

LIFE GOALS AND GENERAL WELL-BEING¹

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Summary.—Meaning, purpose and major goals in people's lives have been purported to relate to well-being and health. To begin study of the relations among these variables, a group of 115 college students was divided into subgroups scoring high and low on general well-being, and differences in their life-goal orientation were estimated using the Life Esteem Survey questionnaire. Three life-goal components were significantly different for the subgroups: recognition of a framework of purpose, perspective of progress, and commitment to a framework. A fourth component, quality of life goals, was not significantly different. A comprehensive set of 22 possible life goals significantly discriminated among the subgroups; however, on only one, excitement, were differences significant. The only significant interaction between sex and well-being also held for the value placed on the goal of excitement. A tendency was shown for the value placed on more hedonistically oriented goals to differentiate the subgroups with the group on low well-being higher on the hedonistically oriented goals.

Ten years ago the concept of health as being more than the absence of disease was relatively new in research literature (Antonovsky, 1979). Since then health has become widely accepted as a state of general well-being that includes both physical and psychological components. This is reflected in the statement of the World Health Organization that health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and is not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" (Danish, 1983). More recently health and general well-being have been conceptually related to the views people have about meaning, purpose, and life goals (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987; Emmons & King, 1988; Woolfolk & Richardson, 1984; Ruffin, 1984). Researchers have used the Purpose-in-Life test (Crumbaugh, 1973) to indicate the strength of a person's over-all sense of purpose. Other research has involved the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) to indicate the qualitative nature of a person's goal orientation. However, the quantitative and qualitative nature of this goal orientation has not yet been combined so that its relationship to general well-being can be systematically explored.

The purpose of this preliminary investigation was to ascertain whether people high in general well-being could be discriminated from those low in general well-being using their views of meaning, purpose, and life goals. Discriminating factors of specific interest were the extent to which people believe there is a framework of purpose, their perspective of progress with

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respect to a major goal or set of goals, their commitment to such a system, and the nature and quality of their goals.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 115 students in a university introductory psychology class who volunteered to complete questionnaires. The group included similar numbers of men and women; 58 identified their sex. Mean age of the total group was 21 yr.

Measures

General well-being was estimated using the General Well-being Questionnaire developed to measure a comprehensive set of factors contributing to well-being, health, quality of life, and longevity that include physical complaints, behaviors, attitudes, temperaments, feelings, experiences, and situations. The questionnaire consists of 143 Likert-type items assessing 30 factors and providing an over-all index. Scores range from 1 to 5 where 5 indicates high well-being. Construct validity has been established and reliability for the over-all index was .92, using test-retest procedures and .82 for coefficient alpha (Wheeler, 1985a). Only the over-all index was used in the present investigation. The questionnaire has been used in other studies to assess change resulting from health promotion and disease prevention programs (Wheeler, 1981) and to analyze the roles of various sources of well-being (Wheeler & Frank, 1988).

Life-goal orientation was estimated using the Life Esteem Survey which was developed to measure the relative importance of 22 life goals and the four previously mentioned aspects of a person's sense of purpose: framework, perspective, commitment, and quality (Wheeler, 1977). The scores for framework, perspective, and commitment are based on 30 five-point Likert-type items that expand the concepts measured by Crumbaugh's (1973) Purpose-in-Life test. The quality score is the sum of the values attributed to the 22 possible goals on a scale of 1 to 9 after being weighted for healthful characteristics suggested in psychology and psychiatric literature. Since that literature was mainly based on the results of clinical experience, the weights had been proposed as tentative and useful for further research. Table 1 lists the life goals with their definitions and weights. Both the 22 possible goals and the 30 Likert items had been developed through a series of studies using factor analyses, regressions, and other psychometric procedures. Reliability and construct validity were adequate, with coefficients alpha ranging from .78 to .61, and test-retest coefficients ranging from .81 to .79. The quality score had the lowest reliability of .61 (Wheeler, 1977). The Life Esteem Survey has been used in several studies analyzing goal orientations for different groups of people (Wheeler, 1985b).

TABLE 1
POSSIBLE LIFE GOALS

1.	<i>Production:</i>	To make things or contribute by producing goods. (3)
2.	<i>Freedom:</i>	To be able to do what I want regardless of consequences. (2)
3.	<i>Understanding:</i>	To acquire wisdom and knowledge. (4)
4.	<i>Equality:</i>	To develop fair and impartial treatment for everyone. (3)
5.	<i>Excitement:</i>	To have thrilling and stimulating activity. (0)
6.	<i>Service:</i>	To benefit, help, or improve people or nature. (4)
7.	<i>Pleasure:</i>	To do things that are pleasurable. (1)
8.	<i>Harmony:</i>	To produce order, peace, and balance in the world. (4)
9.	<i>Expression:</i>	To communicate ideas and things I feel are important. (3)
10.	<i>Superiority:</i>	To be recognized as having more or being better than others. (0)
11.	<i>Economic:</i>	To obtain wealth, possessions, and material goods. (2)
12.	<i>Benevolence:</i>	To give love, affection, and companionship to others. (4)
13.	<i>Beauty:</i>	To be able to perceive and enjoy beauty. (1)
14.	<i>Transcendence:</i>	To fill requirements for salvation, union, atonement, etc. (3)
15.	<i>Religion:</i>	To live in accordance with belief in a supreme being. (4)
16.	<i>Aesthetics:</i>	To contribute and stimulate beauty. (3)
17.	<i>Belonging:</i>	To have love, affection, and companionship from another. (1)
18.	<i>Existence:</i>	To continue my life efficiently, making the most of situations. (1)
19.	<i>Justice:</i>	To be treated with fairness, honesty, and equality. (1)
20.	<i>Achievement:</i>	To produce results providing a sense of accomplishment. (3)
21.	<i>Individuation:</i>	To find and develop my own potential. (3)
22.	<i>Procreation:</i>	To perpetuate certain ideas or physical characteristics. (3)

Procedure

Subjects were divided into high and low general well-being groups by the over-all general well-being index score, using a median split (3.55). Discriminant analyses were used first to judge whether the component scores (framework, perspective, commitment, and quality) and the goal scores would significantly discriminate between the groups high and low in well-being. Then follow-up *t* tests were used to assess the significance of differences on individual component and goal scores. A multivariate analysis of variance was used to analyze effects of sex.

RESULTS

A discriminant analysis using the four component scores produced a function that significantly discriminated between the two groups with a canonical correlation of .603 [$\chi^2_4(n = 91) = 39.92, p < .001$]. Another discriminant analysis using the 22 possible life goals raw scores produced a function that significantly discriminated between the two groups with a canonical correlation of .600 [$\chi^2_{22}(n = 91) = 34.92, p < .05$].

The follow-up univariate *t* tests for component score differences were statistically significant for framework, perspective, and commitment, using an alpha level of .01 to preserve an experiment-wise level of .05. The quality scores were not significantly different at either a .01 or .05 level. The mean

scores, standard deviations, and significant t values with df are presented in Table 2.

The differences between the high and low groups for the scores of six of the 22 possible life goals were statistically significant at the .05 level. However, when an alpha level of .001 was used to preserve a .05 experiment-wise level, this reduced to one, excitement. These results are also presented in Table 2. All of the significant goals except religion were of hedonistic orientation and were given low weights in the calculation of the quality score. Higher values on these five hedonistic goals and lower value on religion were associated with the group having lower well-being.

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCES IN LIFE GOALS ORIENTATION FOR GROUPS OF HIGH AND LOW WELL-BEING

Aspect	High Well-being		Low Well-being		t	df
	M	SD	M	SD		
Component						
Framework	4.0	0.5	3.4	0.5	5.88‡	93
Perspective	4.0	0.4	3.4	0.6	5.65‡	95
Commitment	3.9	0.5	3.7	0.5	5.01‡	95
Quality	3.5	0.5	3.5	0.5		
Goal						
Individuation	8.0	1.1	7.7	1.2		
Achievement	7.9	1.2	7.5	1.5		
Benevolence	7.8	1.3	7.7	1.6		
Service	7.7	1.6	7.1	2.1		
Belonging	7.6	1.5	7.9	1.5		
Understanding	7.5	1.3	7.6	1.4		
Existence	7.4	1.4	7.5	1.6		
Justice	7.3	1.6	7.5	1.4		
Religion	7.3	2.1	6.0	2.5	2.36*	91
Expression	6.7	1.8	6.8	1.6		
Equality	6.5	2.2	6.9	1.6		
Harmony	6.4	2.0	6.0	2.1		
Pleasure	6.4	1.7	7.2	1.4	-2.59*	91
Beauty	6.3	1.9	6.5	1.7		
Transcendence	5.9	2.2	5.6	2.0		
Excitement	5.7	2.0	7.1	1.6	-3.74‡	92
Procreation	5.6	2.4	5.6	2.3		
Aesthetics	5.4	2.0	5.7	1.8		
Economic	5.1	2.4	6.1	2.2	-2.05*	91
Freedom	5.1	1.9	6.3	2.5	-2.62*	90
Production	3.8	2.1	4.6	2.5		
Superiority	2.8	2.3	4.4	2.6	-3.13*	90

* $p < .05$. † $p < .01$. ‡ $p < .001$.

The goals in Table 2 are listed in the order in which they were scored by the group high in well-being, beginning with the higher valued goals. The

group high in well-being valued individuation most and the group low in well-being valued belonging most. Achievement was ranked second by the high group and seventh by the low group. The high group valued the higher weighted goals more than the low group; however, the difference in rank-order was not statistically significant as determined by the Mann-Whitney test for a .05 alpha level.

The multivariate analysis of variance indicated no main effects of sex for either component scores or goal scores, and no interactions were indicated for component scores. An interaction was significant for the goal scores ($F_{22,33} = 2.01, p = .003$). Univariate follow-up tests yielded only one goal, excitement, in a significant interaction ($F_{1,54} = 5.27, p = .026$). For people lower in general well-being, men valued excitement more than women (7.60 vs 6.53); however, for people in the high well-being group, men valued excitement less than women (4.54 vs 5.60). As some protocols were missing identification by sex, the listwise deletion for missing data reduced the *N* to 58 (23 men and 35 women) for the gender analysis. Even though there was no indication the 58 did not represent the entire sample, these results should be considered as coming from a limited subset of this sample.

DISCUSSION

These results confirm previous research indicating a significant relationship between general well-being and particular aspects of life goal orientation. Recognition of a framework of purpose, a perspective of progress, and a sense of commitment significantly differentiated between people who scored high and low in well-being.

The measure of quality used in this study did not differentiate significantly probably because the weighting system used in its calculation was developed from clinical judgement rather than from empirical data. The qualitative value of particular life goals has not yet been established and deserves further investigation.

The unweighted relative value the subjects place on specific life goals was significantly related to well-being, particularly for those goals that have an hedonistic orientation. Further investigation of this relationship using multiple regression and factor analysis has the potential of suggesting a more valid weighting system which might enable calculation of a more sensitive score for the quality of a person's life goals. Also, further research about the importance of hedonistic vs nonhedonistic goals might reveal a cluster of pleasure goals that lessen a person's well-being and are related to health measures such as risk factors, health-care use, and illness symptoms. To accomplish these, however, a larger and more generalizable group of subjects is needed than young college students. A prospective study is being planned with working adults as subjects and including health care utilization as a dependent variable.

It must be recognized that these results do not support any cause-and-effect conclusions and also that they pertain to a very limited and special sample of people so generalization must be very cautious. This study was preliminary in nature, but it demonstrated the feasibility of relating life goal orientation with general well-being using self-report measures.

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