function independently, without help; not to be a burden or dependent on anyone.
7. *Personal status and success*: to be successful financially/materialistically; to succeed in all aspects of life.
8. *Self-fulfillment*: to derive personal satisfaction from accomplishments; to feel self-fulfilled.

Interpretation of Dimensionality. Examination of the location of clusters in the quadrants created by the north/south and east/west axes revealed four principal underlying dimensions very similar to those reported by Reker (1998): a self-preoccupation dimension (physical and mental health, personal status and success); a self-actualization dimension (self-fulfillment, being respected by others); a collectiveness and connectedness dimension (closeness to family, belonging to a social group); and a self-transcendence dimension (living according to values, spiritual and mental activities). The positioning of the clusters on the axes appeared to lend additional support to the conceptualization of the four basic dimensions: self-preoccupation and collectiveness were at opposite poles on the north-south axis, while the self-actualization and self-transcendence dimensions were at opposite poles on what was roughly an east-west axis.

Stage 2: Construction of the Questionnaire

The eight clusters that emerged from the concept mapping procedure provided us with a contextual structure for the SLM. From the pool of 93 statements we chose, after eliminating clearly redundant items, those 41 statements that best captured the essence of the eight meaning clusters. We then rewrote the items in a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire format (1 = not important at all as a source of meaning; 5 = very important as a source of meaning). The final interview schedule, in both the Hebrew and Arabic versions, consists of a section on demographics and background information, the 41 Likert-type meaning items, and a third section containing three summary questions dealing with the respondent's global

assessment of meaning in his or her life.

To test the psychometric properties of the SLM, the responses of a convenience sample of 405 men and women were surveyed. Ages ranged from 20 to 97 years; the mean age was 50 years. Of the total, 57% were Jewish and 43% were Arab. The younger Jews and Arabs again were recruited from the rosters of the Tel Aviv University. The older respondents were interviewed in their senior citizens' organizations, in community centers, or in the northern Arab villages in which they lived.

As expected there were significant differences between the two cultures in areas of religious observance, country of birth, and education. On the whole, Arab respondents reported poorer health than Jewish subjects. These differences closely reflect the population parameters for these variables.

Exploratory Factor Analysis. Table 8.1 presents the results of factor analytic procedures and the alpha coefficients for each of the 11 factorially derived scales. The principal components factor analysis method with varimax rotation was used in this study. The reader's attention is called to the fact that the items listed for each factor are only examples and do not represent the total of all items in the factor.

Two factor analyses were conducted. In the first, we found a considerable amount of missing data in three items. Two of the items ("to live with a suitable partner" and "having good relationships with a partner") may not have been relevant for part of the sample and were therefore left blank. A third item ("to attain social status") was not understood, especially by the Arab subjects, due in large part to a poor translation of the Hebrew into Arabic, and also left blank by many. This might also have been due to culture-bound nuances relative to "social status." In the second factor analysis, the third item was removed completely. However, in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study at this early stage, and owing to the importance we intuitively assigned to the first two items, an additional factor, Factor 11, was created, and given the label "reflecting relationships with partner."

For 8 of the 11 factors, the number of valid responses ranged from 359 to 372. The missing data in these factors are more likely due to random non-completions rather than to group or culture-related misinterpretations. As such, given the number of useable questionnaires, we saw no statistically significant problems in using these eight factors even with their varying number of valid responses. Factor 2, with its 303 valid responses, presents a potential factor analytic problem. There are too many missing responses to be random; more likely they are due to either issues of relevancy, age and/or cultural interpretations, or both. Nonetheless, at this stage of the research it was decided to treat Factor 2 as we did the others, albeit with some caution in interpreting results. A similar decision was taken with regard to Factors 10 and 11, each with 345 valid responses, in which the missing data might have been random non-completions or problems of relevancy rather than of cultural-based (mis)interpretation.

TABLE 8.1 Summary of Factor-Analytically Derived Subscales

<i>Factor Example Items</i>	<i>N Items</i>	<i>Explained Variance</i>	<i>Alpha</i>
1. Reflecting Family and Communal Values “to preserve the honor of the family” “to be respected by the community”	7	23.4	0.75
2. Reflecting Materialistic Concerns/Values “to be successful financially/materialistically” “to be gainfully employed”	5	8.3	0.79
3. Reflecting Life Satisfaction/Autonomy “to determine how I wish to lead my life” “to enjoy life” “to function independently, without help”	6	6.9	0.65
4. Reflecting a “Sense of Connectedness” “to feel loved” “to be with people” “to enjoy good social relationships”	6	4.7	0.78
5. Reflecting Communal Consciousness/ Awareness “to feel proud of my country’s accomplishments”	3	4	0.7
6. Reflecting Attainment of Tranquillity/Peace “to live a quiet life” “to be at emotional peace with one’s self”	3	3.8	0.67
7. Reflecting Leisure Pursuits; Self-Development “to pursue hobbies (reading, music, writing, art)” “to broaden knowledge; to continue learning”	3	3.5	0.66
8. Reflecting Family Relationships “to maintain good relationships with all close kin” “to feel enjoyment and satisfaction with family”	3	3.1	0.67
9. Reflecting Leisure Activities Away From Home “to go on trips, go to movies, vacation activities”	2	2.8	0.45
10. Reflecting Enjoyment from Animals “to be with pets”	1	2.6	—
11. Reflecting Relationship with Partner “to share my life with a suitable partner”	2	1	0.84

NOTE: Cumulative alpha for all 41 items = 0.87; Total variance explained by all factors = 64.1%

A number of factor structure anomalies were encountered and have not yet been dealt with. For example, originally the six items in Factor 4 were grouped under the label *interpersonal relationships*. However, among those six items is the item “to feel satisfied with the accomplishments of the country.” Its loading on the factor is .40 and conceptually it would appear to be out of place. If removed, however, the alpha for the subscale would decrease from .78 to .75. A reconsideration of the factor name, to sense of connectedness, provides the items with increased conceptual connectedness, and all but the name was left unchanged. A similar situation was found in Factor 8, *family relationships*, with the item: “to feel physically and emotionally healthy” having the lowest of the three loading weights (.51) and being conceptually misplaced. If removed, the alpha would increase from .67 to .70. As above, we left it in place at this stage of the research.

One- and two-item factors will require a reconsideration of their utility. In future stages of this research these scales will either be augmented by additional items or, in the interest of economy, will be removed since their structure is at best questionable and their contribution to explained variance is marginal. Focal items that were either misunderstood or not understood at all, as, for example, in Factor 3, *life satisfaction/autonomy*: “to accept life as it is,” and in Factor 7, *leisure pursuits; self-development*: “to have an inner feeling of self-fulfillment” will be reworded. Items that were interpreted as having political undertones, such as “to attain a state of peace and security in the country” (loaded on Factor 6, *attainment of tranquillity/peace*), and showed as missing values on many questionnaires, will also be reworded. Lastly, though Factor 11 (*relationship with partner*) is shown here more for heuristic than empirical purposes, it is too weak to be considered a workable subscale. Its item loadings were less than .40 and explained variance was less than 1%. The items will be augmented by additional ones from the 93 items generated and submitted to further testing.

Test-Retest Reliability. In order to obtain test-retest reliability estimates, 79 individuals unfamiliar with the instrument or its development, and ranging in age from 27 to 88 years, were administered the 41-item SLM. For most, administrations were carried out over a 2-week period; for some the interval was 3 to 4 weeks. Of the 79 interviewed, complete and valid responses were obtained from 64 persons (81%). The reliability coefficient obtained was .77. A more rigorous test-retest reliability estimate might have been obtained had the psychometrics for each factor-scale been tested individually. Owing to the fact that the scales are still in the process of being developed, and in the interest of space here, individual scale reliabilities are not reported.

Stage 3: Observing SLM Differences Between Younger and Older Arabs and Jews: The Quantitative Phase of the Study

Four groups were the focus of our attention: two young groups of males and females (ages 20-40) of 101 Jews and 81 Arabs, and two older groups of males and

females (ages 60-97) of 83 Jews and 100 Arabs. The differences between ethnic groups were not constant and tended to vary according to the age group in question. That is, the differences between Jews and Arabs were usually apparent only in one age group, or were greater in one age group than in the other, in most of the areas examined. The following is a brief comparison, by factorialized meaning scales, of the significance of the sources of life meaning for younger and older Arabs and Jews.

- Factor 1. *Family and Communal Values*: This factor was found to be significantly more important for Arabs than for Jews (main effect for ethnicity), and the difference between the two ethnic groups was most pronounced among the young (much more important for younger Arabs than for younger Jews).
- Factor 2. *Materialistic Concerns/Values*: This source of life meaning was generally given a low ranking. However, it was substantially more important for the young groups than for the old. In addition, it showed a significant three-way interaction manifested in the differences of gender in the older groups. This source of meaning was of least importance to older Jewish men, but of most importance to older Arab men. Arab and Jewish elderly women positioned themselves between these two extremes.
- Factors 3 & 4. *Life Satisfaction/Autonomy* and *Connectedness/Belonging*: Both of these factors were important sources of meaning overall ($M = 4.53$ and $M = 4.41$, respectively). In addition, both sources were found to be more important for Jews than for Arabs among the older groups, whereas no differences were found among the younger subjects.
- Factor 5. *Communal Consciousness/Awareness*: This factor, though relatively low in overall importance, was found to be significantly more important for Arabs than for Jews, especially among younger subjects. Gender was more significant than ethnicity in this dimension.
- Factor 6. *Attainment of Tranquillity/Peace*: This meaning dimension was rated highly by all groups ($M = 4.68$) and especially by older Jewish subjects ($M = 4.88$).
- Factor 7. *Leisure Pursuits/Self-Development*: This dimension was also rated highly by all groups ($M = 4.09$) but it drops somewhat in significance among the older groups, and especially among the Arab aged ($M = 3.56$ for Arab aged; $M = 4.35$ among younger Arabs).
- Factor 8. *Family Relationships*: This was the most highly rated source of life meaning overall ($M = 4.71$). It was of similar importance to both Jews and Arabs, but it seems to be slightly less important to older Arabs than to younger ones. There are no observable differences between younger and older Jews in this dimension.
- Factor 9. *Leisure Activities Away From Home*: This source of meaning was relatively low in significance ($M = 3.66$). It is also one of the few areas where differences were found between the sexes. It generally appears to be of less importance to Arab women than to Arab men or Jews of either sex. Among the younger groups it is more important to men than women (in both culture groups). Furthermore, its significance seems to decrease with age for Arab men and women

and for Jewish men. For Jewish women, there is a reverse trend in that its importance as a source of life meaning is more important for older Jewish women than for younger Jewish female subjects.

- Factor 10. *Enjoyment From Animals*: This was the lowest rated source of life meaning overall ($M = 2.55$). This was the dimension with the most widespread differences between the sexes: it was rated more highly by men than women in both age groups, and in both culture groups. In addition, there was a strong interaction between ethnicity and age: its importance increases with age among Arabs of both sexes, whereas it decreases with age for Jews.
- Factor 11. *Relationship With a Partner*: This was one of the most important sources of meaning overall ($M = 4.65$). It was more important for Jews than for Arabs among both sexes and both age groups. In addition, while it retains its importance with age for men (both Arabs and Jews), it becomes less important with age for women. This may be due to the fact that so many elderly women are without mates compared to elderly men.

Summarizing, results showed substantial main effects for age as well as for ethnicity, and a two-way interaction effect for ethnicity by age. Though significant statistically, total meaning differences were quite small; the groups were all very similar in *overall amount of meaning in life* that they reported. The data revealed, as expected, that the differences in *total amount* of meaning reported for the age and ethnic groups is almost inconsequential as compared with the main differences reported by the groups in *sources* of meaning. This finding supports earlier studies by Reker (1988) and Prager (1996, 1997) with Canadian and Australian samples, respectively. The SLM appears to be an age and ethnically sensitive instrument for measuring sources of life meaning.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EXPLORATORY PHASE OF THE STUDY

This chapter describes the development of a culturally sensitive instrument, the SLM, to measure sources of life meaning. A mixed methods qualitative and quantitative approach to instrument construction was utilized with younger and older Arab and Jewish subjects whose ages ranged from 20 to 97 years. Focus group techniques were used, followed by the identification of the major domains of meaning and their referent items, employing the processes of dot and concept mapping. The resultant 41 meaning items, representing four major dimensions of Sources of Life Meaning (11 factorially derived scales) were administered to 405 Arab and Jewish Israelis. Through quantitative procedures, including factor analytic methods, the psychometric properties of the instrument were determined. Most of the factorially derived scales attained creditable Cronbach alpha levels, and test-retest reliability was similarly respectable. As expected, while there were no significant differences between the two culture and gender groups in total magnitude of meaning-in-life, substantial differences were found between them with respect to which sources of meaning were most significant for each group.

The study of what sources of meaning are generated by specific cultures (culture-specific instrument conceptualization) and how those sources of meaning identify and differentiate between different samples within those cultures may be a more empirically valid and useful undertaking than comparing respondents across cultures, using instruments created in foreign cultures, requiring considerable linguistic and semantic adaptation. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, though time-consuming and draining on precious resources was, from our perspective, the most appropriate way of exploring sources of meaning in life within a bi-cultural Arab-Israeli study sample. In choosing Arabs and Jews to participate in our study we consciously selected two cultures markedly different from each other on traditional/spiritual dimensions, but similar to each other in historic roots. In choosing both young and old to participate in our study we hoped to ensure that the items generated would be contextually appropriate for all respondents, and that the resulting instrument could be used validly and reliably in studying similarities and differences between age heterogeneous populations.

The qualitative phase of the research, in acknowledging the fact that our aged have considerable native ability to know and share things about their own lives and their respective worlds, was the suitable methodology for ferreting out information in such a culturally grounded area as personal meaning. We felt that through our utilization of focus groups and the analysis of the content generated we were able to gain some additional clarity, understanding, and relevancy in the exploration of personal meaning in the lives of Arabs and Jews, both young and old. One example of this would be the emphasis we observed on personal honor and respect from others as a source of meaning in life, especially emphasized by the Arab respondents. The qualitative methodology served as a means to acquire an in-depth culturally empathic insight into a phenomenon not previously explored in Israel, in any age group.

The clustered content of the 93 statements generated by the focus groups supported the thesis of Rokeach (1973) and the later work of Reker (1988) in revealing four basic dimensions or levels of meaning: areas of meaning reflecting preoccupation with material comforts and the outward manifestations of material and other achievements; sources of meaning concerned with realization of personal potential; areas of meaning lying beyond the realm of self-interest; and sources of meaning that transcend the self and others, encompassing "cosmic" meaning and ultimate purpose.

At the time of this writing the quantitative part of the study is only in its rudimentary stage. As mentioned above, much needs to be done before we can consider the SLM to be a completely valid and reliable instrument. Items that are unclear or were not answered for other reasons need to be reconsidered and either made clearer or dropped. Items with factor loadings below .40 also need to be reconsidered; either additional items will be added to strengthen these otherwise weak factors, or such items (and factors, as the case may be) will be dropped. Randomly chosen Arabs and Jews in much larger numbers than recorded in this

study will provide us with data enabling us to finalize the factorial structure of the SLM, more clearly analyze the variance in sources of personal meaning within and between groups of younger and older Arabs and Jews, and develop baseline data for meaning magnitude and diversity within the different subsamples. If feasible, computer simulations of a longitudinal analysis will help establish the extent of meaning continuity during the adult years. Lastly, as our final questionnaire will include biographic variables that are both general and socioculturally specific, we may be able to make some determinations as to the effects, if any, of certain personal and communal life events on current perceptions of sources of meaning and their relative importance to the individual.

In closing we would like to take this opportunity to invite our readers, who no doubt represent cultures quite different from the one described here, to join us in developing similar research ideologies and methodologies so that, together, we may be able to observe how different younger and older ethnic groups, living in disparate socio-environmental settings, differentially determine those sources of meaning that are most significant in their lives.

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