

Pursuit of Goals in the Search for Happiness: A Mixed-Method Multidimensional Study of Well-Being

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ABSTRACT. Although accomplishing life's goals is important for flourishing, well-being may vary depending on the type of goals and developmental stage. Participants were asked to choose a goal aimed at enhancing their happiness. The present study examined the extent to which goal type (altruistic, individualistic) and age group (emerging adult, adult) had an impact on 5 elements of well-being (PERMA: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishments; Seligman, 2011) between Time 1 and Time 2 of a 6-week happiness project. Forty-one participants between the ages of 19 and 65 (27 women, 14 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 28.71$, $SD = 10.78$) completed pre- and post-assessment online surveys. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed-model analysis of variance was conducted for each domain of well-being. Contrary to hypotheses, engagement, $F(1, 37) = 8.21$, $p = .007$, generalized $\eta^2 = .09$, and meaning-making, $F(1, 37) = 35.85$, $p = .001$, generalized $\eta^2 = .33$, decreased from Time 1 to Time 2, whereas positive emotions, relationships, and accomplishments did not change. Overall, adults reported having greater relational support than emerging adults, $F(1, 37) = 4.39$, $p = .043$, generalized $\eta^2 = .05$, whereas emerging adults with altruistic goals were happier and had more relational support than those with individualistic goals, $F(1, 37) = 7.80$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2 = .15$ and $F(1, 37) = 10.99$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .23$, respectively. Journal reflections provided deeper insight into how goals contributed to relationships and spirituality. Qualitative analyses revealed that goals improved relationships by promoting mindfulness, having a positive impact on others, and enhancing communication, and it fostered meaning-making by enhancing self-actualization with feelings of increased awareness, recognition of self-action, and the discovery of purpose through goals. Findings underscore the importance of examining a multidimensional model of well-being that varies over time in relation to goals and aspirations that develop throughout the lifespan.

Keywords: goals, relationships, spirituality, happiness, well-being

Pursuit of goals has been linked to increased well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Kiaei & Reio, 2014; Klug & Maier, 2015). Personal goals provide structure, motivation, and meaning, allowing an individual to be aware of continuous opportunities for change. Self-actualization, or the process of “becoming,” fulfills a person’s need for personal growth and discovery throughout the lifespan (Maslow, 1943). By setting goals and intentionally engaging in positive activities,

people can attain greater happiness and well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). When asked what contributes to a happy, fulfilling, and meaningful life, Emmons (2003) found that people often spontaneously say it is their life goals and hopes for the future. Although accomplishing life’s goals is important for flourishing, well-being may vary depending on the type of goals pursued.

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Goal Types

Over the years, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on intrinsic and extrinsic goals and motivation, advancing knowledge on how motivation affects performance and psychological well-being. Extrinsic goals require an external person to ascertain the worthiness and achievement of the goal to define how success is measured (e.g., financial success, social recognition, popularity). Those who pursue external rewards and materialistic goals tend to report lower physical and emotional well-being (Emmons, 1991; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Self-determination theory suggests that, if extrinsic motivation is engaged, but not transformed or integrated, it will diminish feelings of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic goals that are not congruent with one's own enduring interests and values may easily be abandoned when challenges arise. On the other hand, extrinsic goals that have been more fully integrated and promote autonomy have predicted greater psychological well-being in the United States and Japan (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic goals are inherently valuable to the individual, fostering personal growth, physical health, satisfying relationships, and community support (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Intrinsic goals that are motivated by self-interests and personal beliefs tend to be more meaningful and contribute to greater well-being (Emmons, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon et al., 2004). Researchers found that college students and working adults who were altruistically motivated and prosocial tended to report greater happiness and life satisfaction (Kasser, 2016; Moynihan et al., 2015; Waterman et al., 2008). Similarly, Schueller and Seligman (2010) found that those who focused on seeking engagement with others or with meaningful tasks reported greater life satisfaction than those who oriented themselves toward pleasurable activities.

Another way to define goal types is to examine whether they are *individualistic* (e.g., fulfilling materialistic desires or a competitive drive) or *altruistic* (e.g., contributing to fostering relationships, family, or community). Headey (2008) utilized similar categorizations to examine subjective well-being in relation to zero sum and nonzero sum goals. Zero sum goals were defined as economic, competitive, and materialistic goals usually involving one person's gain at the expense of another, whereas nonzero sum goals were relational goals that tended to help others. They found that those who developed nonzero sum, family, and altruistic goals reported greater life satisfaction than those who had zero sum, individualistic, and competitive goals.

Emerging Adulthood and Goals

Emerging adulthood, a developmental stage between the ages of 18 and 25, is characterized by greater independence, instability, self-focus, feeling "in between" adolescence and adulthood, and exploration of potential future possibilities (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adults are usually in the stage of identity moratorium, exploring the meanings of their ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, while seeking long-term commitments in their relational, educational, and career goals. A more in-depth understanding of this population is needed in order to understand how goals have an impact on emerging adults' well-being. Furthermore, it is important to explore how goals have an impact on well-being for emerging adults in comparison to adults.

Goals may vary over the course of the lifespan. As adults age, goals become less about desires to travel, educational attainment, and friendships, and more about work, family, and health (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). During emerging adulthood, individuals become less dependent than during adolescence but do not yet have the enduring responsibilities of adulthood, so they can explore a wide range of possible opportunities for love, work, and worldview in preparation for adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Kiaei and Reio (2014) found that emerging adults reported having more extrinsic goal aspirations and lower well-being than adults; however, for both emerging adults and adults, intrinsic goal aspirations were related to greater well-being. Further research is needed examining the extent to which different goal types influence various domains of well-being at different stages of adulthood.

Well-Being as a Multidimensional Construct

Well-being is a multifaceted construct with implications for parenting (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018), education (Coffey et al., 2016; Kern et al., 2014), work and organizations (Allan et al., 2019; Wright, 2010), and even measuring the prosperity of entire countries (Forgeard et al., 2011). Well-being can be broadly defined as a dynamic process that involves the interaction of environmental circumstances, activities and individual differences in psychological resources that have an impact on life satisfaction, and fulfillment (Forgeard et al., 2011). More specifically, the two primary ways well-being has been examined are the hedonic approach, focusing on increasing pleasure and avoiding pain (Kahneman et al., 1999), and the eudaimonic approach focused on meaning-making and self-realization (Waterman, 1993).

Although there is a wealth of research on well-being, it has often been examined using a unidimensional measure. The widespread utilization of this broad construct often makes it difficult to identify exactly how well-being is defined. Sometimes researchers fail to distinguish between happiness and well-being. In the recent work of Fritz and Lyubomirsky (2018), they use the terms *happiness* and *well-being* interchangeably, defined as the experience of more positive emotions over negative emotions combined with high life satisfaction.

In contrast to unidimensional measures, Seligman's (2011) PERMA model is based on the assumption that well-being is a multidimensional construct comprised of five distinct but related elements, including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishment. Greater levels of well-being predicted flourishing for both emerging adults and adults (Coffey et al., 2016). Because individuals may wish to focus on each domain for reasons other than increasing well-being, flourishing does not necessarily mean that an individual will be high on all five of these domains. For example, a person suffering from trauma might have difficulty increasing their positive emotions or happiness, but they could still flourish by increasing their level of engagement (e.g., finding an activity where their skill meets their challenge), or by building on their relationships (e.g., asking for help or guidance from a loved one). In a recent study, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2019) examined three different models, demonstrating ways people can boost and sustain their levels of happiness through intentional activities, despite the fact that it is partially determined by genetic predisposition and circumstances.

The five elements of the PERMA model contribute to overall well-being. However, each of the five elements can be pursued for its own sake, and can be measured independently of each other. The present study examined how different types of goals impact each of the five elements of well-being separately. The following section provides a review of the literature examining goal types in relation to each domain of well-being.

Positive Emotion

Positive emotions, or feelings of happiness, joy, and contentment, play a central role in well-being (Ehrlich & Bipp, 2016; Seaton & Beaumont, 2015). They are also an important piece of the goal process, influencing behavior in the service of goal completion at the beginning (e.g., anticipatory

emotions eliciting hope of success and fear of failure) and at the end (e.g., positive feelings associated with success or negative feelings associated with failure) of the goal process (Bagozzi et al., 1998). Seaton and Beaumont (2015) found that those who had a positive emotional profile tended to set more personal goals for themselves.

The type of goals that a person develops can have an impact on emotions. Emmons (1991) found that striving for affiliative goals was related to increased positive emotions, whereas power-related goals were related to heightened negative emotions. Meta-analytic findings indicated that materialistic goals are related to lower positive affect and higher negative affect (Kasser, 2016). Furthermore, Seaton and Beaumont (2015) found a reciprocal relationship between emotions and goals in that positive emotions can contribute to choosing goals focused on self-improvement, which in turn reinforces feelings of happiness.

Engagement

Engagement, or *flow*, occurs when a person is completely immersed and focused in an enjoyable activity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Previous findings have suggested that flow contributes to happiness and well-being (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014; Rathunde & Csíkszentmihályi, 1993; Schueller & Seligman, 2010); however, the relationship between goal types, flow, and well-being are unclear. Using structural equation modeling, Olčar and colleagues (2019) found that extrinsic life goals were related to feelings of lower autonomy in the workplace and decreased flow experiences. On the other hand, intrinsic life goals were related to increased flow and competence, which in turn contributed to greater life satisfaction in a sample of Croatian teachers. Flow leads to well-being when there is lack of internal conflict between competing goals, involving being fully engaged in an activity that maximizes immediate intrinsic rewards (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975). Waterman and colleagues (2008) found that, in comparison to hedonic activities, those who engaged in intrinsically motivated, eudaimonic activities experienced significantly greater flow experiences, a balance between challenge and skills, and self-actualization.

Relationships

Positive relationships are developed when individuals feel cared for and supported by others. Humans are social creatures with an innate drive to create and maintain social connections (Aronson, 2004;

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Myers, 2000). The development and maintenance of close personal relationships is one of three basic psychological needs essential for well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Myers (2000) highlighted a significant link between close positive relationships (e.g., family members, friendships, marriage) and greater well-being. In an in-depth literature review, Kasser (2016) found that materialistic goals are related to increased loneliness and interpersonal problems. In contrast, Krause and Hayward (2014) found that those who performed altruistic behavior toward family and friends reported greater well-being. Findings suggest that altruistic goals contribute to positive supportive relationships, which in turn enhance overall well-being.

Meaning-Making

Meaning-making is important because it contributes to people feeling and believing that their life is valuable, and that they are connected to something greater than themselves (Seligman, 2011). Human beings have an innate desire to explore and understand the world around them (Heine et al., 2006; Higgins, 2000). This desire can culminate in a belief of an organizing force in the universe, connectedness with nature and others, faith in one's worldview, compassion, and the ability to make meaning of life and death (Purdy & Dupey, 2005). Often referred to as spirituality, Steger et al. (2008) posited that the exploration into the meaning of life has an impact on psychological well-being. Myers (2008) found that individuals who identified as actively religious reported higher levels of subjective well-being when compared to their nonreligious counterparts. This may be because meaning-making allows for spiritual connections that transcend the material aspects of life, fostering increased awareness, and a sense of purpose in one's life (Liu & Robertson, 2011; Myers, 2000).

Meaning-making provides individuals with goals that can bolster overall well-being (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Seligman, 2011). Schnitker and Emmons (2013) emphasized the importance of developing goals that are connected to spirituality. Recent studies have suggested a positive relationship between spirituality and intrinsic motivation (Milliman et al., 2018; Moon et al., 2018). Moon and colleagues (2018) found that intrinsic motivation is a mediator between spirituality and job performance. Teranishi Martinez and Scott (2014) argued that engaging in a meaningful activity may be more important to finding happiness than

the type of activity or level of engagement. These studies highlight the importance of examining the interconnection between goals, spirituality, and well-being.

Accomplishment

Accomplishments help individuals monitor their progress toward their goals, develop their self-confidence and self-efficacy, and feel a sense of achievement. Self-determination theory posits that well-being is closely related to mastery (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and a sense of efficacy within their internal and external environments (Ryan et al., 2008). Seligman (2011) suggested that accomplishment should be explored through a person's drive or desire to attain their pursuits. Previous research has been inconsistent in how accomplishment has been operationalized or measured. However, extant studies have examined accomplishment as specific achievements, such as awards, earnings, and prestige (Kern et al., 2014).

The Present Study

In this 6-week, mixed-method study, participants were asked to carry out a goal aimed at enhancing their happiness and well-being. Conceptualizing well-being as a multidimensional construct using Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, it was hypothesized that, at the end of the 6-week happiness project, participants would demonstrate an increase in well-being across each of the five domains of the PERMA model. Building on previous research, it was predicted that those who carry out altruistic goals would report significantly greater positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishments than those who pursue individualistic goals. *Altruistic goals* were defined as intrinsic (e.g., self-acceptance, affiliation) and self-transcendent goals (e.g., spirituality), and *individualistic goals* were defined as physical (e.g., appearance, hedonism) and extrinsic goals (e.g., educational, career, financial success). Because goals develop and change over the lifespan, it is important to examine whether there are differences in the way goals impact well-being for emerging adults (18 to 25 years old; Arnett, 2000) compared to adults (26 years and older). Therefore, the present study also examined the interaction between age group (emerging adult, adult) and goal type (altruistic, individualistic) to see whether there were significant changes in each of the five domains of well-being from Time 1 to Time 2 of the 6-week happiness project.

Method

Participants

Fifty-five participants were recruited from a small, four-year public university and throughout the broader West Coast community. At the end of the 6-week study, 41 participants (27 women, 14 men) completed the 6-week happiness project, with ages ranging from 19 to 65 ($M = 28.71$, $SD = 10.78$). Twenty-three participants were emerging adults (18–25 years old; Arnett, 2000), and 18 were adults, of which 27% were between 26–35 years, and 17% were between 36–65 years old. Fourteen participants (8 women, 2 men) between the ages of 20 and 54 ($M = 29.86$, $SD = 10.78$) did not complete the postassessment survey, so they were excluded from further analyses.

Additional demographic information, including ethnicity, highest level of education, and relationship status, were obtained. Forty-two percent identified as White/European American, 39% as Latinx/Chicanx, 12% as multiethnic/multicultural, and 7% as Asian American/Pacific Islander. Thirty-four percent were currently enrolled in college; 22% had their associate's degree; 27% had a bachelor's degree; 10% had their master's degree; and the remainder attended some high school or had a high school diploma. Forty-one percent were single; 22% were married; 20% were cohabiting; and 17% were currently in a relationship.

Measures

Goals

Participants were instructed to set a specific goal to enhance their physical, mental, relational, spiritual, and personal happiness over a 6-week period. Goals were classified into several categories, including improving physical health (41.5%), staying on track with educational or career goals (22%), developing a new or improving an existing relationship (17%), tapping into one's spirituality (14.6%), and learning a new skill or hobby (4.9%). Goals were coded as individualistic or altruistic. Individualistic goals ($n = 17$) were activities such as pursuing their education, career, individual achievements, fitness, health/lifestyle changes, prioritizing/time management skills, learning a new skill or hobby, and practicing an old skill. Altruistic goals ($n = 24$) included activities such as mending a relationship or maintaining intimacy, forming new relationships, enhancing one's spirituality, and volunteering within the community.

Well-Being

Well-being was operationalized as a multidimensional construct according to Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, which consists of five elements, including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishment.

Positive Emotion. The first component of well-being, positive emotion, was operationalized using Lyubomirsky and Lepper's (1999) 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale. Items included, "Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterize you?" Participants rated this item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*). Another item, "In general, I consider myself..." was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not a very happy person*) to 7 (*a very happy person*). A composite score was calculated by reversing negatively scored items, summing the responses, and obtaining the mean to assess positive emotion at Time 1 and Time 2. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) examined psychometric properties of the Subjective Happiness Scale across age groups (i.e., sample of high school age, college, and community adults) and noted good to excellent alpha levels ($\alpha = .79$ to $.94$) and test-retest reliability ranging from $.55$ to $.90$. Cronbach's alpha reliability was acceptable for the Well-Being subscale in the current study ($\alpha_{pre} = .99$, $\alpha_{post} = .84$).

Engagement. Participants were asked to recall a time when they were completely immersed in an enjoyable activity, and state how many times they experienced flow while doing this activity in the past week. Jackson and Marsh's (1996) 36-item Flow State Scale was used to rate statements pertaining to this flow experience on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The composite score was computed by summing the items, and obtaining the mean to assess engagement at Time 1 and Time 2, the beginning and end of their 6-week project. Jackson and Marsh (1996) reported adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$ to $.86$) for the current measure across varied ages. Cronbach's alpha reliability for the present study was acceptable for the flow subscale for this study ($\alpha_{pre} = .93$, $\alpha_{post} = .97$).

Relationships. Cutrona and Russell's (1987) 24-item Social Provisions Scale was used to measure the extent to which participants' relationships provide social support. Items were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items include, "There are people I

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can depend on to help me if I really need it” and “I have relationships where my competence and skills are recognized.” Relational support was computed by summing the items, and obtaining the mean to assess relational support at the beginning and the end of their 6-week happiness project. In a sample of college students, Perera (2016) reported good reliability ($\alpha = .93$) for the full Social Provision Scale with acceptable internal consistency for all subscales ($\alpha = .64$ to $.83$). Cronbach’s alpha reliability for the current study was acceptable for the relational support subscale ($\alpha_{pre} = .85$, $\alpha_{post} = .88$).

Meaning-Making. Meaning-making was assessed using the Spirituality Involvement and Beliefs Scale-R (Hatch et al., 2006) applicable for diverse religious affiliations and beliefs. This measure consists of 26-items including, “I can find meaning in times of hardship,” “My spiritual life fulfills me in ways that material possessions do not,” and “Spiritual activities help me draw closer to a power greater than myself.” Participants were asked to rate the statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A composite score was computed by summing the responses and obtaining the mean to assess meaning-making at Time 1 and Time 2. Dong and colleagues (2018) examined the psychometric properties of the Spirituality Involvement and Beliefs Scale and reported good reliability ($\alpha = .49$ to $.95$) and validity ($r = .89$) across subscales within a college student sample. Cronbach’s alpha reliability for the spirituality subscale was acceptable ($\alpha_{pre} = .91$, $\alpha_{post} = .91$).

Accomplishment. The present study tested the use of a new and unpublished measure to assess participants’ subjective ratings of their accomplishments in terms of how important these achievements are to who they are (Teranishi Martinez, 2015). Participants were asked to state the five things they were most proud of accomplishing in their lifetime. After listing their accomplishments, they were asked to rate the importance of each of these accomplishments on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*not very important*) to 5 (*very important*). The average rating of importance of their accomplishments was assessed by summing the responses and obtaining the mean score at Time 1 and Time 2. This measure assesses participants’ subjective valuation of the accomplishments they achieved at each point in time.

Qualitative Measures

Open-Ended Questions. At the end of the 6-week project, participants were asked: “How did your project affect the way you interacted with others

(e.g., your romantic partner, your parents, your children, friends, coworkers)?,” “Was your project life changing?,” and “Did it affect how you connect to nature, spirituality, the world, etc.?”

Weekly Journals. At Time 1, participants were given instructions to keep track of their goals and outcomes by drawing and writing in a journal at least once a week for 6 weeks. At Time 2, journals were collected and transcribed into a Word document. Drawings were not used for analyses, but as a creative outlet to inspire them as they were writing their journal reflections.

Design

Quantitative Analyses

Data were analyzed using RStudio (Version 1.2.1335). The ezANOVA package was utilized to conduct $2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) in which goal type (altruistic and individualistic) and age group (emerging adult and adult) were between-subjects factors, and time (Time 1 and Time 2) was the repeated-measures factor. The dependent measures were each of the five domains of well-being in the PERMA model: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishment.

Assumptions for homogeneity of variance and normality were met for all preassessment data. Posttest variables of relational support, engagement, and accomplishments had larger differences between variances, and were negatively skewed and leptokurtic. Because neither square root, logarithmic, or inverse transformations of these data improved normality or homogeneity of variance, untransformed data was used for analyses. Mauchly’s test indicated no violation of sphericity assumptions; however, analyses did contain unequal sample sizes.

Qualitative Analyses

A phenomenological approach was used to examine themes that emerged, and grounded theory was used to construct a representative theoretical model of participants’ experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Research assistants were trained to do multiple in-depth readings of open-ended question responses and the weekly journals. Major themes were coded and organized in an Excel spreadsheet to examine common reoccurring themes. The researchers remained open to continual recategorization after each subsequent reading until saturation was attained to the point in which no new themes emerged.

Procedure

This study was approved by the California State University Channel Islands Research and Sponsored Programs Office Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with ethical standards and protection of human subjects. The principal investigator and research assistants recruited participants from undergraduate psychology courses at a small West Coast, public 4-year university, and via convenience sampling using online social media platforms targeting individuals within the broader community. For student participants, instructions were provided as a group within a classroom setting, whereas community members received instructions individually. Volunteers were invited to participate in a study investigating factors that contribute to happiness and well-being, setting a new goal to enhance their physical, mental, relational, spiritual, and/or personal happiness. At Time 1, participants were given a packet containing their participant ID number, consent form, written instructions for carrying out their happiness project and maintaining their weekly journal, and a Qualtrics link to complete an online preassessment survey. At Time 2, the end of the 6-week project, journals were collected, and participants were given a Qualtrics link to complete a postassessment survey comprised of the same measures administered at Time 1. Undergraduate college students were offered extra credit for their participation upon instructors' approval, whereas community members were not offered any incentives for their participation.

Results

Altruistic and Individualistic Goals

Fifty-eight percent of participants carried out an altruistic goal over the 6-week study. Of those, more than 60% were emerging adults between 18 and 25 years old. Although more emerging adults chose altruistic goals, chi-square analysis revealed no significant differences between the age groups (emerging adults, adults) and goal types (altruistic, individualistic; $\chi^2 = 0.44$, $p = .508$, $\phi_c = 0.15$). Furthermore, chi-square analyses indicated no significant differences between goal types for gender or ethnicity.

Mixed-Model ANOVA Analyses

Table 1 provides means and standard deviations for each factor at Time 1 and Time 2 as well for the goal type and age group factors for each dimension of the PERMA model.

Positive Emotion

Table 2 provides mean squares, F statistics, and eta-squared values for both significant and nonsignificant omnibus tests. Analyses revealed a significant interaction between goal type and age group on happiness. Simple effects tests indicated that emerging adults with altruistic goals reported being significantly happier than those with individualistic goals. Adult participants indicated the opposite pattern: Those with altruistic goals reported being significantly less happy than those with individualistic goals, $F(1, 37) = 7.80$, $p = .047$, and $F(1, 37) = 6.29$, $p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$, respectively.

Results also indicated a significant 3-way interaction between goal type, age group, and testing time (see Figure 1). Post-hoc analyses indicated that, for adults with individualistic goals, happiness increased from Time 1 to Time 2. Conversely, adults with altruistic goals reported that their happiness decreased from Time 1 to Time 2. However, it should be noted that results were only marginally significant, $F(1, 16) = 3.50$, $p = .080$, generalized $\eta^2 = .09$. The interaction was not significant for emerging adults, $F(1, 21) = 1.58$, $p = .223$, generalized $\eta^2 = .02$.

Engagement

A main effect for engagement was found; however, findings were contrary to expectations, indicating a significant decrease in flow from Time 1 to Time 2. Results are qualified by a 3-way interaction between goal type, age group, and testing time (see Figure 2). Post-hoc tests were marginally significant: Adults with individualistic goals reported increased engagement, while adults with altruistic goals reported decreased engagement from Time 1 to Time 2, $F(1, 16) = 3.82$, $p = .068$, generalized $\eta^2 = .14$. The interaction was not significant for emerging adults, $F(1, 21) = 2.24$, $p = .149$, generalized $\eta^2 = .05$.

Relationships

Although there was no significant change in relational support from Time 1 to Time 2, there was a main effect for both age group and goal type, as well as a significant interaction between the factors. Figure 3 illustrates the interaction effect of relational support. Simple effects tests examining Time 2 data indicated that emerging adults who carried out altruistic goals reported greater relational support than those who pursued individualistic goals, $F(1, 37) = 10.99$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .23$. For adults, however, there was no difference in relational support between those who chose altruistic or individualistic goals, $F(1, 37) = 0.05$, $p = .825$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

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TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations for PERMA Factors by Goal Type and Age Group

PERMA Factor	Goal Type	Total (N = 41)		Emerging Adults (n = 23)		Adult (n = 18)	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
		M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Positive Emotion		5.33 (1.15)	5.46 (1.49)	5.14 (1.20)	5.39 (1.40)	5.57 (1.07)	5.56 (1.62)
	Altruistic goals	5.43 (1.11)	5.42 (1.60)	5.33 (1.24)	5.82 (1.49)	5.58 (0.90)	4.75 (1.64)
	Individualistic goals	5.19 (1.24)	5.52 (1.35)	4.78 (1.12)	4.59 (0.81)	5.55 (1.28)	6.36 (1.20)
Engagement		4.07 (0.46)	3.73 (0.64)	4.07 (0.52)	3.67 (0.72)	4.07 (0.40)	3.81 (0.54)
	Altruistic goals	4.15 (0.45)	3.79 (0.44)	4.10 (0.51)	3.90 (0.42)	4.22 (0.34)	3.61 (0.43)
	Individualistic goals	3.96 (0.47)	3.65 (0.87)	4.00 (0.56)	3.25 (0.99)	3.92 (0.41)	4.01 (0.58)
Relationships		4.50 (0.44)	4.46 (0.54)	4.43 (0.46)	4.39 (0.59)	4.57 (0.42)	4.54 (0.49)
	Altruistic goals	4.57 (0.42)	4.59 (0.37)	4.49 (0.42)	4.64 (0.30)	4.50 (0.45)	4.51 (0.47)
	Individualistic goals	4.39 (0.46)	4.26 (0.69)	4.14 (0.41)	3.93 (0.73)	4.61 (0.40)	4.56 (0.53)
Meaning-Making		4.77 (1.07)	3.23 (1.04)	4.70 (1.19)	3.12 (1.17)	4.86 (0.92)	3.36 (0.86)
	Altruistic goals	4.82 (1.18)	3.23 (1.16)	4.68 (1.29)	2.98 (1.25)	5.03 (0.98)	3.65 (0.90)
	Individualistic goals	4.71 (0.93)	3.22 (0.88)	4.73 (1.05)	3.38 (1.03)	4.69 (0.88)	3.07 (0.75)
Accomplishment		4.61 (0.38)	4.51 (0.78)	4.55 (0.38)	4.63 (0.48)	4.68 (0.39)	4.36 (1.04)
	Altruistic goals	4.63 (0.38)	4.63 (0.82)	4.65 (0.32)	4.78 (0.24)	4.61 (0.49)	4.36 (1.30)
	Individualistic goals	4.57 (0.39)	4.35 (0.72)	4.36 (0.43)	4.35 (0.69)	4.76 (0.26)	4.36 (0.79)

Meaning-Making

Contrary to expectations, there was a significant decrease in spirituality from Time 1 to Time 2 (see Table 2). There were no significant interaction effects.

Accomplishment

There were no significant main effects or interaction effects for accomplishments.

Qualitative Findings

Table 3 provides the frequencies and percentages of each theme that emerged from the qualitative analyses.

Relationships

Sixty-six percent of participants indicated that their project enhanced their relationships ($n = 27$). Twelve percent reported it had no impact on their relationships ($n = 5$); 10% reported it had both a positive and negative impact ($n = 4$); and 10% said it had a negative impact ($n = 4$; 1 no response). When asked to reflect upon how their project affected their relationships, they described being more mindful, having a positive impact on others, improved communication, and negative impact on relationships.

Being in the Present Moment. In the open-ended section of the survey, 78% of participants

reported that their project enhanced their relationships because they were more focused and in the present moment. This included feeling overall positive well-being ($n = 20$), feeling more relaxed and patient ($n = 8$), and being mindful and self-reflective ($n = 3$). Participants said,

My goal helped me feel a little more confident and stronger, mentally and physically. In turn this helped me be more available to those around me because they were able to be around someone who was feeling happy and energized. I feel like in some way I was able to motivate others because I felt motivated.

Another participant said,

The way it affected my interaction with others was in a positive way. I felt more relaxed, excited, optimistic, and just really good about myself. I was way more friendly than I would have been to friends and family members had I not gone to the gym.

Positive Impact on Relationships. Thirty-five percent of participants reported that their project enhanced their relationships giving them increased energy and positive mood. It allowed them to

have more time for themselves and others ($n = 10$) and more shared activities/interests ($n = 4$). Participants said, “I noticed that once I was able to take time for myself, that I was able to have a more relaxed, positive attitude towards everyone,” “With coworkers, I was more active and carried out more duties,” “I have much more energy to do things with friends and family I didn’t have before,” and “I went to bed earlier, which made my spouse happy. I realized I slept better so in turn had more energy.”

Better Communication. Eighteen percent of participants reported that their project enhanced their relationships by increasing their communication skills, openness, and honesty ($n = 7$). A participant said,

I became more honest, open, transparent, and vulnerable. For the first time in my life, I was open with my boss and shared how I really felt, and shared my future goals. I have never shared that type of information with anyone. This openness and honesty I found translated to my other relationships, and I became a more open person.

Other participants said, “I am calm and focused on their conversation” and “I feel that working on levels of communication with my boyfriend truly helped us in times of conflict. It brought attention to flaws in my own levels of communication, which was humbling.”

Negative Impact on Relationships. Ten percent of participants reported that their project increased their negative mood or had a negative impact on others ($n = 4$). One participant said, “I noticed that I tended to be more short-tempered with my boyfriend, and that I became more distant to my coworkers because I was feeling overwhelmed with accomplishing my goal.” Another said,

Since I dedicated more time toward my studies, various relationships were not maintained as they were beforehand. It resulted in spending less time with friends, romantic partner, and family. Although they all understood some relationships were affected more than others.

Spirituality

Sixty-three percent indicated that their project was life changing. When asked to reflect upon how their project affected them spirituality, participants’ described enhanced self-actualization (e.g., finding purpose through goals), self and identity

(e.g., sense of self and increased confidence), and health and well-being (e.g., awareness of stressors and increased coping skills).

TABLE 2

Omnibus Mixed Model Analysis of Variance for Each PERMA Factor

PERMA Factor	Effect	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Positive Emotion	Time	0.087	0.07	.787	.00
	Goal Type	0.044	0.02	.883	.00
	Age	3.595	1.77	.192	.03
	Time x Goal Type	1.132	0.97	.331	.00
	Time x Age	0.127	0.11	.744	.00
	Goal Type x Age	13.625	6.69	.014	.09
	Time x Goal Type x Age	6.445	5.51	.024	.04
Engagement	Time	2.657	8.21	.007	.09
	Goal Type	0.505	1.96	.170	.02
	Age	0.303	1.17	.286	.01
	Time x Goal Type	0.025	0.08	.784	.00
	Time x Age	0.221	0.68	.414	.01
	Goal Type x Age	0.873	3.38	.074	.03
	Time x Goal Type x Age	1.876	5.79	.021	.07
Relationships	Time	0.071	0.39	.538	.00
	Goal Type	1.284	5.46	.025	.06
	Age	1.032	4.39	.043	.05
	Time x Goal Type	0.105	0.57	.453	.01
	Time x Age	0.011	0.06	.811	.00
	Goal Type x Age	2.035	8.65	.006	.10
	Time x Goal Type x Age	0.067	0.37	.548	.00
Meaning-Making	Time	44.234	35.85	.001	.33
	Goal Type	0.266	0.25	.621	.00
	Age	0.508	0.47	.496	.01
	Time x Goal Type	0.019	0.02	.901	.00
	Time x Age	0.005	0.00	.947	.00
	Goal Type x Age	2.221	2.07	.159	.03
	Time x Goal Type x Age	0.416	0.34	.565	.00
Accomplishment	Time	0.331	0.94	.339	.01
	Goal Type	0.401	1.01	.321	.01
	Age	0.005	0.01	.908	.00
	Time x Goal Type	0.107	0.30	.586	.00
	Time x Age	0.743	2.10	.155	.02
	Goal Type x Age	0.927	2.34	.134	.03
	Time x Goal Type x Age	0.000	0.00	.996	.00

Note. *MS* = Mean squares; η^2 = Generalized eta-squared; PERMA = positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning-making, and accomplishments; *Df* (1, 37) for all analyses. Significant results are in **bold**.

Self-Actualization. In the open-ended section of the survey, 95% of participants reported that their project enhanced their self-actualization, including feelings of increased self-awareness ($n = 14$), recognition of self-action ($n = 16$), and

finding purpose through goals ($n = 9$). Participants said, “I continue to work on my goal, and though there have been times I stray, working out has helped me see a different side of myself that is more capable” and “It was life changing in a way where I feel more aware of my surroundings, and I do feel a sense of clarity and better focus.”

Self and Identity. Eighty-eight percent of participants described how their project affected their self and identity by enhancing their sense of self-concept ($n = 25$), and their self-esteem and confidence ($n = 12$). For example, two participants stated, “It reaffirmed for me when I’m engaged in positive activities, I feel better about myself and engage better with others” and “It was life changing in that I realized I have more self-control than I ever thought. I am proud of myself that I value myself enough to do this for myself.”

Health and Well-Being. Fifty-nine percent of participants said that their project enhanced their health and well-being by helping them realize the importance of taking care of themselves ($n = 13$), and acknowledging the stressors and developing coping strategies ($n = 11$). Participants stated, “I can find peace within myself and whenever I feel stressed or mentally trapped, I can just sweat it out,” “I think it was life changing. I will try to set time aside as my days get busier and more hectic, I will need more ‘me’ time so I am not stressing, or taking my stress out on others,” and “I felt that it was life changing because now I have another technique that I can use to relax during stressful periods of my life.”

Discussion

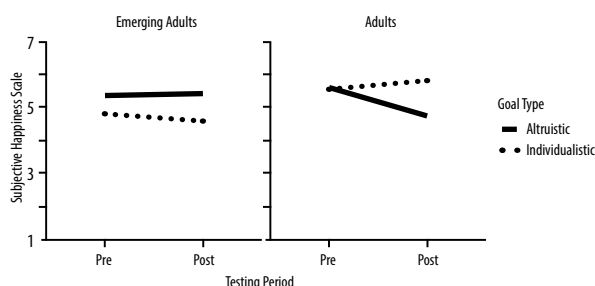
The present study helped shed light on understanding the extent to which pursuing altruistic and individualistic goals contributed to well-being at different stages of adulthood. Findings provide evidence that well-being is a multidimensional construct comprised of five distinct but related domains that vary over time depending on goal type and developmental stage. Using a mixed-method approach, qualitative analyses facilitated the interpretation of the quantitative findings that were contrary to hypotheses, in addition to providing insight into various meanings of well-being.

Changes in Well-Being After Project Completion

Contrary to our first hypothesis, the engagement and meaning-making elements of PERMA decreased from Time 1 to Time 2, whereas positive emotions, relationships, and accomplishments did

FIGURE 1

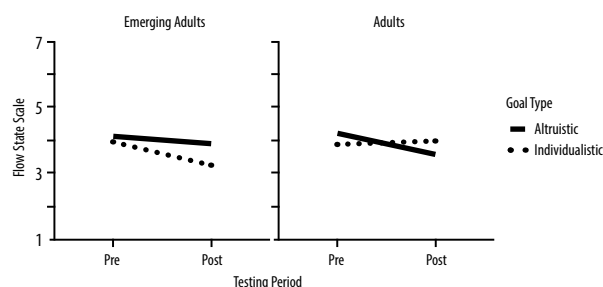
Pre-Post: Positive Emotions by Age Group and Goal Type



Note. Means for positive emotions (as measured by the Subjective Happiness Scale) by age group and goal type depicting significant interactions of goal type by age group, as well as testing time. Main Effects were not significant.

FIGURE 2

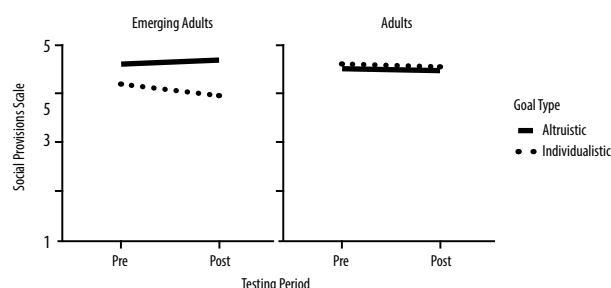
Pre-Post: Engagement by Age Group and Goal Type



Note. Means for engagement by age group and goal type depicting significant main effect of testing time as well as an interaction of goal type by age group by testing time.

FIGURE 3

Pre-Post: Relational Support by Age Group and Goal Type



Note. Means for relational support by age group and goal type depicting significant main effect of age group and goal type, as well as an interaction of goal type by age group.

not change significantly. Although participants were asked to choose a short-term goal, goals might have been too lofty to complete in a short 6-week time frame. Furthermore, providing participants with instructions to select a goal aimed at increasing their happiness might have increased the value placed upon the goal by the participant. Steca et al. (2016) found that those who placed a higher value on their goals at Time 1 experienced decreased subjective well-being 4 weeks later. There was a detrimental effect on well-being when highly valued goals were not attainable until later in the distant future. Interestingly, a meta-analytic study revealed that the association between goal pursuit and well-being was strongest when participants were focused more on the process of completing a goal, rather than attainment of the goal (Klug & Maier, 2015). Participants in the present study were asked to keep a journal to track their goal progress over time; however, it was never explicitly stated that they were expected to complete the goal, nor were they asked whether they ultimately accomplished their goal. Further research is needed examining how the process of goal setting and goal attainment contribute to Seligman's (2011) five domains of well-being.

Positive Emotions

Emerging adults who carried out altruistic goals indicated having more positive emotions than those with individualistic goals. Results support previous research indicating that altruistic goals contributed to increased positive emotions, whereas individualistic goals led to heightened negative emotions (Emmons, 1991; Kasser, 2016). However, contrary to expectations, adults who carried out altruistic goals were less happy at the end of the 6-week project. Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) developed a model to understand various conditions in which positive activities contribute to well-being, which helps provide possible explanations for understanding why altruistic goals may lead to decreased happiness in adults. One possible explanation is that participants carried out their altruistic goal too frequently, so it became monotonous, tedious, or burdensome, leading to decreased positive emotions. Another possible explanation is that some adults might have been too highly motivated to become happier, not realizing that preoccupation with happiness could end up thwarting positive emotions. Finally, it may be that, if an altruistic person starts to feel those they are helping expect too much from them or become too demanding, they may feel exploited

or taken advantage of, subsequently diminishing their happiness. Future research is needed to better understand how altruistic goals and positive emotions are mediated by age-related differences and experiences.

Engagement

Also contrary to expectations, adults with altruistic goals reported decreased engagement or flow, whereas adults with individualistic goals experienced higher levels of flow after the 6-week happiness project. Flow occurs when there is low conflict between competing goals, and when a person is fully engaged in an activity that maximizes immediate intrinsic rewards (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975, 1990). Perhaps adults who pursued altruistic goals expended a lot of energy and experienced conflicting or competing goals. As mentioned earlier, if goals are highly valued and do not contribute to immediate intrinsic rewards, it might inhibit them from being fully engaged. Adults who pursued individualistic goals might have discovered more opportunities to find balance between challenge and skills, so they could experience greater flow and well-being.

Relationships

In partial support of our hypotheses, those who carried out altruistic goals reported greater relational support at both Time 1 and Time 2. Results are consistent with previous findings indicating that altruistic goals compared to individualistic goals fostered greater well-being (Kasser, 2016; Krause & Hayward, 2014; Myers, 2008). Qualitative data further support these findings: Two-thirds of

TABLE 3

Qualitative Theme Frequencies

Themes	<i>n</i>	%
Relational		
Being in the Present Moment	31	78
Positive Impact on Others	14	35
Communication and Openness	7	18
Negative Impact on Relationship	4	10
Spiritual		
Self-actualization	39	95
Self and Identity Development	36	88
Health and Well-being	24	59
No Change	13	32

Note. Some participants noted more than one theme to describe how their goals affected their relationships. Thus, total percentage does not add up to 100.

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participants described that their project enhanced their relationships, helping them be more focused in the present moment with family and friends, and having a positive impact on others. One person said that their goal helped them feel stronger mentally and physically, so they were able to be more available to those around them. Findings illuminate the reciprocal influence of altruistic goals and relationships: Relational support can lead to increased desire to help others.

Researchers have found that, as adults grow older, goals become increasingly altruistically motivated with more of an emphasis on family relations (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007), and that adults with more relational support tended to have greater well-being (Kiaei & Reio, 2014). Congruent with these findings, results from the present study revealed that adults reported having greater relational support than emerging adults. Our study also seems to suggest that choosing an altruistic goal in the emerging adult life stage is advantageous for well-being. Findings indicated that emerging adults who chose altruistic goals reported more positive emotions and greater relational support than those who chose individualistic goals. Starting out early in adulthood developing altruistic goals and participating in community engagement can contribute to a positive relational support network and sense of community, which in turn enhances overall well-being across the lifespan.

Meaning-Making

Although participants' self-report responses at the end of the 6-week happiness project revealed an overall decrease in meaning-making, qualitative journal reflections provided deeper insight into how goals contribute to spirituality. Most participants described enhanced self-actualization, including feeling increased awareness, recognition of self-action, and finding purpose through goals. Some researchers have argued the importance of developing goals that are connected to spirituality because meaning-making can bolster overall well-being (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Schnitker & Emmons, 2013; Seligman, 2011). For future research, participants could be instructed to carry out a "meaningful" project rather than a goal that contributes to happiness. In addition, the length of time given to carry out the goals could be extended to provide participants more time to reflect and find meaning from their project.

Qualitative and quantitative findings both suggest that goal type may not be especially meaningful

for this domain. For example, one person with an individualistic goal said, "It was life changing in a way where I feel more aware of my surroundings, and I do feel a sense of clarity and better focus," whereas another with an altruistic goal stated, "I can find peace within myself and whenever I feel stressed or mentally trapped, I can just sweat it out." These statements suggest that participants were able to find meaning regardless of goal type. Indeed, researchers have suggested that any type of goal pursuit can increase well-being to some degree; if that activity is meaningful to the individual, it may be more important than the activity itself (Seaton & Beaumont, 2015; Teranishi Martinez & Scott, 2014). Further research is needed, explicitly asking participants to describe their motivation and purpose, which would help better understand the meaning behind the goal they chose.

A factor outside the scope of the current study concerns religion. Previous research has suggested that active engagement in religious practices contributes to greater spiritual well-being (Myers, 2008). Two-thirds of the current sample identified with a particular religion (e.g., various forms of Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism). Future studies should consider whether differences in meaning-making between Time 1 and Time 2 may depend on religious and/or spiritual affiliation.

Accomplishments

Goal type and age group did not have an impact on accomplishments, and there was no significant change in accomplishments. This could be due to the fact that participants carried out their goals for a short period of time, so they might not have felt that an increase in accomplishment. Some participants found it challenging to follow through with their goals each week, particularly those who were college students trying to concentrate on finals at the end of the semester. Others who did not accomplish their goals indicated that they experienced negative emotions, discouragement, and a negative impact on their relationships.

In the present study, the accomplishments measure assessed goals accomplished over an individuals' lifetime (e.g., getting their driver's license, graduating from college, getting married), and how important these goals were to them. This measure enabled us to understand participants' sense of overall achievement throughout their life in relation to how much they valued the goals they achieved. Being able to reach goals can give people a sense of pride and accomplishment, while

feeling proud of accomplishments is important to push people to continue to thrive. However, the measure used in the current study might not have accurately captured the intent of the accomplishments component of the PERMA model.

According to Seligman (2011), accomplishment should examine an individual's desire to achieve something and not necessarily be connected to specific goals they have accomplished or their importance. Previous longitudinal research suggested that students who were committed and believed they could accomplish their goals reported increased well-being (Brunstein, 1993). On the other hand, Forgeard and colleagues (2011) associated achievement with competence, a component of self-determination theory, which posits that achievement should measure whether an individual feels they are capable of mastering their environment. It is important to examine self-efficacy and the process of goal attainment because goals are always changing, and throughout this 6-week time frame, other commitments and activities are likely to have interfered with individuals' goals. Developing goals is a dynamic process because they are not only pursued and attained, but they may be put on hold, amended, or abandoned (Elliot & Church, 1997; Emmons, 1986; Klug & Maier, 2015). Thus, in turn accomplishments are also in flux, and may take some time to achieve. Future research may very well need to examine multiple current measures of achievement in relation to the PERMA model to determine how best to operationalize this concept.

Limitations

Findings from the present study contribute to the existing literature on goal pursuits and a multidimensional model of well-being; however, several limitations must be addressed. Results of pre- and posttest must be interpreted with caution because limited resources did not allow for use of a control group. Furthermore, this study relied heavily on convenience sampling to recruit participants, and because participation was voluntary, self-selection might have been a factor in those who chose to participate in this 6-week happiness project. Nevertheless, Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) found that, when participants were aware of what the positive psychology intervention was and were committed to carrying it out, it was more likely than a placebo to bolster their well-being.

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2019) described a number of methods and models that demonstrate

ways people can maintain the boost and blissful feeling after achieving a positive life change. However, in the present study, 6-weeks might not have allowed sufficient time for participants to experience a significant long-lasting change in well-being. It is suggested that an intervention should be carried out for a minimum of 8-weeks in order to observe a significant impact on well-being (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Longitudinal studies are challenging due to the extensive time and resources needed, and attrition is an inherent problem, particularly for college students juggling the demands of school, work, and family, among other competing expectations. Nonetheless, this type of research design is valuable to better understand developmental changes over the lifespan. Further longitudinal studies are needed with a larger, more representative sample size.

Another difficulty is the challenge in determining whether goals are inherently altruistic or individualistic. For example, although several students developed the goal of staying on track with their educational aspirations or academic success, motivations for this goal may vary from person to person. For example, some students may aspire to do well in school to receive honors, whereas others may do it to get a better job in order to support their family. Individuals may have multiple intentions for their goals, or goals might change from being individualistic to altruistic over time. Further qualitative research is needed to better understand goal motives, having participants describe in more detail the reasons they developed their goals. Although some individuals may demonstrate changes in brain function after 2 weeks of changing a behavior, research has suggested that goals may take 60 to 90 days to become a habit or routine (Loehr & Schwartz, 2005). Future studies are needed examining within-group variability in the ability to achieve goals in relation to the fit with an individual's personality, values, behaviors, and cultural expectations.

Conclusions

Goal pursuit is a continuous process. Rather than primarily focusing on the outcomes of the goals that are being pursued, it may be beneficial to encourage individuals to develop mindfulness and present-moment awareness, while focusing on the process of attaining their goals. People have different needs for personal growth and well-being at different points throughout their lifespan. The pursuit of goals helps fulfill the need for self-actualization

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as people strive to reach their potential to become the best possible version of themselves (Maslow, 1943). Findings from the present study suggest that emerging adults might benefit from focusing on altruistic goals to enhance positive emotions and relationships as they pursue future goals, such as education, career, marriage, and family. In contrast, adults in early to middle adulthood might benefit from focusing more on individualistic goals to increase happiness, focus, and flow while juggling multiple demands and expectations, such as career, children, and aging parents. However, by also being altruistic, adults can receive the reciprocal benefits of increasing relational support in their lives. The search for happiness is a lifelong pursuit, and by conceptualizing well-being as multidimensional, people can discover extraordinary ways they can continue to flourish throughout their lifespan.

From a positive psychology perspective, goals can help people build on and utilize their strengths and abilities to fulfill a purpose and create meaning in their lives. By setting goals that help people grow individually, they can become physically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually healthier. At the same time, they can find a deeper meaning by reflecting on how these goals serve a greater purpose by improving their relationships, preserving their environment, and strengthening the communities in which they live.

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