

Daily Goals, Life Goals, and Worst Fears: Means, Ends, and Subjective Well-Being

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ABSTRACT This study addressed the relations among personal strivings (daily goals) and future life goals and worst fears. Eighty undergraduate participants (62 women, 18 men) listed their daily goals, their ultimate life goals, and their worst fears, and completed questionnaire measures of subjective well-being. Daily goals were content-analyzed for relevance to attaining life goals or avoiding worst fears. Daily goals that were instrumental to life goals or that avoided worst fears were rated as more important but also more difficult by participants. Working on daily goals avoiding one's worst fears was negatively related to measures of subjective well-being, controlling for daily goal progress, difficulty, ambivalence, and importance. Working on daily goals that were instrumental to one's life goals only weakly predicted well-being. The avoidance of worst fears interacted with daily goal appraisals such that individuals who experienced little progress at daily goals that served to avoid their "worst case

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scenario” experienced the lowest levels of subjective well-being. In addition, progress at daily goals that were relevant to accomplishing one’s life goals was significantly more strongly related to subjective well-being than progress at daily goals that were unrelated to one’s life goals. Results indicate that daily goals are used to enact life goals and avoid worst fears and that these means–end relations have implications for well-being.

Commitment to and progress on valued daily goals is strongly associated with the experience of subjective well-being (SWB) (e.g., Emmons, 1989, 1992; Omodei & Wearing, 1990; Palys & Little, 1983). Low difficulty, and the absence of ambivalence and conflict among and within goals, have been found to relate to psychological and physical well-being (Emmons & King, 1989; Palys & Little, 1983). Personalized goals can vary widely in depth and breadth, from “magnificent obsessions” to “trivial pursuits” (Little, 1989; Emmons, 1992). Some examples of daily goals help illustrate this point: “to grow out my bangs,” “to exercise three times each week,” “to smile more.” Given the potentially mundane character of these daily goals, one might question the role of personalized goals in the loftier pursuit of realizing one’s life dreams. However, when viewed in the broader hierarchy of a person’s life plans, even seemingly trivial pursuits may emerge as means to a larger end. For instance, the goal “to grow out my bangs” takes on new significance if placed in the context of the person’s life goals (e.g., “to become a fashion model” or “to become a successful actress”) or worst fears (e.g., “to end up alone and ugly”). Simply put, some daily goals may be building blocks toward an imagined future or escape routes from a dreaded life outcome.

This study focused on the relations of daily goals to both positive and negative long-term outcomes: life goals and worst fears. It seems obvious that daily goals might be instrumental to the accomplishment of some desired life goal. We will refer to this means–end relation as “life goal achievement” (LGA), a term that indicates that the accomplishment of a daily goal facilitates the achievement of a life goal. An individual might seek the daily goal “to meet someone new every day” in order to achieve the future goal “to be surrounded by good friends and never be alone.” The second type of means–end relation examined in this study is referred to as “worst fear avoidance” (WFA). In thinking about the future, a person may see not only what he or she hopes to have happen but also what he or she most hopes to avoid (see Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Thus, daily goals might also be focused on avoiding a

worst possible scenario. Indeed, research suggests that some successful individuals might get that way by working to avoid failure rather than by seeking to achieve success (Norem & Cantor, 1986; Norem & Illingworth, 1993). An individual may strive mightily at the daily goal “to do my best at all that I do” in order to avoid the worst fear “to be such a failure I am unable to face my family and friends.”

This investigation had two purposes with regard to means–end relationships between daily goals and life goals and worst fears. First, this study examined the ramifications of LGA and WFA for the quality of daily goal pursuit—that is, how important, difficult, or conflictful daily goals are related to life goals/worst fears. Second, this study examined the relation of LGA and WFA to SWB. Theories of self-regulation (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990) often point to affective states as indicative of an individual’s progress toward valued goals. The present study examined the degree to which working on daily goals that are instrumental to the achievement of life goals (or to avoiding worst fears) related to the experience of SWB.

Theoretical Issues

Daily goals in an action hierarchy. A common assumption of personalized goal approaches to personality is that goals exist within a system of hierarchically organized superordinate and subordinate goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), in which functioning at one level of the hierarchy has ramifications for other levels. Although this hierarchical arrangement of goals has been widely assumed, this assumption of means–end relations between daily goals and long-term life goals has been subjected to very little empirical testing in the personality literature (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

A theoretical framework that readily encompasses the hierarchical organization of daily goals and life goals/worst fears is control theory (Powers, 1973). Control theory emphasizes the embeddedness of daily goals in a motivational hierarchy. Within control theory, self-regulation occurs in a dynamic system of negative feedback loops in which the organism seeks to close discrepancies between its current and its desired states (i.e., goals). Carver and Scheier (1982, 1990) have described in detail the implications of control theory for conceptualizations of self-regulation, two of which are of great importance here. First, within control theory, the importance of a goal at a low level in the hierarchy is, at least to some

extent, dependent on the degree to which its attainment contributes to the attainment of a higher level goal (Carver & Scheier, 1990). This implication suggests that individuals ought to value more highly daily goals that serve to attain their life goals. Thus, if a person does possess a higher level goal of becoming a fashion model, the daily goal “to grow out my bangs” might well be valued quite highly by that person.

A second important implication of control theory for goal functioning is that the higher levels of the hierarchical organization are more essential and self-definitional than the lower levels (Carver & Scheier, 1990, p. 20). Thus, the impact of success or failure at a daily goal on a person’s sense of self-esteem and well-being would depend upon the relevance of that daily goal to the individual’s life goals/worst fears. To the extent that our affect informs us of how we are doing in areas we value (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1990), we might expect that SWB would be particularly related to progress at goals that are instrumental to the attainment of our life goals or to the avoidance of our worst fears. Thus, an individual whose life goal is “to become a doctor” might become quite distressed in the face of obstacles to the daily goal “to get As in my biology classes.”

Implications for SWB. Control theory predicts that the impact of daily goal progress on SWB should be a function of the relation of those daily goals to life goals/worst fears. A number of studies have addressed the psychological implications of short- and long-term goal striving. Research has shown that having “low level” proximal goals relates positively to feelings of success and self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Morgan, 1985). More long-term distal goals have been found to be related to heightened intrinsic motivation (Manderlink & Harakiewicz, 1984). Extrapolating from this research, it seems that an individual would benefit from conjoining daily goals and life goals. By pursuing daily goals that serve life goals one would enjoy the feelings of success and efficacy associated with the achievement of daily goals while experiencing the intrinsic motivation, deeper satisfaction, and meaning associated with working toward a life goal. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) examined the relation between individuals’ daily goals and their future life goals. Participants in that study were asked to rate the extent to which their current daily goals mapped onto a set of future goals provided by the experimenters. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) found that psychological well-being was related to the degree to which daily goals related to future

goals, particularly to future goals that were intrinsically motivating. Thus, LGA has been found to relate to SWB. Importantly, however, the future life goals considered were not idiographically defined.

McIntosh, Harlow, and Martin (1995) obtained apparently contradictory findings regarding the ramifications of “linking” a lower-order goal to some higher-level goal. Their study showed that “linkers” are prone to rumination and depression. It is important to note, however, that these participants were asked specifically about the degree to which their future happiness depended on the achievement of a variety of goals (e.g., money, achievement, etc.). Because McIntosh, Harlow and Martin (1995) asked participants, specifically, the degree to which their happiness depended on attaining the goal, participants may have focused on how unhappy they would be at the loss of the goal. Furthermore, in this study, the abstract life goal considered for all participants was happiness; no consideration was given to the more specific long-term life goals participants might have been trying to accomplish. Finally, it is important to note that participants who felt that their happiness was independent of attaining a particular life goal might have been revealing more about their self-perceived resilience than the importance of achieving their life goals.

Thus, there is some contradictory evidence that seeking to accomplish one’s life goals through daily goals is related to SWB. What are the implications of seeking daily goals that seek to avoid one’s worst fears? Research from a variety of areas suggests that WFA ought to relate negatively to SWB. For instance, research on defensive pessimism has shown that individuals who focus on dreaded catastrophe rather than success in a given pursuit tend to miss out on the positive affect associated with goal attainment (Norem & Cantor, 1986; Norem & Illingworth, 1993). In the area of achievement motivation, Elliott and Church (1997) proposed a hierarchy of approach and avoidance goals. They found that avoidance goals were negatively related to both intrinsic motivation and to goal progress. Thorne and Klohnen (1993), using a sample of women, found a relationship between depression and avoidant wishes. Thus, WFA (seeking daily goals that avoid one’s worst fears) seems likely to relate to lowered SWB and to lowered daily goal progress. Individuals who seek to avoid their worst fears through their daily goals may be sapping the potential of daily goal pursuit to provide positive affect and a sense of purpose.

The present study differs from previous research in at least four important ways. First, both daily goal appraisals and means–end relations

of daily goals to WFA and LGA were included. Working on daily goals that are appraised as important, not too difficult, and low in conflict has been found to be related to SWB in a variety of studies (e.g., Emmons, 1986; Omodei & Wearing, 1990). Because the means–end relationships that might exist between daily goals and life goals/worst fears are likely to relate to the appraisal of daily goals, previous research may have confounded these predictors of SWB. It is important, then, to include both types of goal variables (i.e., long-term goals and daily goal appraisals) in order to tease apart their independent relations to SWB. Second, this investigation included not only life goals but also avoidance of worst fears goals. A great deal of research has shown that individuals possess “worst possible selves” and that individuals can be motivated by these dreaded future outcomes (e.g., Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; Norem & Illingworth, 1993). Previous research using idiographic methods has not included these dreaded outcomes in research on the goal hierarchy. The pattern of results reviewed above with regard to avoidant goals and SWB, intrinsic motivation, and goal progress suggests that worst fear avoidance may be a strong negative predictor of SWB.

Third, this study differs from past research in that we used coder ratings as opposed to self-ratings of the connections between participants’ current daily goals and their life goals and worst fears. Previous research has relied solely on self-report of goal appraisals, goal progress, and the means–end relations that might exist between daily goals and future life goals. The present study afforded an examination of the implications of goal means–end relations apart from issues of shared method variance or awareness. (The potential difficulties of this approach will be discussed later.)

The fourth and final aspect of this study that distinguishes it from past research is that daily goals, life goals, and worst fears were idiographically defined. Typically, in describing the higher levels of the control hierarchy of motivation, researchers have resorted to very broad constructs, often assuming that higher levels of motivation are unavailable to awareness (cf. Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Aronoff & Wilson, 1985; Emmons & King, 1989; Emmons & McAdams, 1991). Many theories posit a specific goal or small set of goals that occupy this top level. In Deci and Ryan’s (1995; cf. Sheldon & Kasser, 1995) self-determination theory, for example, this top level is occupied by organismic values. Rather than limit the higher level goals to those specified by a particular theory, we simply asked participants to tell us what they would like to

accomplish in their lifetimes. Hence, this investigation represents an examination of idiographically defined daily goals and equally idiographic life goals/worst fears.

The Present Study

Predictions

Participants in this study generated their daily goals, their life goals, and their worst fears. In addition, participants completed measures of SWB. Daily goals were content-analyzed for relevance to life goals or worst fears. These data were used to address the implications of working on daily goals that are relevant to accomplishing one's life goals (and avoiding one's worst fears) to daily goal appraisal and to SWB.

Predictions were made with regard to the relations of LGA and WFA to daily goal appraisal, SWB, and the interaction of LGA and WFA and daily goal appraisals as predictors of SWB. First, we predicted, in accord with control theory, that the appraisal of daily goals would depend on their means–end relations with desired or dreaded outcomes. Daily goals that were instrumental to realizing an individual's life goals were predicted to be appraised as more important by the individual. Additionally, we predicted that daily goals devoted to avoiding some dreaded future would be appraised as important but more difficult and showing little progress. Daily goals that were relevant to avoiding a worst fear as well as attaining a life goal were predicted to be appraised as most important and least ambivalent and conflictful—since these goals effectively accomplish two ends at once.

In accord with prior findings in the personality literature with regard to the implications of defensive pessimism, avoidant wishes, and avoidant achievement motivation for well-being, it was predicted that the number of means–end links between participants' daily goals and life goals would relate positively to SWB. In addition, it was predicted that the number of avoidant links between participants' daily goals and their worst fears would relate negatively to SWB.

A final set of predictions concerned the relation of interaction of goal appraisal and means–end relations on SWB. We expected that progress on goals that are instrumental to one's life goals would have a particularly salubrious effect on psychological well-being. In addition, we expected that difficulties encountered for daily goals that are oriented toward

avoiding a dreaded outcome might be particularly distressing. Thus, we predicted that daily goal progress and daily goal difficulty would interact with LGA and WFA to predict SWB.

METHOD

Participants

Eighty Southern Methodist University (S.M.U.) upper-level psychology students (62 women, 18 men) completed a take-home packet of questionnaires in return for extra credit in personality and social psychology courses. S.M.U. is a medium-sized private university located in Dallas, Texas. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 35 (mean age = 21.09, $SD = 2.28$). The large majority of participants were of Anglo-American descent (85%). The remaining 15% were Hispanic (10%) and African-American (5%).

Materials

The packet administered to participants in this study assessed daily goals, life goals, worst fears, and well-being.

First, participants completed an abbreviated form of the Personal Striving Assessment Packet (PSAP; Emmons, 1986). Personal strivings (Emmons, 1986, 1989) represent what an individual is typically trying to do. A number of studies have examined the role of these goals in daily thought, mood, and behavior, as well as in psychological and physical well-being (Emmons, 1986; Emmons & King, 1988).

In the PSAP, participants list 15 of their everyday goals in response to the stem, "I typically try to . . ." The PSAP provides instructions specifying the appropriate level of abstraction for the lists; personal strivings are not short-term terminal goals but rather refer to goals that have an enduring impact on behavior. Each personal striving was then rated on four dimensions: importance, ambivalence, progress, and difficulty on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely much). Finally, participants copied their top 10 goals into a 10×10 conflict matrix and rated the influence each goal would have on every other goal on a scale from -2 (very harmful) to $+2$ (very helpful), with 0 meaning no relationship (cf. Emmons & King, 1988).¹ These ratings were converted to a 1 to 5 scale with 1 indicating

1. Although the original PSAP includes a number of other dimensions (e.g., value, social support), because of time constraints participants in this study completed only the dimensions listed. These dimensions were chosen to represent the factors of goal value and difficulty, as determined by Emmons (1986).

no conflict and 5 indicating high conflict. The conflict rating scores were then averaged over the entire 10×10 matrix (after Emmons & King, 1988). This averaging allowed for each daily goal to have a single conflict score, indicating the amount of conflict engendered by that goal in the individual's daily goal system. Only 10 of the 15 goals were used in the conflict matrix in order to reduce the amount of time participants spent transcribing their goals. Means and standard deviations for the goal dimensions are shown in Table 1.

At the end of the packet along with a number of other open-ended questions, participants were asked to list their life goals and worst fears. The "life goals" question read as follows: "Now, we want you to consider your future. Think for a moment about your future life experience. Consider your activities, experiences, and relationships—all aspects of your life as they may realistically be in the future. Think about the life goals of your life. What sorts of things would you like to accomplish? In the space provided, list the ultimate goals of your life. You may list as many as you wish and be as detailed as you feel comfortable being." The "worst fear" question read as follows: "Next, we'd like you to consider the 'worst case scenario' for your life in the future. What things would you see as possibly causing your worst fears to be realized? What are your worst fears for your life?"

Participants were given one page to answer each of these questions. Samples of common life goals given by participants were "find a loving spouse," "be successful as a pediatrician," "have two children," "remain close to my family," "to look back on my life with a sense of accomplishment, not regret." Responses were similar to those found in other studies of the desires of young American adults (Novacek & Lazarus, 1990; Richards, 1966). Samples of common worst fears generated by these participants included "getting divorced," "experiencing unexpected death or illness of a family member," "feeling like a failure," and "being stuck in a job I hate." Participants listed more life goals than worst fears. For life goals the number listed ranged from 2 to 30, mean = 7.86, SD = 6.03. For worst fears, the number listed ranged from 1 to 16, mean = 3.75, SD = 2.48 (paired $t(76) = 6.47, p < .001$).

The packet also included three psychological well-being measures. Participants completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) as a measure of SWB (averaged over all items, scale mean = 4.75, on a 7-point scale, SD = 1.36). The SWLS is a 5-item measure that includes items such as "My life is close to my ideal" and "If I could live my life over again I would change almost nothing." Participants also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). This 10-item scale includes items such as "I take a positive attitude toward myself" and "I think I am a good person, at least on an equal basis with others." Items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (averaged over all items, scale mean = 5.00, SD = 1.03). Finally, in order to measure the opposite pole of positive

well-being, participants also completed the 13-item Beck Depression Inventory Short Form (BDI; Beck & Beck, 1974) as a measure of general distress. On the BDI, participants endorse items of varying severity in a number of life areas (e.g., from “I do not feel sad,” scored 0, to “I am so sad or unhappy that I can’t stand it,” scored 3; summed over all items, the scale mean = 5.04, SD = 6.96).

Procedures

Questionnaire packets were distributed in classes and collected one week later. Participants were encouraged to complete the packet in a quiet setting, not necessarily all at one sitting. In total, the packet took approximately 2 hours to complete. Once all packets had been returned daily goals and life goals and worst fears were entered into coding sheets.

Two raters coded each participant’s daily goals for relevance to the life goals and worst fears. Raters were instructed to code daily goals that shared an instrumental or avoidance relation with life goals or worst fears (i.e., the daily goal was clearly working toward the life goal or working to avoid the worst fear). Daily goals were given a rating of “1” if they were relevant to achieving an ultimate goal or avoiding a worst fear. The correlation between raters for scores on means–end relations was .78 for life goal achievement and .85 for worst fear avoidance. The percent agreement between the two raters on whether a goal was relevant or not to an ultimate goal or worst fear was 81%;² all disagreements were resolved by discussion among the raters and the first author.

Examples of daily goals and life goals that were judged as sharing an instrumental relation included “to get As in my classes” and “to get accepted into a prestigious medical school”; “to be understanding of others” and “to marry a wonderful man and have a warm, understanding relationship”; and “to not worry so much” and “to be happy with whatever I end up doing.” Examples of daily goals and worst fears that were judged as sharing an avoidant relation included “to be a good friend to others” and “to die alone”; “to work hard in school” and “to never get a good job”; and “to please my parents” and “to do something that would cause my family to disown me.” Each daily goal was given a “life goal achievement” score and a total “worst fear avoidance” score. Averaging over daily goals provided a score for each participant. The mean life goal achievement score for current daily goals was .58 (SD = .19). The mean worst fear avoidance score for current daily goals was .40 (SD = .23). Current

2. For a subset of participants ($n = 20$) we were able to contact participants and have them complete this coding as well. The correlations between rater and subject coding of goals was reasonably high ($r = .55$ at the level of daily goal for LGA and .40 at the level of daily goal for WFA, $p < .001$), suggesting that raters overlapped with participants’ own perception of the coherence between their daily goals and broader life concerns.

daily goals were more likely to be related to achieving life goals than avoiding worst fears (paired $t(77) = 6.09, p < .001$), although this could be due to the higher number of life goals being listed.

RESULTS

Because of the gender imbalance in the sample, sex differences could not be fully explored in these analyses. No gender differences were found for any of the goal appraisal dimensions, the means–end measures, or the SWB measures; thus analyses included men and women as a group.

Means–End Relations and Daily Goal Appraisals

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine how relevance to life goals and worst fears might influence the appraisals of daily goals. It had been predicted that daily goals that were instrumental to life goals would be appraised as more important. In addition, daily goals aimed at avoiding worst fears were predicted to be appraised as more important, more difficult, and lower in progress. These predictions were addressed in two ways: at the level of person and at the level of daily goal. First, correlations were computed at the level of person; results are shown in Table 1. These analyses are based on the average appraisals for all 15 goals, aggregated within person. As predicted, life goal achievement was positively related to daily goal importance. In addition, life goal achievement was negatively related to daily goal conflict. As predicted, individuals whose daily goals were dedicated to avoiding their worst fears also reported lower daily goal progress and heightened daily goal difficulty. However, worst fear avoidance was unrelated to ratings of importance. The correlations among the daily goal appraisal dimensions were similar to those reported in previous research (e.g., Emmons, 1986). Importance was significantly positively correlated with progress and negatively correlated with conflict. Progress was negatively correlated with difficulty, conflict, and ambivalence. Difficulty was positively correlated with ambivalence.

The results in Table 1 do not directly examine the relation between the life goal or worst fear relevance of a given daily goal and the appraisal of that daily goal. That is, the results discussed so far simply demonstrate whether individuals who appraised their daily goals as important, on

Table 1
Correlations Among Means-End Measure and Goal Appraisal Dimensions, at the Level of Subject

	Imp.	Prog.	Conflict	Difficulty	Ambiv.	LGA	WFA
Imp.	—						
Progress	.43***	—					
Conflict	-.49***	-.27**	—				
Difficulty	.00	-.50***	.13	—			
Ambiv.	-.20*	-.23**	.12	.34***	—		
LGA	.30***	.09	-.37***	.01	.09	—	
WFA	-.10	-.20*	.17	.34***	.13	.22*	—
Mean	3.91	2.47	2.30	2.67	1.35	.58	.40
SD	.53	.64	.38	.85	1.12	.19	.23

Note. $N = 80$. For daily goal appraisal dimensions, ratings were made on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely much). For all dimensions except conflict, 15 goals were averaged together. For conflict, only 10 goals per subject were averaged. Imp. = Importance, Ambiv. = Ambivalence, Prog. = Progress. LGA (life goal achievement) refers to a daily goal being judged as relevant to achieving a life goal. WFA (worst fear avoidance) refers to a daily goal being judged as avoiding a worst fear.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

average, also tended to have high life goal achievement scores, on average. In contrast, we wanted to examine whether, for a particular daily goal, being instrumental to a life goal or avoiding a worst fear was related to appraisal of that daily goal. In order to address this question directly, analyses also were performed at the level of daily goal.

First, daily goal appraisal dimensions were standardized within person to remove the influence of individual differences in goal appraisals. Within each person, ratings were converted to standard scores, giving each participant a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 for each appraisal dimension (cf. Emmons, 1986; Emmons & King, 1988). This transformation removes the “main effect” of person from the goal appraisals. Analyses were then based on 1,068 daily goals generated in this sample (approximately 13 daily goals per person with complete data), with individual differences removed. For analyses involving daily goal conflict, the number of goals included was 764, since participants only completed conflict ratings on their top-10 daily goals.

Correlations were then computed among the daily goal appraisal dimensions and instrumentality to life goals and avoidance of worst fears.

Results are shown in Table 2. Daily goals that were judged as achieving life goals were appraised as more important, as less ambivalent, and as engendering less conflict with other daily goals. These goals were also appraised as more difficult. As predicted, daily goals that avoided one's worst fears were also rated as more important, as more difficult, and as showing less progress. Interestingly, the correlation between life goal achievement and worst fear avoidance at the level of daily goal was positive and significant, indicating that daily goals that were instrumental to life goals were also more likely to avoid worst fears.

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 demonstrates that the pattern of correlations from the level of person to the level of striving remained largely the same. Significant positive relations between daily goal importance, progress, and LGA obtained at both levels. Negative correlations between daily goal progress and goal difficulty, ambivalence, and WFA also emerged at both levels of analyses. Analyses at the level of daily goal in Table 2 clarify some ambiguities in Table 1, however. For instance, at the level of daily goal, WFA positively related to daily goal importance. This finding indicates that, although individuals who tend to seek daily goals that avoid their worst fears may not also tend to see their daily goals,

Table 2
Correlations Among Means-End Measure and Daily Goal
Appraisal Dimensions, at the Level of Daily Goal

	Imp.	Prog.	Conflict	Difficulty	Ambiv.	LGA
Imp.	—					
Progress	.22**	—				
Conflict	-.07*	-.05	—			
Difficulty	-.02	-.48**	-.06	—		
Ambiv.	-.21**	-.15**	.11**	.14**	—	
LGA	.19**	.03	-.10*	.08*	-.07*	—
WFA	.12*	-.07*	.01	.13**	-.05	.32**

Note. $N = 1068$. For daily goal level analyses, variables were standardized within participants, to remove the influence of individual difference. All means are 0 and all SDs are 1.0. These analyses reveal how means-end relationships to life goals or avoiding worst fear related to the appraisal of that particular goal. For conflict, $n = 764$. LGA (life goal achievement) refers to a daily goal being judged as relevant to achieving a life goal. WFA (worst fear avoidance) refers to a daily goal being judged as avoiding a worst fear. Ambiv. = Ambivalence, or how unhappy one would be if one achieved the goal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

in general, as important, in looking at a specific goal, relevance to avoiding one's worst fear does relate to that goal being highly valued. In addition, while WFA was related to daily goal difficulty at both the level of person and daily goal, LGA was related to difficulty only at the level of daily goal. This difference indicates that individuals who generally seek life goals via daily goals do not tend to think of their goals, in general, as difficult. Yet particular goals are judged as more difficult if they are relevant to achieving one's life goals. Note that the results at the level of daily goal are independent of the positive or negative affective biases that may color individuals' perceptions of their goals in general (cf. Watson & McKee-Walker, 1996).

Overall, these results support a control theory scheme in which lower level goals are valued as they relate to higher level outcomes. Additionally, these results indicate that while such daily goals are likely to be appraised as important, they are also likely to be seen as difficult—whether they pursue a life goal or avoid a worst fear.

Finally, in order to examine the interaction of the two types of means–end relationships on daily goal appraisal, a 2 (LGA vs. not LGA) \times 2 (WFA vs. not WFA) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on all of the daily goal appraisal dimensions. For these analyses, the means–end relation scores were dichotomized. Daily goals with a life goal achievement score greater than 0 were coded as 1 and those with life goal achievement scores of 0 were coded 0. Similarly, daily goals with a worst fear avoidance score greater than 0 were coded as 1 and those with a score of 0 were coded as 0. It had been predicted that daily goals that were both instrumental to life goals and avoidant of a worst fear would be appraised as most important and least ambivalent. The MANOVA revealed a significant interaction, $F(4, 1020) = 4.48$, $p < .001$. Univariate F s were significant for ambivalence ratings, $F(1, 1023) = 4.21$, as well as importance ratings, $F(1, 1023) = 13.21$ (both p s $< .01$). Examination of the cell means for these variables showed that participants were most ambivalent over daily goals that were related to either fears or life goals but not both. In addition, as predicted, participants rated daily goals that both pursued their life goals and avoided their worst fears as most important.

In summary, results with regard to daily goal appraisal dimensions indicated that daily goals that were relevant to accomplishing life goals or avoiding worst fears were likely to be seen as important but also difficult. In addition, daily goals that “killed two birds with one

stone”—attaining a hoped-for future and avoiding a dreaded future—were likely to be most highly valued and were unlikely to engender ambivalence in the person.

Implications for SWB

In order to simplify examining the relations among aspects of daily goals and SWB and undertake multivariate analyses predicting SWB, a well-being composite was created. The three subjective well-being measures were, not surprisingly, highly correlated. The correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem was significant and positive ($r = .66$, $p < .001$). The correlations between depression and life satisfaction and depression and self-esteem were both significant and negative ($r_s = .50$, and $-.59$, respectively, both $p_s < .001$). Principal components extracted one factor from these variables, accounting for 72% of the variance. All communalities were high (ranging from .79 for self-esteem to .66 for depression). Loadings were also high, with self-esteem (.89) and life satisfaction (.84) loading positively and depression loading negatively ($-.81$). Factor scores for this variable were computed using unit weights for each of the standardized well-being measures (weighting depression negatively, alpha for the composite = .81).

Analyses were conducted examining the relations among the daily goal appraisal dimensions, the means–end measures, and SWB. The top half of Table 3 shows the correlations among the appraisal dimensions and SWB. Two aspects of daily goals, progress and difficulty, showed consistent relations to SWB. In accord with past research, participants' ratings that they were making progress at their daily goals were positively correlated with life satisfaction, self-esteem, and the SWB composite, and significantly negatively correlated with depression. In contrast, daily goal difficulty was negatively related to life satisfaction, self-esteem, and the SWB composite, and was positively correlated with depression. Ambivalence over daily goals (i.e., how unhappy participants thought they would be if they succeeded at the goal) was significantly negatively correlated with life satisfaction and was marginally positively correlated with depression. Note that the results in the top portion of Table 3 fail to replicate previous findings with regard to goal appraisals. Daily goal importance was not related to SWB (cf. Emmons, 1986). In addition, daily goal conflict, previously shown to predict psychological distress as well as physical illness, was unrelated to SWB in this sample (cf.

Emmons & King, 1988). These discrepancies with previous research will be discussed later.

The bottom half of Table 3 shows the correlations among the means–end relation measures and SWB. The correlations in Table 3 provide support only for predictions regarding worst fear avoidance. As predicted, having daily goals devoted to avoiding one's worst fears was significantly negatively related to life satisfaction and the SWB composite, and positively related to depression. WFA was also marginally negatively related to self-esteem. Contrary to predictions, pursuing daily goals that are instrumental to one's life goals was not related to life satisfaction, self-esteem, or depression.

Because the means–end relations were positively correlated with each other (i.e., individuals who were likely to have daily goals instrumental to their life goals were also likely to have daily goals avoiding their worst fears), partial correlations were computed to examine the relations of life goal achievement to SWB, controlling for worst fear avoidance, and vice versa. These first order partials are shown at the bottom of Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations Among Daily Goal Appraisal Dimensions
and Measures of SWB

	SWB Measure			
	Life satisfaction	Self-esteem	Depression	Composite
<i>Appraisal dimension</i>				
Importance	.08	.05	-.13	.07
Progress	.33**	.37***	-.44***	.42***
Ambivalence	-.25**	-.12	.20*	-.21*
Difficulty	-.33**	-.49***	.38*	-.46***
Conflict	-.05	-.13	.10	-.07
<i>Means–end relations</i>				
Life Goal Achievement (LGA)	.01	.02	-.14	.04
Worst Fear Avoidance (WFA)	-.36***	-.21*	.26**	-.31***
<i>Partial rs</i>				
LGA controlling for WFA	.08	.05	-.22**	.13
WFA controlling for LGA	-.35***	-.20**	.31***	-.34***

Note. $N = 80$. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Controlling for worst fear avoidance, the life goal achievement of daily goals remained largely unrelated to SWB measures. A marginally significant negative partial correlation did emerge between life goal achievement and depression. Controlling for life goal achievement, worst fear avoidance remained significantly negatively related to measures of positive psychological functioning and positively related to depression.

Because daily goal appraisal dimensions have been shown (both here and in a variety of other studies) to relate to SWB, and because the means–end relations have been shown thus far to relate to aspects of daily goal appraisals, multivariate analyses were conducted predicting SWB from daily goal appraisal and the measures of means–end relations to examine the independent contributions of these variables to SWB. A hierarchical multiple regression equation was computed predicting well-being from daily goal appraisal dimensions and life goal achievement and worst fear avoidance. Appraisal dimensions of importance, ambivalence, progress, conflict, and difficulty were entered on the first step and life goal achievement and worst fear avoidance were entered on the second. Table 4 shows the standardized betas for this equation. Daily goal

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Equation Predicting Well-Being
Composite from Personal Daily Goal Appraisals, and
Links to Worst Fears and Life Goals

	Standardized β
<i>Step 1 PS Appraisals</i>	
R^2 change = .26*	
Conflict	.07
Importance	-.05
Difficulty	-.28**
Ambivalence	.10
Progress	.27**
<i>Step 2</i>	
R^2 change = .07*	
Worst fear avoidance	-.24**
Life goal achievement	.20*

Note. Multiple $R = .59$, $R^2 = .35$, $F(7, 63) = 4.92$, $p < .001$. Criterion = composite of subjective well-being measures; high scores indicate high positive well-being.

* $p < .08$. ** $p < .05$.

appraisal dimensions contributed significantly to the prediction of SWB, on the first step. Progress ratings positively predicted SWB, while difficulty negatively predicted SWB. Entered on the second step, the means–end measures also significantly contributed to the prediction of SWB. In support of predictions, having daily goals that were instrumental to the accomplishment of one’s life goals was positively related to SWB (with marginal significance), while having daily goals that focus on avoiding one’s worst fears was negatively related to SWB. Additional analyses showed that the marginally significant contribution of life goal achievement to SWB only emerged after controlling for the difficulty of the daily goals. Thus, seeking to achieve life goals through daily goals is associated, to some extent, with SWB, but only if daily goal difficulty is held constant.

The Interaction of Daily Goal Appraisals and Means–End Relations and SWB

The final set of analyses assessed the possibility that daily goal appraisal and the means–end relations of daily goals to life goals and worst fears might interact to predict SWB. It had been predicted that it would be particularly aversive to be actively pursuing difficult daily goals, or to experience little progress at achieving one’s daily goal, if those daily goals aid one in achieving a future life goal or avoiding a dreaded outcome. Conversely, it might be particularly satisfying to make progress toward daily goals that are instrumental to one’s desired future (or that serve to avoid a dreaded future outcome).

For the first set of analyses in this regard, it was necessary to create a single composite to measure the daily goal appraisal dimensions. A principal component was therefore extracted from the daily goal appraisal dimensions. This component accounted for 40% of the variance in the goal appraisals. Loadings were high, with progress (–.83) and importance (–.62) loading negatively, and difficulty (.62), conflict (.65), and ambivalence (.35) loading positively.³ Because the more problematic

3. Examination of the scree plot indicated that either a one- or a two-factor solution would best represent the daily goal appraisal data. The two-factor solution accounted for 68% of the variance but the factor loadings were not readily interpretable after rotation. Conflict and difficulty (both positively) loaded on the first factor, while ambivalence (negatively) and importance (positively) loaded on the other. Progress loaded across both factors, highly negatively on the first factor and (less highly) positively on the second.

daily goal appraisal dimensions positively loaded on this factor, it was labeled “problematic goal pursuit.” Note that this factor includes both low progress and high difficulty. Factor scores were computed for this factor using unit weights on the standardized goal dimensions. High scores indicate high difficulty and low progress.

In order to examine interaction effects, the predictors (problematic goal pursuit, life goal achievement, and worst fear avoidance) were converted into mean deviation scores by subtracting each person’s score from the grand mean for that variable (Kreft, deLeeuw, & Aiken, 1995). Centering the data in this way reduces multicollinearity between the predictors and the interaction term. The products of the centered means–end relation scores with the centered problematic goal pursuit scores were used to represent the interaction of goal appraisals and means–end relations (Aiken & West, 1993; Jaccard, Wan, & Turrisi, 1990). These two products represented (a) the interaction of problematic goal pursuit and life goal achievement, and (b) the interaction of problematic goal pursuit and worst fear avoidance. Note that these analyses were conducted at the level of person and so they pertain to the degree to which the effect of encountering difficulty in one’s daily goals is exacerbated by having daily goals that implicate one’s life goals/worst fears.

Two hierarchical regression equations were computed, one for life goal achievement and one for worst fear avoidance. In order to examine the interaction of life goal achievement and problematic goal pursuit, the first hierarchical regression equation was computed entering the main effects for problematic daily goal pursuit and life goal achievement on the first step and the interaction of these two variables on the second. This equation tested the possibility that problems encountered in the pursuit of a daily goal might be particularly distressing if that daily goal was instrumental to accomplishing a life goal. Results showed that only problems in goal pursuit contributed significantly (and negatively) to the prediction of SWB (standardized beta = $-.40$, $p < .001$). These results fail to support the notion that the impact of experiencing problems in daily goal pursuit is exacerbated by having many goals that are relevant to achieving one’s life goals.

Because a simple “value versus difficulty” structure did not emerge in the two-factor solution the single factor was used in subsequent analyses.

The second hierarchical regression equation was computed to predict SWB from the main effects of problematic goal pursuit and worst fear avoidance (on the first step) and their interaction (on the second step). This equation tested the notion that it might be particularly aversive to encounter problems when one's daily goals serve to avoid a dreaded future outcome. The first step contributed a significant change in R^2 . This main effect was qualified by a significant problems by worst fear avoidance interaction. The beta weights for this equation are shown in Table 5.

In order to further probe the interaction shown in Table 5, simple regression lines were computed, predicting SWB for individuals high (one standard deviation above the mean), medium (at the mean), and low (one standard deviation below the mean) on worst fear avoidance at high, medium, and low levels of problematic goal pursuit. To compute the estimated means for the "cells" of the interaction, the regression equation in Table 5 was reorganized to represent the regression of SWB on problematic goal pursuit, at high, medium, and low levels of WFA—that is, for participants high, medium, or low in the WFA scores (cf. Aiken & West, 1993). As Figure 1 indicates, at low levels of worst fear avoidance, problems in goal pursuit have little effect on SWB. However, for moderate and especially high levels of worst fear avoidance, problems in goal

Table 5
Hierarchical Regression Predicting SWB from the Interaction of
Goal Difficulty and Level of Worst Fear Avoidance

Goal Variables	Unstandardized β	Standardized β
<i>Step 1 Main Effects</i>		
R^2 change = .23**		
Problematic goal pursuit	-0.93	-0.33*
Worst fear avoidance	-1.91	-0.16
<i>Step 2 Interaction</i>		
R^2 change = .095*		
Problems \times Avoidance	-4.47	-0.32*
Constant	0.28	

Note. Multiple $R = .56$, $R^2 = .32$, $F_{(3, 70)} = 10.96$, $p < .001$. Criterion = composite of subjective well-being measures; high scores indicate high positive well-being. Problematic goal pursuit is a factor score on which difficulty loads at one end and progress at the other.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

pursuit are associated with much lower levels of SWB. Apparently, individuals who experience little progress at goals that serve to avoid their “worst case scenario” tend to feel quite distressed.

Note, that the analyses presented in Table 5 and Figure 1 do not tap the specific prediction that progress or difficulty specifically experienced with reference to daily goals that are instrumental to one’s life goals/worst fears is more strongly related to SWB than progress or difficulty at other daily goals. In order to examine this possibility, a final

SWB as a function of problems in goal pursuit and worst fear avoidance

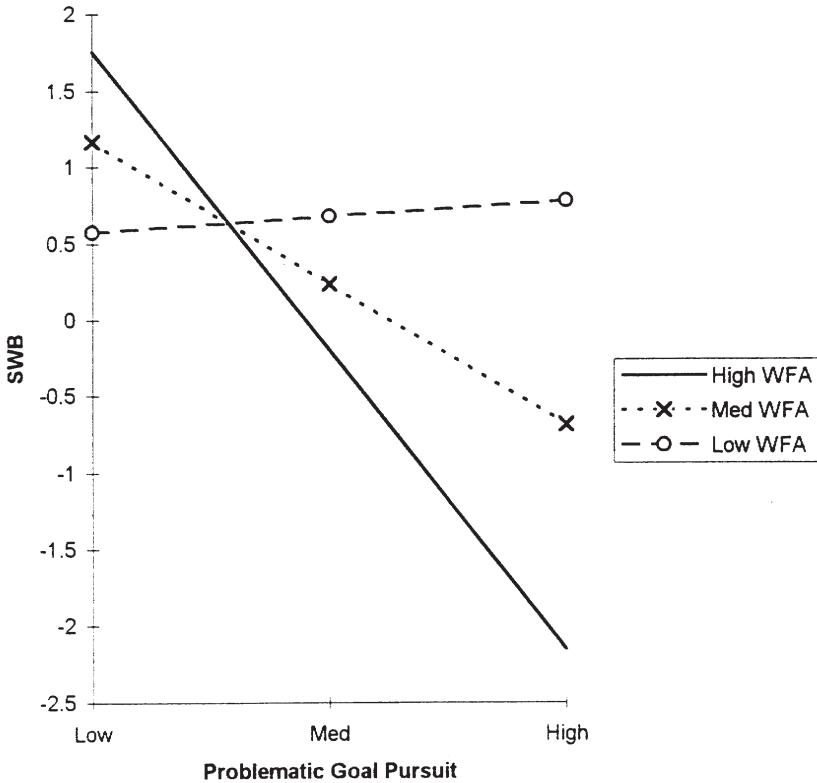


Figure 1

Simple regression lines of predicted values of subjective well-being for participants at various levels of worst fear avoidance across levels of daily goal difficulty. SWB = subjective well-being composite. WFA = worst fear avoidance.

set of analyses was performed. First, daily goals were categorized, within person, for their relevance to life goals and worst fears. Daily goals having a life goal achievement rating of 0 were considered unrelated to life goals; all others were considered related to life goals. Daily goals having a worst fear avoidance score of 0 were considered unrelated to worst fears; all others were considered related to worst fears. Thus, four sets of daily goals were created for each person in the study: daily goals related to both life goals and worst fears (mean = 5.44, SD = 3.25), daily goals related to life goals but not worst fears (mean = 4.38, SD = 2.44), daily goals related to worst fears but not life goals (mean = 2.08, SD = 1.30), and daily goals unrelated to life goals/worst fears (mean = 5.17, SD = 2.53). Because both progress and difficulty appraisals have been shown to relate SWB in this sample, these two appraisal dimensions were included in the following analyses. Progress ratings were averaged within these groups, giving each subject four progress scores, one for each set of daily goals. These same scores were also computed for daily goal difficulty. Note that the number of goals included in each of these aggregates was necessarily smaller for the LGA-only or WFA-only goals, since the two types of means-end relations were positively correlated. In addition, because participants generated fewer worst fears than life goals, the ratings for WFA-only goals were further constrained. Finally, it is notable that for the average participant in this study, approximately a third of his or her daily goals were judged as unrelated to his or her life goals or worst fears.

Correlations were computed to test the prediction that progress at daily goals that serve one's life goals, or avoid one's worst fears, would be more strongly related to SWB than progress at daily goals that are unrelated to one's life goals/worst fears. Table 6 shows the results. As Table 6 illustrates, progress for all four sets of daily goals (those relevant or irrelevant to life goals/worst fears) were related to each other and, with one exception, to SWB. Only progress at daily goals that were unrelated to life goals/worst fears bore no significant relation to SWB. In order to test for the significance of the differences between the correlations, Fisher's r to z transformation was used.⁴ As Table 6 demonstrates, predictions were supported to some extent. First, progress at daily goals

4. Because the progress measures were intercorrelated and these scores are based on the same sample, the following formula was used for the standard error of the difference in z s $((2-2r_{zz})/(N-3))$

Table 6
Correlations Between Progress on Daily Goals and SWB, as a
Function of Daily Goal Relevance to Life Goals and Worst Fears

Daily goal relevance	LGA + WFA	LGA only	WFA only	SWB
LGA + WFA (<i>n</i> = 80)	—			.38** _{ab}
LGA only (<i>n</i> = 70)	.45**	—		.46** _a
WFA only (<i>n</i> = 70)	.51**	.26*	—	.23* _{bc}
Neither (<i>n</i> = 70)	.48**	.56**	.39**	.13 _c

Note. Minimum pairwise *n* = 70. *Ns* vary because not all subjects had daily goals of every possible combination. LGA = life goal achievement; WFA = worst fear avoidance; SWB = subjective well-being composite. In the SWB column, coefficients with differing subscripts are different, *p* < .05.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

that were relevant to one's life goals and worst fears, or to one's life goals only, was more strongly related to SWB than progress at daily goals that were unrelated to life goals/worst fears. In addition, progress at goals related to achieving one's life goals was more strongly related to SWB than was progress at daily goals that avoided one's worst fears. Interestingly, progress at daily goals that served one's life goals only was most strongly related to SWB.

A parallel set of analyses was conducted using the difficulty ratings to test whether difficulty encountered in the pursuit of daily goals that are relevant to one's life goals/worst fears would more strongly predict SWB than difficulty at daily goals unrelated to one's life goals/worst fears. All of these difficulty ratings were significantly related to SWB. The magnitude of the correlations followed the same pattern as for progress. SWB was significantly negatively correlated with the difficulty of daily goals relevant to one's life goals ($r = -.45$), to the difficulty of goals relevant to both life goals and worst fears ($r = -.41$), to the difficulty of goals relevant to one's worst fears only ($r = -.42$), and to the difficulty of daily goals unrelated to life goals/worst fears ($r = -.27$, all *ps* < .02). Differences between these correlations were not significant, however.

DISCUSSION

The present results provide evidence for the role of daily goals in accomplishing life goals and avoiding worst fears. Results indicate that the value placed on daily goals is, to some extent, derivative of the relations of these daily goals to life goals/worst fears. In addition, avoiding one's worst fears through daily goals was a strong negative predictor of SWB, while seeking one's life goals through daily goals was, weakly, related to SWB. These results indicate that daily goals may partly serve to connect individuals to some larger life plan—to serve as a concrete means of enacting a life goal (or avoiding a worst fear). These results imply that the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that has often been associated with pursuing personalized goals is in some cases (but not all) also intimately tied to the accomplishment of broader, more future-oriented goal states.

Control theory describes the ways that our emotional lives are interwoven with the hierarchy of our lower and higher level goal pursuits. The present results provide support for two implications of this framework. First, results (particularly those at the level of daily goal) indicated that the relevance of a daily goal to attaining one's life goals or avoiding one's worst fears was associated with that daily goal being appraised as more important. Additionally, such daily goals are likely to be appraised as more difficult. Daily goals that served to attain life goals and to avoid worst fears were appraised as most important. These results support the notion that, in a control hierarchy, lower level reference values should be valued to the extent that they relate to higher order reference values. Secondly, the present results support, to some degree, the notion that emotional well-being depends in part on progress toward daily goals that serve life goals. Individuals who experienced low progress and high difficulty in the pursuit of daily goals that were related to avoiding their worst fears suffered most in terms of their overall feelings of well-being. Daily goal progress was related, in general, to SWB. This relationship was particularly strong, however, for progress on daily goals that were instrumental to one's life goals.

The present results not only provide empirical support for the implications of control theory, they also add an additional dimension to this framework. These results indicate that having daily goals that serve to avoid one's worst fears showed a strong negative relation to SWB. Thus, avoidant goals, particularly at a very high level in the hierarchy, may be seen as detrimental to the person's sense of well-being.

Consideration of worst fears is a provocative expansion of previous considerations of the action hierarchy. In this study, findings with regard to worst fear avoidance were consistently stronger than findings with regard to life goal achievement. There are several possible explanations for this pattern. First, it may be that worst fear avoidance represents a type of inhibition. Because “not doing” something has been shown to be difficult as well as taxing (e.g., Pennebaker, 1989; Wegner, 1988), it would not be surprising that seeking to avoid one’s dreaded future in one’s current life would be associated with distress. Such a possibility would indicate that the ramifications of worst fear avoidance for physical health might be a profitable avenue to explore—especially given the large literature on the physiological toll that inhibition can take (Pennebaker, 1989). Second, it may be that the worst fear avoidance measure taps into the degree to which the dreaded future self looms large in the person’s subjective sense of the future. This possibility suggests that this type of measure might relate to other thematically similar concepts (e.g., defensive pessimism and optimism).

Further exploring the possible role of avoidant daily goals in SWB in a sample with a more even gender distribution is vital to clarifying the role of gender in this effect. Thorne and Klohnen (1993) reported a relation between depression and avoidant wishes in a sample of women. Given that the present sample was largely female, it is possible that the present findings represent a general tendency for depression to be related to motives to avoid. However, how much this finding generalizes to men remains an important area for future work. It may be that the disproportionate number of women in the current sample explains the more robust findings for WFA.

Another reason that the worst fear measure provided stronger results might be that the responses participants gave with regard to the issue of their worst fears were more affectively charged—that is, this question was more likely to tap into central or essential values. A comparison of life goals and worst fears on the dimension of emotionality might provide clues about this possibility. Furthermore, it might be necessary to ask participants about the intensity or importance of the two types of higher order concerns measured in this study. It seems likely that, in general, it is more important to avoid one’s worst fears than to achieve one’s life goals. Even if one falls short of one’s life dream, a good and meaningful life is possible, exploring alternative opportunities. In fact, one might be happy in a variety of contexts. Settling for a back-up plan in the pursuit

of one's life goals is clearly much less aversive than actually realizing one's most dreaded end. For example, though one may have to "settle" for being a high school biology teacher instead of a renowned research biologist, this second choice may be more rewarding than one had first imagined. On the other hand, compared to realizing one's worst fear, for example, of dying of some illness before one has had a chance to marry and have a family, settling for a life goal that is less positive than one's first choice seems inconsequential. Actually realizing one's worst fear implies that all of one's viable alternative futures have fallen through.

This example also illustrates yet another difference between life goals and worst fears. It may be that life goals are more fluid than worst fears—that life goals are more likely to change in response to life circumstances, while worst fears remain the same. Research on the stability of these two types of motivational measures is necessary to clarify this possibility. Differences in the reliability of these measures might also explain the relatively weak findings with regard to LGA. It may be that in order to gauge the role of LGA on SWB, more sensitive measures of both LGA and SWB will be required.

The present results add to the growing literature on the role of pursuing life goals via one's daily activity in SWB. Like Sheldon and Kasser (1995), this study indicates that seeking life goals via daily goals does have benefits for psychological well-being. However, our findings were somewhat weaker than those reported by Sheldon and Kasser. It may be that consideration of the content of life goals is necessary to capture these beneficial effects. In addition, these present results also support the notion that linking one's daily life to more ultimate life goals may be detrimental to well-being—particularly if these ultimate goals involve avoiding one's worst fears. These findings jibe with the results of McIntosh, Harlow, and Martin (1995). It might be argued that in that study participants were led to imagine whether they could be happy without the valued goals listed for them. Thus, these participants may have been focused primarily on the loss of these goals rather than the successful attainment of them.

The present results provide fascinating evidence for the interplay of goal progress and WFA and LGA in SWB. The interaction shown in Figure 1 indicates that problems in goal pursuit may impact on SWB, particularly when an individual is seeking goals that avoid his or her most dreaded life outcome. Using cross-sectional data, conclusions about process are premature; however, the present results do suggest that

tracking goal difficulties over time, along with the means–end relations introduced here, might provide additional insight into the ways daily goal functioning impacts on SWB. In addition, the correlations reported in Table 6 indicate that daily goal progress is particularly strongly related to SWB if the daily goals in question also seek to accomplish one’s life goals.

A few general conclusions about the nature of daily goals can also be made, based on the present data. First, it is interesting that some daily goals do bear meaningful relations to the accomplishment of future ends or to the avoidance of worst fears. Not all goals do, however. Indeed, on average, 5 of the 15 goals generated by participants in this study were irrelevant to long-term life concerns. It may be that such goals are concerned with very concrete projects or these goals may be so intimately tied to the participants’ current lives as to be impossible to decontextualize. It is also possible that such goals serve more maintenance functions than more future-oriented goals. These goals might, then, endure throughout life. Certainly, it would be interesting to investigate the functions of goals that do not serve long-term future ends in individuals’ lives.

An important consideration for future research on life goals and worst fears is the implications of change in the goal hierarchy for goal functioning and well-being. What happens to individuals when they have actually achieved a life goal? What happens when an individual’s life dream is no longer available? For instance, an individual might have been seeking the daily goal “to do well in my classes” to achieve the ultimate goal “to be a doctor.” The impact of a high-level change (e.g., when one realizes that the ultimate goal is not possible) on lower level goals and, ultimately, on SWB, is a fascinating area for future research. It would be interesting not only to follow daily goal progress but life goal progress over time. Future research should seek to explore the role of daily goals in life goal achievement and to map the impact of “top-down” changes (e.g., changes in a life goal, due to goal attainment or failure) and more “bottom-up” changes (e.g., changes in daily goals as a function of life events, etc.) on the individual.

Finally, the impact of the means–end relations addressed here for goal attainment warrants further investigation. Research on visualization indicates that individuals are likely to be more successful at a task if they have a mental image of themselves actually succeeding (e.g., Ruvolo & Markus, 1992; Sherman, Skov, Hertz, & Stock, 1983). The possibility

that idiographic future goals serve as incentives that facilitate the accomplishment of lower level goals is a promising area for future work.

With regard to daily goal appraisal dimensions, it is notable that the present data failed to replicate the findings that having important goals is positively related to SWB (Emmons, 1986). This failure may be specific to the present sample. It is notable that in this sample a one-factor rather than a two-factor solution best represented the data (in contrast to Emmons, 1986). It seems that these participants were more likely to distinguish among their goals in terms of a single dimension of progress versus difficulty rather than along two separate dimensions of value and difficulty. In addition, these data failed to provide support for the negative effects of goal conflict on SWB. One reason why this might have occurred is that participants in the present study completed conflict ratings only on their top 10 goals (rather than all 15, as in Emmons & King, 1988). Perhaps this less sensitive measure of conflict simply did not capture conflict effectively. The strength of this possibility is lessened by the fact that all of the other goal dimensions showed good consistency from the first 10 to the last 5 (correlations ranging from .50 for importance to .84 for ambivalence). It does not appear that the last 5 daily goals were appraised as different from the first 10. It is also possible that the SWB measures used in this study were more likely to tap positive well-being than distress. Emmons and King (1988) used a broader range of measures, many of which were aimed at distress. Finally, it is possible that goal conflict is more likely to have an effect on physical than on psychological well-being.

Several limitations of the present study deserve attention. First, this study relied on observer ratings of LGA and WFA. In the studies by Sheldon and Kasser (1995) and McIntosh, Harlow, and Martin (1995), participants reported on the links that existed between their lower level and prescribed higher level goals. In the present study, the links between means (daily goals) and ends (life goals and worst fears) were drawn by raters, not by participants themselves. Ideally, future studies would include both types of information: observer and participant generated links. The strong results obtained with regard to worst fear avoidance are all the more remarkable given the lack of shared method variance in the "links" and the questionnaire measures of SWB. However, observer ratings of LGA and WFA necessarily relied on semantic overlap and may miss the idiosyncratic overlap for participants.

A second limitation of the present results is that they are primarily self-report data collected at one point in the lives of a young adult sample. Longitudinal research that includes objective measures of progress is necessary to strengthen the present results. An important consideration in viewing the present results is the extent to which these results are generalizable to other age groups. Because our sample was drawn from a college population, the age range represented was limited. It may be that linking one's current goals to an imagined future is particularly beneficial to individuals who, as young adults, are actively engaged in pursuing long-term aspirations through short-term behavior (i.e., seeking a degree in order to ensure future employment). In addition, for young adults embarking on the beginnings of careers and relationships, the "worst possible scenario" may be somewhat more salient and threatening than for older individuals. Further research on more diverse populations will be required to examine this possibility.

In sum, the data reported here demonstrate that the relations that exist between daily goals and life goals/worst fears—between the ends we seek and the means to those ends—have implications not only for the quality of goal pursuits but also for SWB. Although seeking daily goals that are instrumental to one's life goals weakly predicted SWB, seeking daily goals that avoid one's most dreaded outcomes was strongly associated with lowered SWB, even controlling for the importance, progress, and difficulty encountered in daily goal pursuit. Furthermore, difficulties encountered in goal pursuit were particularly distressing when those goals were aimed at avoiding one's worst fears. These results give an intriguing glimpse into the implicit agency of everyday life (cf. King, in press), indicating the extent to which our mundane goal pursuits lead us toward a valued future or away from the precipice of imagined disaster.

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