The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being

Dr. Carol Ryff, director of the Institute on Aging at the University of Wisconsin, has developed an inventory that assesses the psychological component of wellbeing. Both the long (84 questions) and medium forms (54 questions) comprise a series of statements reflecting six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement.

Here is an example statement from each of the areas of wellbeing:

- **Autonomy**
  I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

- **Environmental Mastery**
  In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

- **Personal Growth**
  I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

- **Positive Relations with Others**
  People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

- **Purpose in Life**
  Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

- **Self-Acceptance**
  I like most aspects of my personality.

Responses are totaled for each of the six categories (about half of the responses are reverse scored, which is indicated on the master copy of the test). For each category, a high score indicates that the respondent has a mastery of that area in his or her life. Conversely, a low score shows that the respondent struggles to feel comfortable with that particular concept.

Here are Dr. Ryff’s definitions of the Theory-Guided Dimensions of Well-Being:

*Self-acceptance*

*High scorer:* Possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.

*Low scorer:* Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred with past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.
Positive relations with others

*High scorer:* Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships.

*Low scorer:* Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it difficult to be warm, open, and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.

Autonomy

*High scorer:* Is self-determining and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behavior from within; evaluates self by personal standards.

*Low scorer:* Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgments of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.

Environmental mastery

*High scorer:* Has a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.

*Low scorer:* Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.

Purpose in life

*High scorer:* Has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.

*Low scorer:* Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.

Personal growth

*High scorer:* Has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her potential; sees improvement in self and behavior over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness.

*Low scorer:* Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviors.


Institutions or organizations interested in using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being should send a request and description of how the instrument will be used to Dr. Carol Ryff; University of Wisconsin; Institute on Aging; 2245 Medical Sciences Center; 1300 University Avenue; Madison, WI 53706; Phone: (608) 262-1818; Fax: (608) 263-6211; email: cryff@wisc.edu. Dr. Ryff requests that institutions or organizations provide her with the results of their study and any subsequent journal article citations.

*Prepared by Jan Hively, PhD, May 2017*