

Original Paper

## Clarification of the Cause of the Problems in the PIL (Purpose in Life) Test

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### Abstract

The PIL (Purpose in Life) test was devised by psychologist Crumbaugh, J.C. and Maholick, L.T in 1964 and was based on the concept of logotherapy by psychiatrist Frankl, V.E.

The test was translated by Fumiko Satou and Hiroko Tanaka in Japan, in 1966. The test was introduced as a ‘psychological existence test’ and is currently used in Japan as psychological evaluation to clarify levels of existence. At the beginning of the study, the test was given to social welfare college students to assess their existential consciousness. I analyzed the test results according to the manual of the test. However, problems were encountered with the test while analyzing the test results. Thus, the purpose of this study is to clarify the cause of the problems in the test. After analyzing and considering the problems, I discovered that since the test uses a natural scientific psychological method of quantitatively evaluating the subject’s existence, and that each human’s existence differs individually, that the test cannot be evaluated one’s existence. In brief, there is a contradiction between the existential philosophical purpose of the test that clarifies existence, and the natural scientific psychological method that evaluates categorically and quantitatively.

### Introduction

The purpose of the PIL test is to evaluate ‘consciousness of meaning in life and consciousness of purpose in life’ and ‘existential vacuum’ quantitatively. The PIL test was developed by Crumbaugh, J.C. and Maholick, L.T in 1964 and was based on the concept of ‘Logotherapy’ by psychiatrist Frankl, V.E. Frankl is widely known as the author of the book titled “Man’s Search for a Meaning” [1]. The original title of the book is “Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager” [2], and this means “A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp”. His experience at the concentration camp of the Nazis in World War II is recorded in this book.

Logotherapy means ‘therapy through meaning’ [3]. Frankl perceived that when the patient finds meaning in life, it leads to a cure. In my research, the patient signifies a person who has neurosis caused by loss, or has failed to find meaning and purpose in life.

The PIL test consists of 3 parts, A, B and C. Part A is composed of 20 questions regarding one’s ‘purpose in life’. Each item is rated on a 7 point scale. Parts B and C are descriptive.

At the beginning of the study, the test was given to social welfare college students to reveal their

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existential consciousness. The results were analyzed according to the manual of the test. However, I encountered problems with the test while analyzing the test results. Thus, the purpose of this study is to clarify the cause of the problems in the PIL test.

## Definitions of Terms

### 1. Existence

Existence is the state of a human being who is aiming at attaining his or her own ideal of how to exist. Thus, existence is the state of a living human, and that each human differs individually. In short, existence means ‘meaning and purpose in life’.

Frankl emphasized spirit, freedom, and responsibility as essential aspects of human existence, which he described in his book [4] as follows:

“Three existential traits (Existentialien) constitute (not merely characterize) human existence as such, as human: the spirit, freedom, and responsibility.” [5].

Then, Frankl indicated the spirit of human beings who have the freedom and responsibility in a dimensional structure, which he called, ‘spiritual’ or ‘noetic’.

According to Frankl, humans are natural, integrated beings with three dimensions: the somatic, the mental, and the spiritual or noetic. He refers to this ‘dimensional ontology.’ [6]. The somatic means the level of the body or soma, the biological level. The mental means the psychological level. The spiritual or noetic means the noological level, the level of psychiatry. The word ‘spiritual’ has no religious connotations.

Frankl’s dimensional ontology is committed to the existence of a “higher” spiritual dimension, which means precisely a human dimension that is free and responsible. [7]. As mentioned above, Frankl placed importance on spirit, freedom, and responsibility as essential aspects of human existence, and used the expressions ‘spiritual’ and ‘noetic’ to refer to the spirit of human beings who have freedom and responsibility. Therefore, ‘spiritual’ and ‘noetic’ can be considered as synonymous with ‘existence’.

### 2. Logotherapy

Frankl described ‘logotherapy’ in his book [8] as follows:

“A literal translation of the term ‘logotherapy’ is ‘therapy through meaning.’ Of course, it could also be translated as ‘healing through meaning,’ although this would bring in a religious overtone that is not necessarily present in logotherapy. In any case, logotherapy is a meaning-centered (psycho-) therapy. The notion of a therapy through meaning is the very reverse of the traditional conceptualization of psychotherapy, which could rather be formulated as meaning through therapy. Indeed, if traditional psychotherapy squarely faces the issue of meaning and purpose at face value rather than reducing them to mere fake values, as by deducing them from ‘defense mechanisms’ or ‘reaction formations’-it does so in the vein of a recommendation that you just have your Oedipal situation settled, just get rid of your castration fears, and you will be happy, you will actualize your self and your own potentialities, and you will become what you were meant to be. In other words, meaning will come to you by itself.” [9].

As Frankl stated above, logotherapy is ‘therapy through meaning’, which actually goes against traditional ideas of psychotherapy. Thus, logotherapy implies that when a patient finds his or her meaning in life, it leads to a cure.

## Methods

### 1. Subject

The subject of this study is the PIL test itself with the purpose to clarify the cause of the problems in the test. The explanations for framework, content and method of evaluation of the test are described below.

The PIL test consists of 3 parts, A, B and C [10]. Part A is the 'attitude scale' [10] and is composed of 20 questions about 'purpose in life' (Table 1 [11]). Part A starts with sentences, and subjects complete the sentences by choosing from the numbers. Each question is rated on a 7 point scale. In each question, point 4 is designated as 'neutral' and different descriptive terms are given for positions 1 and 7. For example, "I am usually: (1) completely bored - (4) neutral - (7) exuberant, enthusiastic".

As each question is rated on a 7 point scale, total scores therefore range from 20 (low purpose) to 140 (high purpose). Higher points mean that subjects are finding a greater 'meaning and purpose in life'. In other words, higher points mean that subjects have a high 'level of existence'.

Parts B and C are descriptive. Part B consists of 13 questions. Part C asks subjects for detailed descriptions of their purposes and hopes in life. In Crumbaugh and Maholick's original PIL test, only part A is a quantitative analysis, while parts B and C are not a quantitative analysis, but are descriptive [10].

Satou and Tanaka devised the Japanese adaptation of the PIL test. They later changed parts B and C to a quantitative analysis from a descriptive analysis due to rising interest in use of the PIL test.

The content and method of evaluation in the original PIL test and the Japanese version are the same, and in this study, only part A of the test is the subject.

### 2. Study Method

First, I analyzed Frankl's understanding of the human and existence and considered the problems in the test that were encountered while analyzing the test results. Secondly, I considered the application of logotherapy to the PIL test and the different purposes and methods between logotherapy and the PIL test.

## Other Research on PIL

I discovered a study done by Yu Urata, in which problems that appear in the PIL test are mentioned. This author described it as follows:

"Yalom pointed out that different plural concepts are included in the content of the items in the PIL test and Garfield criticized that the test was based on the sense of value of purposive and future orientation. Then, various questions concerning frame and validness of factor of the test are raised." [12].

Researchers Yalom and Garfield point out problems they have encountered with the PIL test in their studies. In reality, Yalom described them in his book [13] as follows:

"First, the face content of the items deals with several different concepts. Eight items (3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 17, 20) deal explicitly with life meaning (purpose, mission); six items (1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 19) deal with life satisfaction (life is boring, routine, exciting, or painful); three items (13, 14, 18) deal with freedom, one item (15), with fear of death; one (16), with contemplation of suicide; and one (10) with worthwhileness of one's life. To my mind this conceptual confusion raises serious questions about the validity of the instrument." [14].

Then, Garfield described the problems in his paper [15] as follows:

"Although the authors of the PIL contend that the test has been used successfully with subjects of a fourth-grade educational level, they may not have considered the current state of American inner city education. Despite the fact that all subjects in Group G were high school graduates, several expressed

Table 1 Part A of the PIL test

1. I am usually:	(1) completely bored	(7) exuberant, enthusiastic
2. Life to me seems:	(1) completely routine	(7) always exciting
3. In life I have:	(1) no goals or aims at all	(7) very clear goals and Aims
4. My personal existence is:	(1) utterly meaningless, without purpose	(7) very purposeful and Meaningful
5. Every day is:	(1) exactly the same	(7) constantly new and Different
6. If I could choose, I would:	(1) prefer never to have been born	(7) like nine more lives just like this one
7. After retiring, I would:	(1) loaf completely the rest of my life	(7) do some of the exciting things I've always wanted to
8. In achieving life goals I have:	(1) made no progress whatever	(7) progressed to complete fulfillment
9. My life is:	(1) empty, filled only with Despair	(7) running over with exciting good things
10. If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been:	(1) completely worthless	(7) very worthwhile
11. In thinking of my life, I:	(1) often wonder why I exist	(7) always see a reason for my being here
12. As I view the world in relation to my life, the world:	(1) completely confuses me	(7) fits meaningfully with my life
13. I am a:	(1) very irresponsible person	(7) very responsible person
14. Concerning man's freedom to make his own choices, I believe man is:	(1) completely bound by limitations of heredity and environment	(7) absolutely free to make all life choices
15. With regard to death, I am:	(1) unprepared and frightened	(7) prepared and unafraid
16. With regard to suicide, I have:	(1) thought of it seriously as a way out	(7) never given it a second thought
17. I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose, or mission in life as:	(1) practically none	(7) very great
18. My life is:	(1) out of my hands and controlled by external factors	(7) in my hands and I am in control of it
19. Facing my daily tasks is:	(1) a painful and boring experience	(7) a source of pleasure and satisfaction
20. I have discovered:	(1) no mission or purpose in Life	(7) clear-cut goals and a satisfying life purpose

discomfort in dealing with the PIL. This may be due to educational deficiencies and/or racially associated attitudes toward the concepts utilized or implied by the PIL. It is clear that such assumptions as the advocacy of the Protestant work ethic, future orientation, and purposive and goal-directed behavior may be inconsistent with the norms implicit in this subcultural context. This may be due to both the need to concentrate upon the satisfaction of primary needs, and more specific, racially related psychological factors.” [15].

Although they discovered problems with the PIL test, they have not clarified the cause of the problems. The following is my clarification of three examples of the problems in analyzing the test results.

#### Clarification of the Problems in Part A of the PIL Test

##### 1. Problem 1

Question 19 of part A asks, “Facing my daily tasks is: (1) a painful and boring experience - (4) neutral - (7) a source of pleasure and satisfaction”. The problem lies in choice ‘(1) a painful and boring experience’ where two different concepts, ‘painful’ and ‘boring’ are used together. The words mean two completely different things; ‘pain’ causes suffering, whereas ‘boredom’ does not cause serious suffering. One may consider that a suffering person lives his or her own life seriously. Thus, the person who is suffering without purpose in life or existence and tries to find it, feels ‘pain’, while the person who runs away from trying to find existence, simply experiences ‘boredom’. In this situation their existence is different. Therefore, the problem in this question is each of them cannot be comparable.

##### 2. Problem 2

In part A, all 7 point answers are positive answers, while all 1 point answers are negative. Thus, a high score is given for a positive answer and a low score is given for a negative one. For example, in question 16 of part A, “With regard to suicide, I have: (1) thought of it seriously as a way out - (4) neutral - (7) never given it a second thought”. If the subject selects the answer “(1) thought of it seriously as a way out”, the score will be 1 point. However, this item cannot show the existence level of a subject who has had suicidal thoughts of his or her own and hopes to help others who are suffering similarly.

##### 3. Problem 3

In question 15 of part A, “With regard to death, I am: (1) unprepared and frightened - (4) neutral - (7) prepared and unafraid”. If the subject selects the answer “(1) unprepared and frightened”, the score is 1 point. If the subject selects the answer “(7) prepared and unafraid”, the score is 7 points. However, this method of evaluation cannot show the existence level of a person who may think “death is frightening but I need to be aware of death and I will have a better life”, as there is no additional question asking why the subject selected that answer.

Some analysis and consideration of the problems follows:

#### Analysis and Consideration of the Problems of Part A

In the analysis of part A, the basic problem is that existence is being evaluated categorically and quantitatively. For example, in question 2 of part A, “Life to me seems: (1) completely routine - (4) neutral - (7) always exciting”. If the subject selects the answer “(7) always exciting”, the score is 7 points.

However, the answer ‘always exciting’ does not always define a high existential consciousness. There is

a possibility that one who is always thinking only about immediate pleasures and not thinking seriously about life gets a high score. Therefore, one may consider that the cause of these problems is the categorical evaluation of existence, ‘positive or negative’, as a given in the answer ‘always exciting or completely routine’, in addition, the quantitative evaluation of existence with a 7 point scale.

Frankl also suggested that “PIL-A asks the level of the consciousness of meaning in life and consciousness of purpose in life, yet it doesn’t ask its direction and content. Therefore, the PIL score will rise easily with subjects who have radical political ideas or religious fanaticism, and so on.” [16]. Thus, it is thought that Frankl pointed out problems in part A in which evaluation is possibly dependent on a temporary rise of consciousness of enthusiasm in religion or politics, and part A does not show direction and the content of existence.

Frankl perceived that the essences of human existence are the spirit, freedom, and responsibility, and further explained that the core of ‘dimensional ontology’ is the spirit of a human being who has the freedom and the responsibility and is termed: ‘spiritual’ (noetic). Frankl distinguished the dimension of the spiritual (noetic), the mental and the somatic.

I devised a figure (Fig. 1) of the dimensional ontology based on Frankl’s figure [17] of a layered structure of dimensional ontology.

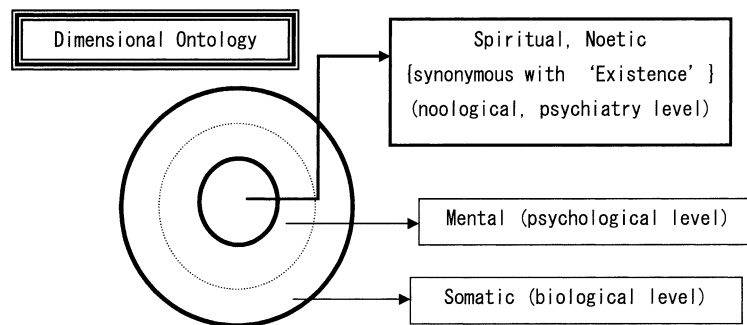


Fig. 1 Structure of dimensional ontology

This figure of dimensional ontology has two layers, an outer layer and inner layer, and a core. The outer layer of dimension indicates the somatic, a biological level. The inner layer of dimension indicates a mental, psychological level. The core of dimension indicates a spiritual (noetic), noological (psychiatry) level. As stated previously, it can be interpreted that ‘spiritual’ and ‘noetic’ are synonymous with ‘existence’. Thus, the dimension of the psychiatric level is synonymous with the ‘dimension of existence’.

Frankl explained that “the fundamental boundary, essential dividing line, exists between psychological level and psychiatric level dimensions and that these three dimensions are essentially different from each other and therefore should be differentiated ontologically but, in human beings, these are essentially related with each other and cannot be separated” [17]. Then, Frankl remarked that “the dimension of the psychiatric level disappears by projection to the psychological level.” [18].

It is thought that this statement by Frankl indicates that we cannot reveal psychiatric dimension that is dimension of existence by projection to the psychological level, because of the definite borderline between the dimension of psychology and that of existence.

Frankl explained that “to the extent a subject is made into a mere thing (‘reification’) and, thus, him or herself turned into an object (‘objectification’), to the same extent the dimension of existence must

disappear, so that, eventually his or her subject quality is lost altogether" [19]. It was thought that this explanation implies that if a subject is seen superficially, through partial 'reification' and through 'objectification', that the dimension of existence cannot be understood. Thus, it means that we cannot consider existence as an objective thing, and neither can we clarify existence by focusing on only one part of a human being. Therefore, it can be considered that Frankl pointed out that existence cannot be understood by psychological measuring, categorically and quantitatively.

Additionally, Frankl described in his book [8] as follows: "Meaning is missing in the world as described by many a science. This, however, does not imply that the world is void of meaning, but only that many a science is blind to it. Meaning is scotomized by many a science. It is not demonstrated by every scientific approach; it is not touched by every 'cross section,' to stick to our simile." [20].

With the above, it can be considered that the psychology that Frankl described refers to not general psychology but a part of psychology which uses a natural scientific method of categorically and quantitatively evaluating the subject. In this study, I refer to this as 'natural scientific psychology'.

Taking this into consideration, I have determined that the problems in part A resulted from the PIL test categorizing and quantifying existence by natural scientific psychology, though the existence differs individually and thus cannot be essentially categorized and quantified.

Next, I have summarized the clarification of the cause of basic problems of the PIL test which evaluates existence categorically and quantitatively.

#### Clarification of the Cause of Basic Problems in the PIL Test

As mentioned above, the PIL test was developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick based on Frankl's logotherapy. It can be considered that there is a possibility that the cause of problems with the PIL test occurred during the process of the conception of the test. Therefore, each purpose of Frankl's logotherapy and Crumbaugh and Maholick's PIL test is considered as follows:

##### 1. Purpose of Logotherapy

Frankl perceived that when the patient finds the meaning in life, it leads to cure. The purpose of logotherapy is to cure by finding the meaning in life that is existence. Thus, Frankl aimed to cure the patients by finding or recovering the patients' existence through logotherapy.

Frankl remarked in his book [8] as follows. "Existence was dependent on 'self-transcendence,' a concept that I introduced into logotherapy as early as 1949. I thereby understand the primordial anthropological fact that being human is being always directed, and pointing, to something or someone other than oneself: to a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love. Only to the extent that someone is living out this self-transcendence of human existence, is he truly human or does he become his true self." [21].

The self-transcendence Frankl refers to can be interpreted as being direct to the ideal of oneself, to surpass the present state of oneself, and to others for dedication. Only in this way can a human being live as one who has existence through self-transcendence.

From Frankl's understanding of existence, it can be considered that Frankl focused on not the measurement of the level of existence, but existence itself.

##### 2. Purpose of the PIL Test

Crumbaugh and Maholick developed the PIL test for the following two reasons:

The first was to differentiate the diagnoses of common neurosis, and 'noogenic neurosis' (named by

Frankl) [22]. According to Frankl, “The noogenic neuroses are those neuroses that arise when existential frustration is dealt with in a maladaptive fashion, e.g., when the existential or spiritual character of the crisis is ignored or repressed.” [23]. This implies that noogenic neurosis is caused by having lost one’s existence.

The second was to evaluate ‘consciousness of meaning in life and consciousness of purpose in life’ and ‘existential vacuum’ quantitatively [22]. As mentioned above, the PIL test consists of 3 parts, A, B and C. In Crumbaugh and Maholick’s test, only part A is a quantitative analysis and parts B and C are not a quantitative analysis, but are descriptive. They use parts B and C as a method for only clinical counseling. Therefore, it is thought that the psychologists Crumbaugh and Maholick psychologically reinterpreted the existential philosophical intention of Frankl’s logotherapy when part A of the test was devised.

Although the test was based on the concept of logotherapy and has an existential philosophical purpose that reveals existence, the analytical method of the PIL test became a natural scientific psychological method of categorically and quantitatively evaluating the subject’s existence during the process of the conception of the test. Thus, the problems in the test occurred due to the contradiction between the purpose and the method of the test, and cannot achieve the original purpose which reveals existence.

Then, it is thought that the difference in existential philosophy and natural scientific psychology is the cause of the problem.

Next, the difference in existential philosophy and natural scientific psychology is described.

#### Consideration of the Cause of the Contradictions

The difference in existential philosophy and natural scientific psychology is the subject. Existential philosophy deals with transcendent subjects. On the other hand, the field of natural scientific psychology deals with objective subjects.

The transcendent subjects refer to meaning and purpose in life that is existence. In this study, the word ‘transcendence’ has existential philosophic meaning. Thus, transcendence means “state of existence that always surpasses the present state” [24].

The objective subjects mean the things that are numerable and possible to categorize. As mentioned above, existence is the state of a human being who is aiming at attaining his or her own ideal and the state of a living human being, and that each human differs individually. It is thought that existence which is a transcendent subject cannot be understood by dealing with it as an objective subject and expression by a quantity that is common to all people and by categorizing characteristic. Therefore, it is thought that problems with the test occurred.

#### Conclusion

In this study, I analyzed Frankl’s understanding of the human and existence and considered the problems in the PIL test that were encountered while analyzing the test results. As a result, it was clarified that the problems occurred because the PIL test categorizes and quantifies existence by natural scientific psychology, though existence differs individually and cannot be essentially categorized and quantified.

As mentioned above, the PIL test was developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick based on Frankl’s logotherapy. Thus, it was thought that there is a possibility that the cause of problems with the PIL test occurred during the process of the conception of the test. Therefore, I considered the application of logotherapy to the PIL test and the different purposes and methods between logotherapy and the PIL test. As a result, it was clarified that a natural scientific psychological method of categorically and quantitatively



evaluating the subject's existence became used in the PIL test during the process of the conception of the test by Crumbaugh and Maholick. Although the PIL test started from the purpose of Frankl's logotherapy and the test has an existential philosophical purpose that clarifies existence.

Therefore, it is thought that the problems that the test cannot achieve the original purpose which reveals one's existence that occurred because of contradiction between the original purpose that is the existential philosophical purpose and the natural scientific psychological method of the test. In this study, it is suggested that the necessity of the new method is to reveal existence.

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