ABSTRACT. This article is concerned with the conceptual and methodological issues in the measurement of personal goals, with special emphasis on assessing spiritual and religious content in goals. The research literature on personal goals and subjective well-being is reviewed and synthesized. A comparison of several popular goal units in the research literature is included. Goal content and goal conflict have been reliably associated with well-being in past research. Spiritual or religious content in personal goals emerges as having an especially strong influence on well-being, and recent research on spiritual personal strivings and well-being is summarized. One of the primary purposes of the article is to consider conceptual and methodological challenges in the measurement of spirituality through personal goals. The advantages of a combined idiographic-nomothetic approach to measuring spirituality through purposive behavior are enumerated. A personal goals approach to studying spiritual motivation can make an important contribution to understanding how religiosity affects well-being, thus expanding religion’s role in quality of life research.

In their review of the characteristics of happy people, Myers and Diener (1995) describe three principles theories of happiness which must be taken into account: (1) due to adaptation, the influence of life events is short-lived, (2) these events are interpreted within a cultural worldview that renders them as sources of suffering or as opportunities for growth, and (3) people’s values and goals are potent contributors to their overall levels of happiness. It is with the third point which Myers and Diener make, that the present article is concerned, the role of personal motivation as an influence on long-term levels of happiness, or what has come to be known as subjective well-being (SWB).

A substantial research base now exists which demonstrates that people’s priorities are prime determinants of their well-being, and that these priorities are based on their current and long-term goals, projects, and concerns. Beyond this general summary statement,
however, more specific questions can be posed. For instance, are there certain types of goals that are consistently linked with SWB? Do the goals need to be integrated into a more or less coherent overall package for maximal positive emotional consequences? These are questions that goals research, with regard to emotional well-being, has been addressing in the past decade. In the first half of this article, the existing literature on goals and well-being is summarized and synthesized. No attempt will be made to provide an exhaustive review; Austin and Vancouver (1996) recently presented a masterful review of the literature on goal constructs. In the second half of this article, the potential utility of a goals framework for assessing personal religiosity, or spirituality and its relation to subjective well-being will be illustrated. Religious and spiritually-oriented lifestyles are becoming increasingly connected with favorable psychological and physical health outcomes (e.g. Koenig, 1997). Yet there exists a need for broader measures of these constructs that circumvent the limitations of conventional questionnaire measures (Gorsuch, 1984, 1988). Initial research into the effects of religiousness was served satisfactorily by a rudimentary conception of spirituality. However, further progress requires advances in the measurement of spirituality, reflecting more refined ideas about what spirituality is and what role it plays in the lives of individual persons. This would, thus, be a propitious time to consider alternative operationalizations of spirituality/religiousness, and the goals construct would appear to be one promising unit of analysis for measuring it.

A goals-theoretical approach has become widely adopted by researchers in many areas of psychology, including social, personality, clinical, cognitive, developmental, and organizational psychology. A cursory examination of some recent positions in these areas makes the case for goals very clear. Ford and Nichols (1987) state that the “capacity for cognizing and pursuing goals is revealed in everyday experience . . . is what gives meaning and purpose to people’s lives” (p. 293). According to Karniol and Ross (1996), “the goal concept has become critical to many social and personality theorists” (p. 575). Finally, Karoly (1993) expressed it this way: “In the context of a resurgence of interest in purposiveness, self-direction, volitional control, and emotional modulation, the goal
One factor responsible for the growth of goal constructs in psychology has been the increasing attention on quality of life indicators such as subjective well-being. Goals have reliably been shown to be significant predictors of well-being. Research has demonstrated that the goals that people strive for, the manner in which they strive for them, and their ability to integrate the goals into a reasonably coherent framework influences their subjective well-being (SWB). Characteristics of personal goal systems have been explored as precursors of life satisfaction, psychosocial adjustment, depression and anxiety, physical health, and long-term positive and negative affective states (Brunstein, 1993; Diener and Fujita, 1995; Emmons, 1986; Karoly, 1991, 1993; Little, 1989; Omodei and Wearing, 1990; Salmela-Aro and Nurmi, 1996; Yetim, 1993). The possession of and progression toward important life goals are intimately tied to long-term well-being, both concurrently as well as prospectively.

**Personal Strivings and Subjective Well-Being**

A major trend within personality psychology has become the representation of personality in terms of dynamic processes, emphasizing how individuals strive for personally defined goals, construe daily opportunities for the realization of these goals, and regulate their behavior in an attempt to progress toward that which is personally meaningful and self-defining. Goals are internalized representations of desired states, where states include outcomes, events, or processes (Austin and Vancouver, 1996). There exist many ways to conceptualize and measure these internalized representations. In one research program on goals and well-being, goals are conceptualized as personal strivings, defined as “what a person is typically or characteristically trying to do” (Emmons, 1989, p. 92). Personal strivings consist of recurring objectives that characterize a person’s intentional behavior. For example, a person might be trying to “find that special someone”, or “to overcome shyness around strangers”, or “avoid shameless self-promotion.” Personal strivings, as personalized goals, represent choices that individuals make as they direct their lives toward particular outcomes, and away from others.
Personal strivings constitute an important source of meaning as people’s lives are structured around what they are trying to accomplish. These affectively charged goals and themes are central to a person’s life, while emerging from and determining the nature of a person’s transactions with their social worlds. Strivings serve as motivational organizing principles that lend coherence and continuity in day-to-day or to daily goal pursuits and to temporally extended states of mind such as possible selves (Sheldon and Kasser, 1995).

The personal striving approach has its theoretical roots in both the control theory of self-regulation (Carver and Scheier, 1981; Powers, 1973) and existential theory (Yalom, 1980). According to control theory, various levels of reference values that regulate action exist in a hierarchy ranging from the narrowest, most specific actions, to the broadest, most abstract principles. Behavior is a discrepancy-reduction process, where individuals act to minimize the discrepancy between their present condition and a desired standard or goal. Personal strivings can be thought of as one of these reference values that are used to guide action.

Existentialist perspectives (e.g. Yalom, 1980) emphasize the role of meaning and choice as the individual actively constructs his or her life circumstances. An individual creates goals amongst possibilities, and in the optimal situation, arranges them so as to achieve maximum meaning and satisfaction in life. At the core of the existentialist position is directionality and choice. Changes in goals, represented by losses, additions, and shifts in goal hierarchies, can be viewed as alterations in life meanings for the person (Baumeister, 1991).

Previous research has demonstrated the heuristic value of personal strivings in predicting levels of affective, cognitive, and physical well-being (Emmons, 1986, 1992; Emmons and King, 1988; see Emmons, 1996 for a review). Emmons (1996) organized the research findings on personal goals and well-being into 3 domains: goal content (what a person is trying to do, for example striving for achievement or intimacy-related outcomes), goal orientation (how the person typically frames goals, for example in approach or avoidance terms), and goal parameters (e.g. structural properties of goal systems, for example conflict or independence within goal systems). The next section of this article describes simi-
larities and differences between strivings and other personal goal units, and what is involved in the assessment of these constructs. This will be followed by a description of some recent research that extends the personal striving approach into a previously unexplored domain, that of spirituality or religiosity. The domain of spirituality will be used to illustrate opportunities as well as the potential limitations of assessing this realm of human experience through a personal goals framework.

**Personal Goals as Units of Analysis in Contemporary Psychology**

In addition to personal strivings, a number of other goal constructs have recently appeared on the psychological scene, each with its own range of convenience for explaining and predicting significant life outcomes such as subjective well-being. These include the constructs of current concerns (Klinger, 1977), life tasks (Cantor, 1990), personal projects (Little, 1989) and personal goals (Brunstein, 1993). Although these constructs share conceptual overlap, they also differ from each other in important ways.

Klinger (1989) and Little (1996) have sorted out the conceptual differences between these constructs (see also Cantor and Zirkel, 1990, for a comprehensive analysis of middle-level units of personality). Current concerns refer to hypothetical underlying states and thus connote a continuing dispositional state. Personal projects refer not to hypothetical states but to a set of related acts over time – the observable behavior that presumably corresponds to a concern. They are not what the person has, but rather what the person does. Life tasks focus on highly contextualized, non-trivial problems that are rooted in developmental stages and are made salient by life transitions. Little (1996) aligns the personal goal units along an internal-external continuum. Personal strivings, according to Little, reflect the internal, self-defining aspects of the person, whereas life tasks reflect external, culturally mandated problems. Personal projects occupy middle ground along this continuum, reflecting both culturally-prescribed shared developmental concerns as well as idiosyncratic “magnificent obsessions and trivial pursuits” (Little, 1989, p. 15).

Read and Miller (1989) point out that life tasks capture the organization of goals and strategies that are organized around specific
periods and contexts in people’s lives, and are less suited for describing individual differences in a general sense. A personal striving, defined as a class of goals that is characteristic for a particular person, describes enduring and recurring personality characteristics. Unlike current concerns and life tasks, the personal striving approach was not developed as a reaction against the motive disposition approach. In fact, broad motives reveal themselves through the enactment of personal strivings in everyday life (Emmons and McAdams, 1991).

Hyland's (1988) analysis of reference criteria within control theory is useful in helping further distinguish between these constructs. Life tasks represent end-state reference criteria. An end-state is a completed piece of work with a definite termination point. For example, once one has graduated from college, it need not be negotiated again. Concerns and projects may also serve as end-state reference criteria, though they need not be limited to these. Personal strivings are more likely to represent doing or being reference criteria: a recurring and enduring concern with a class of goals rather than the attainment of a particular end state. They are not normally terminated by successful or unsuccessful experiences. For example, a person who is trying to “see the best in difficult situations” is not likely to be content with a single accomplishment of this striving, to be followed by adopting a pessimistic orientation to situations.

Assessing Personal Goals

The assessment of personal goals begins with having respondents freely generate a list of their concerns, tasks, projects, or strivings. In this initial step, the definition of the construct is given, usually with examples, and participants write down as many goals as they can within a specified time period, ranging from 10 minutes (projects) to a few days (strivings). Klinger’s (1987) Interview Questionnaire (IntQ) requires participants to list their current concerns in 14 major life areas (friends, employment, family,). Some of the categories are further subdivided and are accompanied by illustrative concerns. In personal projects analysis, participants are told that personal projects are activities and concerns that people have and they are provided with examples such as “complete my English essay” and
“getting more outdoor exercise” (Little, 1989). They are instructed to list all personal projects that they are engaged in, or are thinking about at the time, and are told that these projects should represent everyday activities and concerns, and not necessarily major life projects.

In the case of personal strivings, individuals are given the definition of a personal striving as “The things that you typically or characteristically are trying to do in your everyday behavior”. They are then provided with several examples, such as “trying to persuade others one is right” and “trying to help others in need of help”. It is stressed that these strivings are phrased in terms of what the person is “trying” to do, regardless of whether the person is actually successful. They are also instructed that the strivings may be either positive or negative, and that the striving must refer to a repeating, recurring goal, not to a one-time concern. Complete instructions for the elicitation of personal strivings are provided in the Appendix.

In an interesting recent study, Ware and Mendelsohn (1997) varied the instructions and examples used to elicit personal goals from respondents. They found that different numbers of goals were generated depending on the instructional set, and that variations in instructions and examples can affect the correlations between appraisal dimensions and criterion variables. In their study, striving instructions were compared with project instructions and a set of “minimalist” instructions that were labeled simply “goals.” Striving instructions generated the largest number of units, and strivings were shown to predict self-esteem more strongly than projects or general goals. This higher validity coefficient for strivings provides some indirect support for Little’s (1996) thesis that strivings reflect more internal, self-defining aspects of personality. The Ware and Mendelsohn study holds significant implications for research on goals and SWB. Clearly, not all instructions are created equally, and the assessment protocol makes a difference in the types of units obtained, how these units are appraised, and their relation to criterion variables.

Personal Goal Dimensions

Following elicitation of the personal goals, respondents are asked to rate each goal on several dimensions. The dimensions used in
any one study depend upon the specific purposes of the research. Theoretically derived dimensions from motivational literature include value, expectancy for success, instrumentality, and commitment. Other dimensions are included because of their presumed relevance to the particular study. For instance, Ruehlman and Wolchik (1988) successfully assessed perceived interpersonal support and hindrance associated with specific projects. Personal goal assessments typically exploit the power of a mixed nomothetic-idiographic research strategy. The units are individually tailored to the respondent, yet the ratings scales used for appraising the goals yield quantitative comparisons between different persons independent of idiosyncratic goal content. Goal construals typically account for more variance in SWB scores than do goal content (Emmons, 1996). A review of the goal appraisal dimensions used in personal goals research can be found in Emmons (1997).

Goal Instrumentality Matrix

A number of investigators have pointed to the possibility of assessing the degree of inter-goal conflict within a person’s goal system. This can be accomplished by constructing for each person a matrix in which both the rows and columns list the person’s goals. Respondents are asked to rate the degree of conflict/instrumentality between each pair of goals, until the entire matrix is filled out. Each goal is in effect rated twice, in terms of the effect that it has on other goals and the effect that other goals have on it. For the matrix as a whole, the average amount of conflict (or the inverse, instrumentality) in the person’s goal system is determined and is used as a variable in between-subject analyses. Emmons and King (1988) found that conflict measured in this fashion prospectively predicted high levels of negative affect, psychosomatic complaints, and physician visits over a one-year period.

Psychometric Properties

The personal goal approaches differ in the degree to which they have been concerned with formal psychometric considerations such as reliability and validity. Klinger (1987) made a compelling case for why traditional reliability estimates are only partially appropriate for both the content and dimensions of personal goals. Commitment
to goals, particularly goals less central to the person, is likely to fluctuate over time. A lack of stability (a psychological process) need not imply lack of reliability (a psychometric situation). Internal consistency estimates are not wholly appropriate either. Since there is no assumption of homogeneity of goal content, there is no reason to expect high internal consistencies. Although such reliability values have been computed for various goal dimensions and have been shown to be acceptably high (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons and King, 1989; Sheldon and Kasser, 1995), the meaning of these is debatable.

While acknowledging these difficulties, some efforts have been made at estimating reliabilities of the goal measures. Both the stability of the goals themselves as well as the goal dimensions have been examined. Emmons (1986) computed both three and six-month stability coefficients for the 18 striving assessment dimensions. The stabilities of the individual scales ranged from 0.58 to 0.91 for the 1-month interval (with a mean of 0.73), and from 0.47 to 0.70 for the 3-month period (with a mean of 0.60). Social desirability and importance were the most stable while effort and impact were the least stable. Wadsworth and Ford (1983) reported three-month stabilities of 12 goal dimensions ranging from 0.48 to 0.82, with a mean of 0.58. Cox and Klinger (1988) administered the IntQ to 42 alcoholic inpatients upon intake and one month later. The test-retest correlations of 8 concern dimensions ranged from 0.07 to 0.77 with a mean of 0.30. Brunstein (1993; Brunstein, Danglemayer, and Schultheiss, 1996) reports 10 week stability coefficients ranging from 0.73 to 0.85 for the dimensions of commitment to and attainability of personal goals.

The stability of the goals themselves has also been investigated. In a sample of 40 undergraduates after one year, 82% of personal strivings listed at time 1 were still present (with minor wording changes, Emmons, 1989). After 18 months, 45% were still present, and a three-year follow up yielded a stability of just over 50%. Thus, there is evidence that strivings reflect enduring concerns in people’s lives. Many of the 50% that were no longer present were associated with a particular life context (college environment) that was no longer part of the person’s life.
**Goal Content and Well-Being**

One way to examine the relationship between personal goals and SWB is in terms of goal content. Is the content of what people are trying to do related to their level of SWB? In terms of personal goals, this requires moving from an idiographic to a nomothetic level of analysis, a move which is made possible when strivings are coded into broader, thematic categories. We have developed a coding system for classifying personal strivings into 12 content categories. These include the “Big 3” (McAdams, 1994) motive dispositions (achievement, affiliation-intimacy, and power) as well as other higher-order themes, such as independence, self-presentation, and generativity. Unlike many thematic measures of motivation (Smith, 1992), however, this results in the clustering together of strivings based on surface similarities, rather than underlying motivational content. The striving content categories, along with representative strivings, are provided in Table I.

In a number of different samples, the proportion of intimacy and affiliative strivings in a person’s striving system predicts greater well-being, while the proportion of power strivings tend to be related to lower levels of well-being (Emmons, 1991). Intimacy strivings reflect a concern for establishing deep and mutually gratifying relationships, whereas power strivings reflect a desire to influence others and have impact on others. Generativity strivings, defined as those strivings that involve creating, giving of oneself to others, and having an influence on future generations (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992) also relate to higher levels of life satisfaction and to measures of positive affectivity (Stemmerich and Emmons, 1993). This suggests that if power motivation can be channeled into generative concerns, its harmful effects on well-being can be mitigated. In general, the associations between striving content and SWB indicators have been modest, with most correlations ranging in the low to mid 0.20’s.

**Goal Structure and Well-Being**

The structural component of goal systems refers to the degree of (inter)dependence that exists between elements within a person’s overall goal hierarchy. Goals may be relatively independent of each other (although complete orthogonality between goals is unlikely),
### Table I

**Personal striving coding categories**

1. **Approach-avoidance**
   
   Avoidant goals refer to preventing or avoiding a negative, undesirable state of affairs (e.g. “Avoid letting anything upset me” “Not to feel inferior in social gatherings”).

2. **Achievement**
   
   Concern with success, accomplishment, competing with a standard of excellence (e.g. “realize my potential as far as a career is concerned”, “work towards higher athletic capabilities”).

3. **Affiliation**
   
   Concern with approval and acceptance; preventing loneliness (e.g. “be friendly with others so they will like me”, “meet new people through my present friends”, “avoid being left out”).

4. **Intimacy**
   
   Goals that express a desire for close, reciprocal relationships (e.g. “help my friends and let them know I care”, “accept others as they are”, “try to be a good listener”).

5. **Power**
   
   Goals that express a desire to influence and impact others (e.g. “force men to be intimate”, “be the best when with a group of people”, “make people laugh”).

6. **Personal growth and health**
   
   Goals that pertain to improving or maintaining mental and physical health (e.g. “develop a positive self-worth”, “not eat between meals to lose weight”, “learn new skills and apply old ones”).

7. **Self-presentation**
   
   Concern with making a favorable impression on others (e.g. “appear intelligent to others”, “avoid appearing outrageous”, “make myself physically attractive”).

8. **Independence**
   
   Goals that express a desire for autonomy and self-assertion (e.g. “be myself and not do things to please others”, “not be a pushover with others”, “be an individual”).

9. **Self-defeating**
   
   Strivings that reflect a lack of growth and/or harm to the self (e.g. “be perfect at everything”, “do things that annoy others”, “avoid the truth when faced with unpleasant facts”).

10. **Emotionality**
    
    Strivings that focus on feelings and emotional regulation (e.g. “be more considerate of Teresa’s feelings”, “be honest with myself about how I truly feel”, “suppress my feelings/ emotions”).

11. **Generativity**
    
    Strivings that reflect a desire for symbolic immortality (e.g. “make a lasting contribution to my agency’s mission”, “feel useful to society”, “make my life mean something”).

12. **Spirituality**
    
    Strivings that are oriented to transcending the self (e.g. “deepen my relationship with God”, “learn to tune into higher power throughout the day”, “appreciate God’s creations”).
instrumental for the achievement of other goals, or conflictual with respect to their mutual attainment. Goal conflict, in its various forms assessed through multiple methods, is a consistently strong predictor of diminished well-being.

Conflict refers to the situation in which a goal that a person wishes to accomplish interferes with the attainment of at least one other goal that the individual simultaneously wishes to accomplish. For example, the goal of trying to spend time with one’s family may interfere with the goal of doing well in one’s career. The debilitating effects of conflict on self-regulatory processes has been discussed in some detail by Bargh and Gollwitzer (1994), Emmons, King, and Sheldon (1993), Gollwitzer (1993) and Karoly (1993). Gollwitzer, and Emmons et al. describe how individuals may resolve conflicts between competing intentions in the service of attaining valued personal goals. The inability to resolve chronic conflicts is associated with poorer well-being. Conflict between goals and ambivalence (approach-avoidance conflict) are associated with a variety of physical symptoms, as well as an increase in health center visits during a one-year follow-up (Emmons and King, 1988). Interpersonal goal conflict is also related to poorer psychological well-being, and an increased risk for physical illness (King and Emmons, 1991).

Colby (1996) has explored the association between identity formation and goal conflict. She suggests that the process of identity development can bring previously disparate and conflicting goals into harmony. Preliminary support for this hypothesis was found in a sample of college undergraduates. Students in the moratorium phase of identity development reported more goal conflicts compared with students who were characterized by other identity statuses. This implies that a higher order organizational structure such as identity, can result in the effective management of lower level goal conflicts.

SPIRITUAL STRIVINGS: ULTIMATE CONCERNS AND HAPPINESS

Since we first began collecting lists of personal strivings over a dozen years ago, there have always been strivings that have not been categorizable given existing coding categories, most of which were patterned after the thematic motivation literature. In particular, striv-
ings pertaining to the sacred or spiritual realm of experience appear frequently enough that it might prove useful to examine these types of strivings in more detail. After all, religion is a basic category of human experience. Approximately 3.5 billion people around the world consider religion, in one form or another, to be an important influence in their daily lives (Paloutzian, 1996). In North America, nine out of ten people profess faith in God, three out of four pray regularly, and nearly forty percent attend religious services at least weekly (Koenig, 1997).

Given these statistics, it would be surprising if religious faith had no influence on people’s goals. Spiritual concerns do find expression in one form or another through personal goals. An examination of strivings that participants have spontaneously generated in past research does indeed seem to indicate such concerns. For example, participants report typically trying to “be aware of the spiritual meaningfulness of my life”, “discern and follow God’s will for my life”, “bring my life in line with my beliefs”, and “communicate my faith with other people.” Illustrations of other spiritual or “self-transcendent strivings” are shown in Table II.

Spirituality does appear to be a motivating force in people’s lives. It seems likely that such motivational concerns would find expression in the goals which people report they are typically trying to seek in their everyday lives. One of the functions of a religious belief system and a religious world view is that it provides “an ultimate vision of what people should be striving for in their lives” (Parga-
ment and Park, 1995, p. 15), and the strategies to reach those ends. Similarly, Apter (1985) sees the religious state of mind as “telic” providing a guide to “the most serious and far-ranging goals there can possibly be” (p. 69).

The most current concern in the personal striving laboratory has been with these goals that might be described as spiritual or religious in content, and with persons who elevate these to a superordinate status in their goal systems. Do people possess goals of a spiritual or religious nature, and, if they do, do these goals make a difference for their well-being?

Religion and Subjective Well-Being

Religious commitment and participation consistently emerge as significant contributors in quality of life (QOL) indicators such as life satisfaction, happiness, and meaning in life (Chamberlain and Zika, 1992; Diener, 1984; Levin and Tobin, 1995; Poloma and Pendleton, 1990). Poloma and Pendleton provided a comprehensive critique of the research literature on religiosity and domains of general well-being. Employing eight measures of religiosity, these authors found that religiosity was an important predictor of general life satisfaction, existential well-being, and overall happiness. They concluded that “the concept of religion obviously is a domain that merits the serious study of those who research well-being” (1990, p. 270).

One conclusion that is frequently drawn from the literature on well-being and religiosity is that the measure of religiousness employed and the component of well-being under examination matter. In fact, depending upon the measures used, researchers can potentially document helpful, harmful, or no effects of religiousness on well-being. At a minimum, critical distinctions need to be made between extrinsic (religion as a means to an end) and intrinsic (religion as a way of life) religiousness, with measures of the former generally showing negative correlations with well-being and measures of the latter showing positive correlations with well-being (Ventis, 1995). Some have argued (Kirkpatrick and Hood, 1990; Pargament, 1992) that even a rudimentary distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness fails to begin capturing the complexity inherent in the construct of religiosity or spirituality.
On the well-being side, distinctions need to be made between the presence of positive well-being (e.g. happiness, morale, life satisfaction), and the absence of negative states such as depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms (Ryff, 1989). Distinctions should also be made between affective well-being, such as happiness, and cognitive well-being, such as life satisfaction and meaning in life. Depending on how each set of variables is measured, one can find evidence for either the helpful, or harmful effects of religiosity on mental health. Yet, as Batson and Burris (1994) persuasively argue, research needs to move beyond the rhetoric of “celebrating or castigating religion based on extreme examples” (p. 150). The way to do this is by conducting research that acknowledges the complexity of each construct and attempting to be true to this complexity by striving for systematic measurement of the variables involved.

Defining Spirituality

Research on spiritual goals and well-being must first grapple with the definitional problem: How are spiritual/religious goals to be defined and assessed? Religion is an extraordinarily diverse, multifaceted construct (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis, 1992). Religious or spiritual strivings may be different from non-religious (secular) strivings, just as religious experience may be different from other types of psychological experience. Batson et al. (1992) depict religion as (a) unique – religious experience and religious concerns are more comprehensive and central to a person’s life than are other concerns, (b) psychologically complex – religious experience involves a complex array of variables – emotions, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and social environments, and (c) diverse – the experience and expression of religion of different individuals can be very different. Achieving conceptual clarity and methodological precision, thus, becomes the challenge for the researcher intent on studying spiritual or religious units of analysis.

Spirituality, as typically defined, encompasses a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, for the highest of human potential (Pargament, 1997). This definition is consistent with a number of authors who, while acknowledging the diversity of meaning, affirm as a common core meaning of spirituality/religion that of the recognition of a transcendent, meta-empirical dimension
of reality (e.g. Kelly, 1995; Koenig, 1995; Pargament and Park, 1995; Worthington, Kurusu, McCullough, and Sandage, 1996). For example, Martin and Carlson (1988) define spirituality as “a process by which individuals recognize the importance of orienting their lives to something nonmaterial that is beyond or larger than themselves ... so that there is an acknowledgment of and at least some dependence upon a higher power, or Spirit” (p. 59).

Personal strivings represent recurring and relatively enduring concerns, in that they pertain to states of mind that persist over time and across situations. This is in contrast to the “current concerns” construct (Klinger, 1977), which is defined as the interim between commitment to a goal and its successful attainment or disengagement. From the perspective of goal theory, spirituality can be conceptualized as “ultimate concern”, a term used by the existential theologian Paul Tillich (1957) in his classic analysis of the affective and cognitive bases of faith. According to Tillich, the essence of religion, in its broadest form, is ultimate concern. An ultimate concern (a) is one in which maximal value is invested, (b) possesses the power to “center” one’s life, and (c) demands “total surrender” (Tillich, 1957, p. 3). When ultimate concerns center on the sacred (Pargament, 1997) they are considered spiritual. The sacred refers to God, or related names for God, such as divine power, Supreme Being, Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Truth. Spiritual personal strivings reflect an acknowledgement of the Ultimate or Absolute and either a collective (religious) or individualistic (spiritual) desire to orient one’s life to the Ultimate.

Given this definition, is it possible to develop a set of coding criteria to classify strivings as spiritual, based on a categorical accounting of the target of the individual striving as directed toward transcendent concerns? Previous goal taxonomic systems have largely ignored this dimension of experience; thus, the development of a reliable system for coding spirituality could significantly advance research on religion and SWB.

Assessing Spirituality Through Personal Strivings

Personal strivings offer an advantageous approach for both conceptualizing and measuring spirituality. Religious attitudes and behaviors are most often the variables of choice in empirical research
on religiosity and SWB. Many of these are single-item measures of questionable reliability and validity. A personal goals approach offers a perspective that transcends measures of denominational affiliation, retrospective reports of church attendance or prayer or other spiritual activity, and general attitudes toward religion to encompass the diversity of daily goals, enduring strivings, and ultimate concerns of a spiritually-oriented lifestyle under the same theoretical umbrella or “sacred canopy” (Berger, 1967). The personal strivings approach exploits the power of a combined idiographic/nomothetic assessment strategy (Klinger, 1995). This approach has the advantage of tailoring the assessment to each person while still permitting quantitative comparisons between persons. In other words, while each participant produces a unique list of personal goal concerns, each person rates their own goals on the same rating scales that others use. This is able to capture the idiosyncratic ways in which individuals strive to obtain or maintain a concern with the sacred in their everyday lives. At the same time, it allows for conclusions to be drawn about the relationship between spirituality and quality of life indicators that generalize across persons.

To illustrate briefly what a personal goals perspective can offer the scientific study of spirituality, consider two individuals, A.W. and J.I. On conventional measures of religiousness, such as worship attendance, prayer frequency, and importance of religion they appear very similar to each other. In fact, they might achieve identical scores on these indices. Yet these surface similarities obscure fundamental differences in structural and functional properties of their spiritual goal hierarchies. A.W. has the goals of “getting closer to God”, “cultivating spiritual meaning in my life” and “discerning God’s will for my life.” Furthermore, he appraises these goals as extremely important, but has a rather vague notion of how he will actually go about pursuing them, and sees them as conflicting with more mundane pursuits in the realms of work and family. J.I., on the other hand, has included among his strivings “memorizing 5 scripture verses a day”, “being forgiving when dealing with my ex-spouse”, and “witnessing to others when opportunities arise.” J.I.’s relatively more focused and concrete strivings, for which he perceives a high likelihood of attainment, are likely to have measur-
ably different effects on his physical and mental health compared to A.W.’s negative appraisals of his more abstract goals. Previous research has demonstrated that a tradeoff between manageability and meaningfulness of goals is most conducive to psychological and physical well-being (Emmons, 1992).

In one study (Emmons, Dank and Mongrain, 1997), we reported the development of a set of coding criteria to classify strivings as spiritual based on a categorical accounting of the target of the individual striving as directed toward ultimate concerns. Our central purpose in that study was to test the validity of that classificatory system in predicting levels of psychological well-being.

In developing criteria for identifying spiritual content in personal strivings, there were two primary considerations. First, the criteria had to adequately represent the multidimensionality of religiousness. A second concern was that the criteria be general enough to capture spiritual concern in a non-controversial, non-sectarian, and in as inclusive a manner as possible. Although spirituality is often associated with religious beliefs and practices, we did not wish to rule out non-religious spirituality. Beginning with James’ (1902) distinction between feelings, acts, and experiences, psychologists have historically partitioned religious experience into meaningful clusters of activity. Glock (Glock, 1962; Glock and Stark, 1965) developed a multidimensional representation of religiosity that lends itself to a coding of spiritual strivings, by dividing religiosity into knowledge, feelings, practice, belief and effects. Of these, knowledge, feelings, and practice are most likely to capture the manifestation of spirituality in strivings. We initially utilized this classification system for the coding of strivings. Thus, spiritual strivings are those that reflected (a) increasing one’s knowledge of a higher power (“Increase my knowledge of the Bible”, “Seek God’s will in my life”, “Learn about God’s creation in the world”); (b) developing or maintaining a relationship with a higher power (“Deepen my relationship with God”, “Learn to tune into higher power throughout the day”, “Increase my faith in God”); (c) attempts to live or exercise one’s spiritual beliefs in daily life (“Not be judgmental”, “Witness to others”, “Treat others with compassion”). These criteria, based primarily on previous psychological theory and research on religion, were developed in Phase 1.
An examination of theological writings on spirituality and spiritual formation led to the inclusion of additional criteria in Phase 2. The core component of spirituality is reflected in the notion of “transcendence.” Strivings that are oriented above and beyond the self, that reflect an integration of the individual with larger and more complex units, or that reflect deepening or maintaining a relationship with a higher power, show a desire to transcend the self. Strivings are coded as spiritual if they reflect concern for an integration of the person with larger and more complex units: with humanity, nature, with the cosmos (“to achieve union with the totality of existence”, “to immerse myself in nature and be part of it”, “to approach life with mystery and awe”). Strivings are content analyzed by trained coders for the presence of self-transcendent themes. Coding strivings in this manner allows for greater inclusivity than do many existing measures of religiosity and will likely be sensitive to the diversity of spiritual expression in a religiously pluralistic culture. At this point in time the criteria remain open; it is anticipated that the existing criteria will be refined and additional criteria will be developed, based upon the outcomes of striving-based research and continued examination of relevant literature. Examples of spiritual strivings are in shown in Table II.

Two independent coders, blind to identifying information, scored the strivings for the four categories of spirituality. For each of the 15 strivings, the presence or absence of each of the four category themes was assessed. If a striving met the criteria for at least one of the four categories, it was deemed a spiritual striving. A given striving could not be scored for more than one category. Disagreements between coders were discussed until resolved; thus, coders achieved 100% agreement. For each participant, the proportion of spiritual strivings from their total list of nominated strivings was determined. Proportions were used since not all participants generated exactly 15 strivings.

To supplement the self-reports, spouse-reports of strivings were also obtained. Spouses were asked to provide a list of strivings that they believed characterized their partner. In response to “What do you think your partner typically tries to do?”, they were provided with two blank lines in which to complete the stem “He/she typically tries to . . .” They were instructed not to confer with their partners.
and not to discuss the study until the questionnaire packets had been mailed back to us. Partners generated an average of 10.4 strivings for their spouses.

The proportion of spiritual strivings within the person’s overall striving profile was significantly associated with rated importance of religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer, and measure of intrinsic religiousness (Gorsuch and McPherson, 1989). With respect to SWB, spiritual strivings tended to be related to higher levels of well-being, especially to greater purpose in life and to both marital and overall life satisfaction. Spiritual strivings accounted for significant variance in well-being outcomes above and beyond the religious variables of attendance, rated importance, and prayer frequency. The associations between spiritual goals and well-being were generally stronger for women than for men, and held when using spouse-reports of strivings as well as spouse-reports of well-being. Spiritual strivings were rated as more important, requiring more effort, and engaged in for more intrinsic reasons than non-spiritual strivings. Spiritual strivings were also associated with lower levels of goal conflict. Results indicated that it is possible to reliably assess spiritual motivation in personal goals, and that individual differences in spiritual motivation are related to various components of well-being. Moreover, the correlations between the proportion of spiritual strivings and well-being measures were stronger than any other type of striving that has been studied, exceeding those for intimacy, power, or generativity. It does appear to be the case, that when it comes to well-being, “not all goals are created equally” (Ryan, Deci, Sheldon, and Kasser, 1996).

**Appraisals of Spiritual Strivings**

Although significant associations between spiritual content in goals and indicators of SWB have now been established, the mechanisms responsible for these links remain largely unknown. One of the advantages of a mixed idiographic-nomothetic strategy is that it permits quantitative indices to be derived from the qualitative information from individual persons. Perhaps spiritual and non-spiritual strivings differ in appraisals across specific appraisal dimensions. If spiritual strivings are appraised relatively more favorably along motivational dimensions of expectancy, purpose, effort, and the like,
TABLE III
MANOVA results for SAS dimensions by spiritual strivings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample 1 (N = 78)</th>
<th>Sample 2 (N = 40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>4.55&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.41&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>1.23&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.67&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social desirability</td>
<td>2.46&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.25&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Across rows, means with same subscripts are significantly different at or below $p < 0.01$. Sample 1, mean age = 28. Sample 2, mean age = 56.

This would be suggestive of the processes through which spiritual strivings enable positive mental health outcomes. More generally, such an analysis would extend the religiosity-mental health link by exploring motivational mechanisms by which personal religiousness might affect mental and physical health outcomes (Koenig, 1997; Schumaker, 1992). Spiritual strivings were rated as significantly more valued, less effortful and difficult, more attainable, more likely to be engaged in for intrinsic reasons, and more instrumental for accomplishing other strivings, when compared to non-spiritual strivings. In Table III, it can be seen that participants (in this case, two samples of community adults) appraised their spiritual strivings less ambiguously, as more meaningful and less socially desirable than non-spiritual strivings. Sample 2, taken from a local conservative Protestant church, also viewed their spiritual strivings as leading to less interpersonal strain relative to their non-spiritual strivings.

In summary, across two diverse samples, spiritual strivings were appraised more favorably than were non-spiritual strivings, thus suggesting a means by which spiritual strivings can impact well-being. Goal-specific appraisals have been shown to be significant predictors of subjective well-being (Emmons, 1986). The specific pattern of appraisals that characterize spiritual strivings (greater value, instrumentality and intrinsicness, and less conflict, effort, and difficulty) has been associated with states of positive emotional well-being (Emmons, 1996; Palys and Little, 1983; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, and Deci, 1996).
Striving Instrumentality and Spirituality

Before considering the implications of measuring spirituality through goals, one final empirical study will be described. Psychological conflicts resulting in the fragmentation of personality have been associated with a host of pathological conditions, including poor mental and physical health, disrupted relationships, and decline in cognitive performance (Emmons, King, and Sheldon, 1993). Given the ubiquity of motivational conflict in everyday life, it becomes imperative to identify conditions that might ameliorate conflict-induced stress and lead to greater harmony, coherence, and integration of personality. Long-term integration requires an overarching framework for diverse activities, interests, and goals of the person. One such framework is that which is provided by religion. Personal religious motivation, defined in terms of spiritual, goals, beliefs, values, and plans is hypothesized by psychologists (e.g. Allport, 1950; Ellison and Smith, 1991) and theologians (e.g. Tillich, 1957) to be a central integrating force in people’s lives.

A recent study (Emmons and Cheung, 1997) tested the hypothesis that religiosity or spirituality can serve as an integrating framework which reduces the overall amount of conflict within a person’s goal system and fosters coherence in personality. The relationship between spiritual strivings and personality integration was assessed through measures of goal coherence (Sheldon and Kasser, 1995). Seventy-eight adults were administered the Striving Instrumentality Matrix, a $10 \times 10$ matrix in which participants make pairwise comparisons between each pair of strivings reflecting the degree to which each striving facilitates or impedes progress toward the other striving. A global striving conflict index was created by summing up the individual ratings for each goal. Two other integration measures were derived from the appraisal dimensions. Ambivalence was assessed by asking how much unhappiness would be felt upon successful consummation of the goal (Emmons and King, 1988), and interpersonal conflict was assessed by asking participants to rate the degree of interpersonal strain that the striving produces in their everyday interactions. All striving integration measures possess adequate reliability and validity (Emmons and King, 1988; Sheldon and Kasser, 1995).
Following the striving assessment, a number of questionnaire measures of conflict were administered. These included the Ambivalence Over Expressing Religion Questionnaire (ARQ), a 25 item-scale that measures conflicts relating to the communication of religious beliefs, the Beliefs About Conflict Scale (BACS) and the conflict items from the Religious Quest Scale (Kojetin et al., 1987). All of these can be considered measures of “horizontal coherence” (Sheldon and Kasser, 1995), in that they reflect instrumental or conflictual relations between elements at a similar level of abstraction.

Pearson correlations were computed between the proportion of spiritual strivings from each person’s total number of strivings and each measure of integration. A composite measure of integration was created by first standardizing, and then summing the 6 integration measures. Overall goal conflict was significantly negatively associated with both spiritual strivings ($p < 0.001$) and theistic (those in which explicit reference to God is made) strivings ($p < 0.01$). Both measures of spiritual striving were negatively related to scores on the Quest-conflict scale ($p$'s $< 0.01$). The overall composite integration measure correlated positively and significantly with spiritual and theistic strivings ($p$’s $< 0.05$). None of the other four measures of conflict were related to the two striving indices. T-tests revealed that spiritual and theistic strivings produced overall less conflict (hence greater integration) compared with non-spiritual and non-theistic strivings (both $p$’s $< 0.01$). Controlling for intrinsic religiosity did not result in a significant diminution of the correlations between overall conflict and spiritual strivings. This is important because it might be argued that intrinsic religiousness is a measure of the degree to which religiousness is integrated within the overall personality. Yet, we did not find a widely used measure of intrinsic orientation (Gorsuch and McPherson, 1989) to be related to overall integration.

Tillich (1957) stated that “the ultimate concern gives depth, direction, and unity to all other concerns, and with them, to the whole personality” (p. 105). The results of the Emmons and Cheung study provide support for Tillich’s thesis. Greater levels of spiritual strivings, whether measured at relatively broad or narrower levels, tended to be associated with less overall conflict within a
person’s goal system, and thus, a greater degree of integration. Spiritual strivings are also likely to meet basic organismic needs for self-transcendence, thus are likely to be inherently satisfying and growth-promoting (Sheldon and Kasser, 1995). Spirituality may thus foster optimal health through a reduction of overall conflict, in that a commitment to a spiritually-oriented lifestyle is one factor that appears to facilitate congruence, integration, and wholeness of the person.

Promises and Limitations of Assessing Spirituality Through Personal Goals

Personal strivings and other goal units would appear to hold promise as conceptual units for measuring personal spirituality. Because it deals with the inner life of the person, the strivings approach is ideal for examining the process of spiritual formation across the life span. It provides both a window into naturally occurring personal spirituality as well as a potential intervention tool for cultivating the human spirit. Future work might find it profitable to obtain separate indices of experiential, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of spirituality and to distinguish between the goals of deepening spirituality and increasing or maintaining religious involvement (Atchley, 1995).

Although the personal strivings approach appears to represent a heuristically useful way of conceptualizing personal spirituality, we must not assume that it reflects the sum total of a person’s spiritual life. Undoubtedly there are significant aspects of personal spirituality that may not be manifested in and articulated through what the person is “typically trying to do.” For example, ideological beliefs regarding particular religious world-views may or may not be revealed in personal strivings. Nor, would beliefs pertaining to life after death, salvation and redemption, or other ultimate concerns necessarily be revealed. Rather, the strivings approach is likely to capture “pragmatic spirituality” and the translation of a broader spiritual orientation into daily commitments and concerns. While it is important to note the boundary conditions of the strivings construct, we also believe that this approach makes a valuable contribution to the literature on personality, well-being, and spirituality.
From a research perspective, the bulk of psychological research on religion has focused on dispositional traits, measuring individual differences in constructs such as the popular intrinsic/extrinsic dimension. The limitations of focusing solely at the trait level while relying exclusively on the questionnaire measurement paradigm have been noted (Batson et al., 1992; Gorsuch, 1984). In his levels of personality framework, McAdams (1995), distinguishes three levels of personality: dispositional traits (Level I), personal concerns (Level II), and identity or the life narrative (Level III). Units at Levels II and III, contextualized concerns and identity issues remain largely unexplored and have much to offer the psychologist interested in religious issues within personality.

It would not be an overstatement to say that there is now considerable momentum and interest building in studying the psychospiritual nature of people's lives. A growing body of literature links religiousness with well-being (Brown, 1994; Schumaker, 1992; Ventis, 1995). Pargament (1992) and Bergin (1991) among others, have argued that psychologists need to treat the topic of spiritual motivation seriously, since people who report themselves to be motivated spiritually behave (or feel) differently from those who report other motivations. Measures of spiritual motivation do contribute significant and unique variance to outcomes that are of central interest to quality of life researchers. Various fields of psychology, in particular clinical and health psychology, are becoming increasingly aware of and impressed by the centrality of religious concerns in people's lives, and the impact that these concerns have on mental, physical and interpersonal outcomes (Bergin, 1991; Kelly, 1995; Kimble et al., 1995; Martin and Carlson, 1987; Paloutzian and Kirkpatrick, 1995).

Conclusions

The measurement of spirituality through personal strivings highlights the potentials opportunities and challenges for quality of life researchers interested in the intricacies of personal spirituality. More generally, this article considered measurement issues associated with telic approaches to subjective well-being, a theoretical approach that has shown considerable utility in accounting for individual differences in SWB. A number of highly fruitful research
programs have provided an empirical foundation for a motivational theory of well-being. The applicability of the goals framework for understanding religion’s role in mental and physical health appears equally promising. Previous work suggests the relationship between religion and well-being to be complex and multifaceted. The inclusion of middle-level units of personality such as strivings into spiritual assessments can complement existing variables and may provide valuable insights into this significant realm of human experience.

APPENDIX

One way to describe someone’s personality is to consider the purposes or goals that the person seems to be seeking in their everyday behavior. We are interested in the things that you typically or characteristically are trying to do. We might call these objectives “strivings.” Here are some examples of strivings:

- Trying to be physically attractive to others
- Trying to persuade others that one is right
- Trying to help others in need of help
- Trying to seek new and exciting experiences
- Trying to avoid being noticed by others
- Trying to avoid feeling inferior to others

Note that these strivings are phrased in terms of what a person is “trying” to do, regardless of whether the person is actually successful. For example, a person might “try to get others to like them” without necessarily being successful.

These strivings may be fairly broad, such as “trying to make others happy” or more specific “trying to make my partner happy”. Also note that the strivings can be either positive or negative. That is, they may be about something you typically try to obtain or keep, or things that you typically try to avoid or prevent. For example, you might typically try to obtain attention from others, or you might typically try to avoid calling attention to yourself.

You can see that this way of describing yourself is different from using trait adjectives (friendly, intelligent, honest). We do not want you to use trait adjectives. Since you may have never thought of yourself in this way before, think carefully about what we are asking you to do before you write anything down. Please keep your attention focused on yourself. Do not mentally compare the things that you typically do with what other
people do. Think of yourself and your purposes alone. Be as honest and as objective as possible. Do not give simply socially desirable strivings or strivings which you think you “ought” to have.

You might find it useful to think about your goals in different domains of your life: work and school, home and family, social relationships, and leisure/recreation. Think about all of your desires, goals, wants, and hopes in these different areas.

On the back of this page, write down as many strivings as you can. There is additional room at the bottom in case you need extra space. There is no limit to the number of strivings you can list, but we would like you to write down at least 10. Take your time with this task; spend some time thinking about your goals before you begin.

NOTE

* Preparation of this article was made possible by a grant from the John M. Templeton Foundation.

REFERENCES


Department of Psychology, University of California,
One Shields Avenue,
Davis, CA 95616-8686