

(Un)Reachable?

An Empirical Differentiation of Goals and Life Longings

Sabine Mayser, Susanne Scheibe*, and Michaela Riediger

Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany

Abstract. Through the selection and pursuit of goals, people are assumed to actively influence their own development. More recently, the construct of life longings (*Sehnsucht*) has been proposed as playing an equally important role in developmental regulation. This study investigated whether both constructs can be differentiated empirically. Eighty-one participants aged 20 to 69 years reported their most important personal goals and life longings, and evaluated these with respect to their cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics. Results indicate that goals, in comparison to life longings, are perceived as being more closely linked to everyday actions, more strongly related to the future, and more controllable (particularly in terms of their attainability). Life longings, in contrast to goals, were evaluated as being more emotionally ambivalent, more long-term oriented, more strongly related to the past, and as involving a stronger sense of incompleteness. Differences between the two constructs further emerged in their specific contents and in their relationship with overall life satisfaction. Findings justify the distinction between both constructs. Implications for theories of self-regulation are discussed.

Keywords: personal goals, *Sehnsucht*, life longings, self-regulation

Introduction

Who has never imagined overcoming obstacles that are currently troubling, or to be near a loved one who is far away? Developing mental representations that contrast with our actual or expected life reality seems to be an activity people often engage in (e.g., Boesch, 1998; Roese, 1997). Several psychological constructs have been suggested to account for such representations of alternative realities. Personal goals are a well-investigated example. Goals have been defined as “internal representations of desired states” (Austin & Vancouver, 1996, p. 338). In developmental psychology, they have been ascribed an important developmental-regulatory function. It has been argued that individuals, through the selection and pursuit of personal goals, actively influence and shape their own life course (for an overview, see Freund & Riediger, 2003).

Recently, Baltes and colleagues (Baltes, in press; Scheibe, Freund, & Baltes, 2007) have explored a concept that is of particular importance in German history and culture: the concept of *Sehnsucht*. The authors assume that *Sehnsucht*, which has not yet been studied extensively in scientific psychology, might also be of high relevance for human development. They define *Sehnsucht* as recurring, emotionally ambivalent representations of ideal (optimal or utopian) states of life that may provide orientation for one’s development. Because the word *Sehnsucht* has no precise English translation, the authors opted for the term “life longings” to express its holistic character. Despite the dif-

ficulty of translating *Sehnsucht* into English, the basic thoughts and feelings associated with this phenomenon are likely relevant for many people’s recurring thoughts and feelings about their lives, not only in Germany.

On a theoretical level, goals and life longings can be regarded as distinct constructs. Both concepts, however, refer to internal representations of alternative life realities. The purpose of the present research therefore was to investigate whether the distinction between goals and life longings is empirically valid. We derived theory-driven predictions about structural differences between goals and life longings and tested them empirically in an adult sample ranging in age from 20 to 69 years.

The Concept of Goals

The construct of goals has a long-standing tradition in psychological research (e.g., Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Goals are structuring elements of everyday life and affect individuals’ thoughts, behavior, and well-being (Brunstein & Maier, 1996). Personal goals have been conceptualized in various ways (for an overview, see Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Pervin (1989, p. 474) characterized the convergence among the various goal conceptualizations by stating that “a goal may be defined as a mental image or other end point representation associated with affect toward which action may be directed.” In line with this definition, we organize our subsequent discussion along

* Susanne Scheibe is now at Stanford University, Department of Psychology, Stanford, CA, USA.

three dimensions: Cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics of goals.

It is widely assumed that the *cognitive representation* of an individual's goals is organized in a hierarchical manner (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Higher-order goals are described as more abstract and temporally distant, whereas lower-order goals are seen as relatively concrete and temporally close (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Bandura, 1989). Often, higher-order goals are pursued by means of lower-order goals and activities (Emmons, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998).¹

The emotional aspect of goals has typically been conceptualized in terms of the emotional experience during goal pursuit. Carver and Scheier (1990), for example, suggested that emotions are the result of a process of meta-monitoring, the individual's awareness of how fast a goal is approached. If perceived goal progress is faster than planned, individuals will experience positive emotions, and vice versa, if it is slower than planned, they will experience negative emotions. Pursuing a goal at planned speed is theorized to be emotionally neutral. The authors further proposed that the pursuit of higher-order goals is accompanied by more intense emotions than the pursuit of lower-order goals. In terms of emotional quality, goals are usually viewed as univalent (e.g., Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Pieters, 1998; Carver & Scheier, 1990). That is, the anticipation of success (or failure) in achieving a goal and the evaluation of action results as successful (or unsuccessful) are considered to exclusively elicit positive (or negative) emotions. A few authors, however, have acknowledged that goals may bring about mixed feelings (e.g., Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1998). For example, the joy about an achieved goal (e.g., a successful job application) may be mixed with insecurity or concerns about the future (e.g., about meeting high demands).

The *action-related component* of goals has already been implied in the notion of goal *pursuit*. Because personal goals are less stable and therefore more easily modifiable than personality traits (Emmons, 1989), they are considered an important means of people's active life management (Freund & Baltes, 2000). The effect of goals on behavior is indeed seen as a central feature of the goal concept (for review, see Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996). However, goals are not always put into action. Volitional processes referring to persistence and willpower are crucial for the active pursuit of goals (e.g., Heckhausen, 1989).

The Concept of Life Longings

Longing, the intense desire for something remote or unattainable, is a frequent human experience. Homesickness, wanderlust, or lovesickness might be regarded as typical

examples. Surprisingly, the psychological literature on the phenomenon of longing or related concepts such as yearning, desire, or nostalgia has been relatively scarce for many years (but see Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Boesch, 1998; Holm, 1999; Palaian, 1993; Ravicz, 1998; Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt, & Routledge, 2006). The conceptualization of life longings proposed by Baltes and colleagues (Baltes, in press; Scheibe, 2005; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007) seeks to integrate and expand the preceding approaches based on a lifespan developmental perspective. These authors regard life longings as a multifaceted phenomenon with cognitive, emotional, and action-related aspects that has developmental antecedents and consequences for developmental regulation.

Specifically, they propose six characteristics to capture the structure of life longings. First, life longings are proposed to involve a *sense of incompleteness* of one's life. This realization of imperfection in one's actual life, which arises in the context of losses, nonchosen alternatives, or blocked life paths, is regarded as the origin of life longings. Second, life longings are assumed to comprise *personal utopias*, or mental images of one's ideal life. Due to their utopian character, life longings are thought to never be fully attainable. Third, these mental images are proposed to be rich in *symbolism*. That is, specific objects of life longings are thought to symbolize fundamental motives, values, and needs. Fourth, life longings are conceptualized as having an *ambivalent emotional quality*. This characteristic can be seen as a consequence of the first two attributes: The incompleteness and unattainability on the one hand, and the fantasy of one's ideal life on the other hand, are assumed to lead to a "bittersweet" experience, a blend of positive and negative emotions. Fifth, life longings are assumed to evoke *reflections and evaluations* of life and one's standing relative to one's ideals. Finally, life longings are thought to relate to the life course as a whole, including the personal past, present, and future. Accordingly, they are considered an *ontogenetic tritime phenomenon*. This theoretical framework has recently been supported by empirical evidence (Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007).

From a functional perspective, Scheibe, Freund et al. (2007) found that life longings can facilitate development in two ways. First, they can provide a *sense of directionality* for development. That is, they can motivate the attempt to approach one's personal utopia. Second, life longings seem to be involved in the *regulation of losses and incompleteness*. By imagining and elaborating one's personal utopia, life longings can provide an imaginary compensation for lost and missing elements of one's life.

Scheibe (2005) further distinguished two dimensions of control, namely, *control over the experience* and *control over the realization* of life longings. A person who is able to influence the onset, course, and ending of a life longing episode can be characterized as having control over the

¹ In line with a prevailing tendency in personality research (e.g., Emmons, 1989), we focused the present investigation on middle-level and higher-level goals. That is, we were interested in goals that extend over weeks, months, or years, rather than in short-lived, fleeting goals.

experience of life longings. The second aspect, which is unrelated to the first, refers to the ability to identify and direct actions that might help to approach one's personal utopia. Because life longings are regarded as never fully attainable, control over their realization is limited per definition. However, persons may vary in their subjective beliefs about the degree to which their utopias can be approximated in objective reality.

Taken together, similar to the concept of goals, life longings have been theoretically described in terms of cognitive, emotional, and action-related facets. They are assumed to involve mental representations of desired, yet unattainable, realities of life; to be an emotionally ambivalent experience; and to give directionality to one's goals and actions.

Hypothesized Differences Between Goals and Life Longings

At first glance, it seems possible to apply the aforementioned definition of goals to life longings as well. Life longings, too, might be described as "internal representations of desired states" (Austin & Vancouver, 1996, p. 338) that are "... associated with affect" (Pervin, 1989, p. 474). Despite sharing these characteristics, we hypothesized that goals and life longings can be clearly differentiated in several respects. Our central predictions on structural differences between goals and life longings follow our heuristic distinction between cognitive, emotional, and action-related aspects.

Cognitive Aspects

Consistent with Carver and Scheier's (1990, 1998) postulate that motivational tendencies are hierarchically organized, we hypothesized life longings to be more abstract than personal goals. As idealized representations of desired alternative life realities, life longings should be located at the upper end of a person's motivational hierarchy. They might be best described as metagoals (Baltes, Freund & Scheibe, 2002) that can (but do not necessarily) lead to the formulation of more or less concrete goals. The understanding of life longings as standing behind or leading to personal goals resembles a notion by Zeigarnik (1984, p. 185) who proposed an "ideal" or "all-embracing goal which at a given moment is not immediately experienced but stands 'behind' the goal and directs behavior."

In accordance with their hypothesized higher-order character, we also predicted life longings to be more closely linked to fundamental motives and needs than goals. In other words, we expected life longings to have a stronger symbolic meaning than goals.

Furthermore, we predicted that life longings involve a stronger sense of incompleteness than goals. Life long-

ings should always imply the lack of something essential, the desire for an important but missing element of life. Goals, in contrast, are not necessarily an expression of a lack. Maintenance goals (e.g., "to stay healthy") or avoidance goals (e.g., "to not get worse at school"), for example, do not comprise a desired state that still waits to be reached (e.g., Ebner, Freund, & Baltes, 2006; Freund, 2006).

Regarding their temporal representation, we expected life longings to be more long-term oriented and more comprehensive than goals. That is, we hypothesized life longings to be recurring for a longer period of life, and to extend into the individual's past, present, and future. In contrast, we expected personal goals to be primarily present-oriented and future-oriented.

Emotional Aspects

We further predicted that the assumed more abstract character of life longings results in differences in emotional quality and intensity. Following the idea that higher-order concepts are associated with more intense emotions than lower-level concepts (Carver & Scheier, 1990), life longings should be associated with more intense emotions. Apart from the emotional intensity, there might also be differences regarding emotional quality. Life longings have been proposed as having an emotionally ambivalent character, that is, their "bittersweetness" is considered a defining feature (Baltes, in press; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007). Concerning personal goals, little importance is given to mixed emotions.

Action-Related Aspects

We expected goals to be more influential for everyday actions than life longings. Although life longings may provide a general orientation and direction in life (Baltes, in press; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007), goals are seen as more directly linked to action and as structuring everyday life (Brunstein & Maier, 1996). We also hypothesized that the greater impact of personal goals on action is associated with an overall stronger feeling of control. Our conceptualization of control comprises four relevant aspects. The first aspect is the degree of awareness or sense of choice involved in the development of (and disengagement from) goals and life longings. While goals can be chosen consciously and actively (e.g., Brandtstädter, 1999), life longings might gradually and unintentionally emerge in response to personal losses or unrealizable life trajectories (Scheibe, 2005), and thus, also be more difficult to give up intentionally than goals.

The remaining three aspects of control follow a distinction by Skinner (1996) between *agent-ends relations* (Can I achieve my objective at all?), *means-ends relations* (Do I know the necessary means?), and *agent-means relations*

(Do I have the necessary means?). We predicted that personal goals are perceived as more attainable than life longings. This hypothesis is based on the notion that life longings involve idealized and therefore unattainable ideas, whereas goals tend to integrate wish and reality (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). In line with this hypothesis, we also hypothesized that the means required to achieve a goal are better known and also more available than the means required to approximate a life longing.

In addition to structural differences between goals and life longings, we explored whether the two constructs can be differentiated in terms of their associations with life satisfaction. In a previous study (Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007), life longings were found to be negatively related to well-being, especially in persons with a low sense of control over the experience of their life longings. This finding is consistent with the notion that life longings focus on incomplete aspects of life and involve the awareness that perfection cannot be fully reached (Scheibe, Kunzmann, & Baltes, 2007). In contrast, having and successfully pursuing goals are typically ascribed a positive role in promoting well-being (Ryff, 1989). Thus, we expected goals and life longings to be differentially related to people's life satisfaction. We also explored whether the predicted distinctiveness of the two concepts is evident in the contents of goals and life longings reported by adults of various ages.

To investigate our predictions, we conducted a study with two counterbalanced measurement sessions about five weeks apart in an adult sample ranging in age from 20 to 69 years. In one session, we elicited reports of personal goals, and in the other, reports of personal life longings. Participants characterized each of their three most important goals and life longings on a number of nomothetic dimensions. This within-person design allowed comparing goals and life longings empirically with respect to a variety of cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics.

Method

Participants

The original sample comprised 83 adults aged 20 to 69 years. A survey company contacted the majority of them by means of a random dialing procedure in Berlin, Germany, and asked them for their willingness to attend two sessions about five weeks apart. Thirteen participants were recruited via advertisement or a participants' database. Two participants cancelled their second appointment.

The final sample thus comprised 81 adults aged 20 to

69 years (total sample: $M = 48.30$, $SD = 14.07$; $n = 26$ younger adults aged 20 to 40 years, $M = 32.04$, $SD = 7.53$; $n = 24$ middle-aged adults aged 41–55 years, $M = 47.98$, $SD = 4.75$; $n = 31$ older adults aged 56–69 years, $M = 63.10$, $SD = 3.97$). Of the participants, 54.3% were female; 8.6% had graduated from junior high school (9th grade), 33.3% had graduated from Secondary School Level 1 (10th grade), 23.5% had graduated from high school (12th or 13th grade), and 34.6% held a college or university degree.

Procedure and Measures

Participants attended two group sessions and were reimbursed EUR 30. The time interval between the two sessions was approximately five weeks ($M = 35$ days, $SD = 5$ days). Life longings were assessed in one session, and personal goals and additional scales were assessed in the other session. The order of sessions was counterbalanced to control for order effects. Analyses showed that the order of sessions had no significant influence on the evaluations of goals and life longings along our dimensions of interest (see descriptions below).^{2,3} Therefore, session order was not considered in further analyses. Personal goals and life longings were both assessed using a mixed idiographic-nomothetic approach that has been successfully used in previous studies on goal constructs (e.g., Emmons, 1989; Little, 1983). Participants were first asked to freely report their personal goals or life longings. Then they selected their three most important goals or life longings and evaluated these along a number of nomothetic assessment dimensions.

Free Report of Personal Goals

Personal goals were elicited by means of a standard written instruction (Riediger & Freund, 2004). They were described as "ideas about the conduct of your life, about what you want to attain and to avoid . . . that are personally relevant at present and will probably still be important in the near future (weeks, months, or years)." The instruction included sample life domains and sample goals. Participants were first asked to write down a list of goals. Afterwards, they were asked to rank their goals, select their three most important ones, and to briefly describe these. The elicitation of goals lasted about 20 minutes. Among the goals reported by the participants were, for example, "to spend more time with my children and grandchildren," "to start working again after parental leave," "to get better grades at university," and "to maintain the wonderful relationship with my husband."

² Neither the multivariate main effect of session order nor the multivariate interaction "session order \times construct (goal vs. life longing)" was significant ($F(13, 67) = .78$; $p = .68$; $\eta^2 = .13$ and $F(13, 67) = 1.23$; $p = .26$; $\eta^2 = .20$, respectively).

³ The multivariate test statistics reported in the present paper all refer to Wilk's λ .

Table 1. Examples of reported goals and life longings

	Most important goal	Most important life longing
Male, 22 years	To recapitulate what I learned in my university classes although I come home tired in the evenings. I need to be organized better.	I am longing for a girlfriend, for tenderness and intimacy.
Female, 54 years	I am very happy in my marriage. I want to spend a lot of time together with my husband.	America. I must have lived there in former times. I often see pictures, it was a happy and beautiful time.
Male, 64 years	To develop good computer skills.	Health. I want to be really fit and vigorous again.
Female, 38 years	To start a solo music project. I am a singer and want to find musicians who want to be in my band. I want to compose a 90 minute program.	To be loved by a man. I am longing for a man who really loves me, who sees my uniqueness, who is proud that I am his partner.

Table 2. Sample items and internal consistencies of the goal/life longing (LL) scales and univariate follow-up analyses of the within-factor "construct" (goal vs. LL)

Scale (No. of items)	Sample item	Cronbach's α		M (SE)		$F(1)$	η^2	p
		Goals	LLs	Goals	LLs			
<i>Cognitive aspects</i>								
Concreteness (6)	Participants listed criteria that would characterize the fulfillment of their goal/LL. They rated these criteria on six items, e.g.: <i>These criteria show precisely at which point I would think of this goal/LL as fulfilled.</i>	.85	.92	4.20 (.06)	4.17 (.07)	.28	.00	.60
Symbolic character (3)	<i>What I am striving for with this goal/what I am longing for embodies some higher aim (e.g., success or love).</i>	.57	.60	3.76 (.08)	3.83 (.08)	1.12	.01	.30
Incompleteness (3)	<i>This goal/LL means that something essential is missing in my life.</i>	.78	.88	2.89 (.10)	3.27 (.11)	13.86	.15	.001*
Tritime focus (2)	<i>This goal/LL has to do with people, things, experiences, or events from my past/present/future.^a When you think about this goal/LL, how much do you think about your past, present, or future? Please express the extent of your thoughts in points. You have 100 points. Please distribute these 100 points among the three time periods. Time periods can also be assigned 0 points.^b</i>	.22	.66	3.42 (.06)	3.34 (.07)	.84	.01	.36
Long-term orientation (2)	<i>The fulfillment of this goal/LL lies in the near future. (R)</i>	.66	.50	3.21 (.06)	3.65 (.06)	38.21	.33	.001*
<i>Emotional aspects</i>								
Emotional intensity (5)	<i>My thoughts about this goal/LL are accompanied by intense feelings.</i>	.88	.84	3.63 (.08)	3.60 (.08)	.13	.00	.72
Emotional ambivalence (4)	<i>Thinking about this goal/LL is both painful and pleasurable.</i>	.85	.87	2.24 (.09)	2.57 (.11)	16.10	.17	.001*
<i>Action-related aspects</i>								
Proximity to action (3)	<i>The realization of this goal/LL affects my everyday actions.</i>	.80	.86	3.84 (.08)	3.31 (.09)	37.63	.33	.001*
Choice (1)	<i>I have chosen this goal/LL myself.</i>	–	–	4.54 (.07)	4.11 (.13)	13.14	.14	.001*
Disengagement (1)	<i>I can give up this goal/LL if I really want to.</i>	–	–	2.73 (.01)	2.30 (.11)	9.42	.11	.001*
Attainability (5)	<i>I will never completely fulfill this goal/LL. (R)</i>	.83	.86	3.78 (.08)	3.11 (.08)	65.41	.46	.001*
Knowledge of means (3)	<i>I know what should be done to fulfill this goal/LL.</i>	.81	.68	3.83 (.08)	3.30 (.08)	38.64	.33	.001*
Availability of means (3)	<i>I do not have the necessary means to fulfill this goal/LL. (R)</i>	.83	.81	3.84 (.08)	3.15 (.09)	63.18	.45	.001*

Note. Response options ranged from 1 (does not apply) to 5 (applies very much) except for the second indicator of the Tritime Focus scale. ^aThe construct was derived by calculating the mean of the three items. ^bThe construct was derived by calculating the standard deviation of the three values and performing linear transformations so that the final score range was 1 to 5, with higher values indicating a higher tritime focus. R = reversed item.

Free Report of Life Longings

The report of life longings was supported by a “guided mental journey” through different life phases, developed by Scheibe, Freund et al. (2007). First, participants read a short definition of life longings as “intense, enduring, and hardly attainable or even unattainable wishes for people, things, events, or experiences from your personal past, present, or future.” Thereafter, participants were asked to vividly imagine five different life phases (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and old adulthood). The experimenter read a text that supported participants in re-experiencing their past, reflecting on their present situation, and imagining their future (see Appendix for the exact wording of the instruction). The purpose of this procedure was to encourage participants to reflect on their whole life, including its overarching themes and wishes. After imagining each life phase, participants were asked to write down life longings if they had any that were related to this phase. Subsequently, participants were asked to rank their life longings, select their three most important ones, and briefly describe these. In total, the elicitation of life longings took about 40 minutes. Among the life longings reported by the participants were, for example, “to feel accepted despite my weaknesses,” “to share my life with the woman I have liked and loved secretly for a long time,” “to make a trip round the world, to get to know foreign places,” and “to live without worries, like a child.” Table 1 displays further examples of the participants’ personal goals and life longings.

Assessment of Goals and Life Longings

In the assessment phase, participants rated each of their three most important personal goals and life longings, respectively, on several scales assessing cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics. Table 2 shows sample items and internal consistencies of each scale.

Cognitive characteristics were assessed by the scales “concreteness,” “symbolic character,” “incompleteness,” “tritime focus,” and “long-term orientation.” Emotional aspects were assessed using the scales “emotional intensity” and “emotional ambivalence.” In addition, the emotional composition of life longings and goals was assessed by means of a short adjective checklist. Participants rated how much two positive (happy, cheerful; Cronbach’s $\alpha_{\text{goals}} = .88$, $\alpha_{\text{life longings}} = .93$) and two negative emotions (unhappy, sad; $\alpha_{\text{goals}} = .87$, $\alpha_{\text{life longings}} = .87$) were associated with their specific life longings and goals. Action-related aspects were rated on the scales “proximity to action,” “perceived attainability,” “knowledge of means,” “availability of means,” and on two single-item indicators, one about the active choice of life longings and goals, and one about disengagement from them. Items were partly adopted from Scheibe (2005) and Chojnowska (2001), partly newly developed. The wording of the items was identical in both sessions,

except for the words “goal” and “life longing” that were interchanged. Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*does not apply*) to 5 (*applies very much*), with one exception. One item of the “tritime focus” scale requested participants to distribute 100 points among past, present, and future according to the degree that each time period is related to their goals or life longings. Because aggregated measurements are more stable and representative estimators than single measurements (Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983), we averaged the same items across all three goals and across all three life longings for statistical analyses.

Additional Measures

Besides the scales reported so far, we included four additional measures. To assess the contents of goals and life longings, participants rated how much their goals and life longings were related to each of 13 different life domains (family, partnership, physical well-being, friendships, health, leisure, societal values, finances, personal characteristics, living, work/education, politics/world situation, religiosity) on a scale ranging from 1 (*does not apply*) to 5 (*applies very much*).

Because personal goals and life longings may touch very private and intimate concerns, participants were also given an extra questionnaire at the end of both sessions (Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007). This questionnaire was collected separately from the rest of the data. It was not marked with the participant’s identification code. Participants’ responses to this questionnaire could, thus, not be linked to the other information obtained throughout the study, which ensured further anonymity of their responses. In this questionnaire, participants were asked, “Do you have goals/life longings that you did not mention in this study because they are too personal?” To obtain descriptions of these previously unreported goals/life longings, the questionnaire included a list of possible instances characterized by high personal intimacy and/or low social desirability, for example, goals/life longings pertaining to sexual experiences, one’s own death, infidelity, or revenge. Participants were asked to check all instances on this list that applied to their previously not mentioned goals/life longings. They also had the opportunity to freely describe the content of the previously not disclosed goal or life longing. We included this questionnaire because 35% of the participants in Scheibe, Freund et al.’s study (2007) revealed that they had not reported all their life longings under normal testing conditions as they found them too personal.

To explore differences concerning the association of goals and life longings with well-being, participants completed the 5-item Satisfaction of Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; $\alpha = .89$) at the end of the test session on goals.

Finally, participants were asked to *directly* compare both concepts at the very end of the study in an open-response

format (“In your opinion, how do goals and life longings differ?”). To categorize responses, we developed a coding system based on our hypotheses on cognitive, emotional, and action-related differences between goals and life longings that comprised the following 10 categories: “concreteness,” “symbolic character,” “utopia,” “emotional character,” “relation to action,” “sense of choice,” “attainability – Can attain,” “attainability – Need not attain,” “knowledge of means,” and “other.” Two independent, trained raters coded whether each of these categories was present in a given answer ($n = 73$; the sample size is reduced because not all participants responded to the open question). *Cohen's k* was computed for each category ($M_k = .70$; $Min_k = .55$, $Max_k = .91$). Responses that had not been coded concordantly by the raters were discussed until consensus was reached.

Results

Contents of Goals and Life Longings

We first examined with a 2×3 multivariate analysis of variance whether the contents of reported goals and life longings differed. Construct (goal vs. life longing) served as within-subject factor and age group (young vs. middle-aged vs. old adults) as between-subject factor; dependent variables were the 13 life domains ratings listed above. In this and all further analyses, age group was included in the analyses to explore possible age differences in the characteristics of goals and life longings. We found a significant multivariate main effect for construct ($F(13, 62) = 2.18$; $p = .02$; $\eta^2 = .31$) and a significant multivariate main effect for age ($F(26, 126) = 3.44$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .42$). The interaction “construct \times age” did not reach significance ($F(26, 126) = 1.18$; $p = .27$; $\eta^2 = .20$).³

Univariate follow-up analyses revealed that participants evaluated their goals, as compared to their life longings, as more strongly related to finances ($M_{goals} = 3.12$; $M_{life\ longings} = 2.78$; $F(1) = 5.52$; $p = .02$; $\eta^2 = .07$), work/education ($M_{goals} = 3.19$; $M_{life\ longings} = 2.89$; $F(1) = 5.43$; $p = .02$; $\eta^2 = .07$) and physical well-being ($M_{goals} = 3.94$; $M_{life\ longings} = 3.62$; $F(1) = 9.48$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .11$). Life longings, in turn, were more strongly related than goals to religiosity ($M_{goals} = 1.78$; $M_{life\ longings} = 2.03$; $F(1) = 5.65$; $p = .02$; $\eta^2 = .07$). No significant differences were found for the remaining nine life domains.

A closer look at the univariate age effects revealed age differences in 5 out of 13 life domains. Scheffé-tests showed that older adults rated their goals and life longings as being less related to work/education than younger and

middle-aged adults ($M_{old} = 2.48$; $M_{middle} = 3.23$; $M_{young} = 3.39$; $F(2) = 9.41$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .17$), and as more strongly related to physical well-being ($M_{old} = 4.23$; $M_{middle} = 3.70$; $M_{young} = 3.41$; $F(2) = 6.83$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .15$), family ($M_{old} = 4.03$; $M_{middle} = 3.46$; $M_{young} = 2.99$; $F(2) = 9.44$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .20$), religiosity ($M_{old} = 2.25$; $M_{middle} = 2.05$; $M_{young} = 1.42$; $F(2) = 4.77$; $p = .01$; $\eta^2 = .09$), and politics/world situation ($M_{old} = 2.47$; $M_{middle} = 2.25$; $M_{young} = 1.70$; $F(2) = 6.15$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .15$) than younger adults.

Differences Between Goals and Life Longings in Cognitive, Emotional, and Action-Related Characteristics

To test whether participants had rated their three most important goals and life longings differently on the cognitive, emotional, and action-related assessment dimensions, we conducted a 2×3 multivariate analysis of variance with construct as within-subject factor and age group as between-subject factor. Dependent variables were “concreteness,” “symbolic character,” “incompleteness,” “tritime focus,” “long-term orientation,” “emotional intensity,” “emotional ambivalence,” “choice,” “disengagement,” “proximity to action,” “perceived attainability,” “knowledge of means,” and “availability of means.” As expected, there was a significant multivariate main effect for construct ($F(13, 66) = 10.61$; $p = .001$; $\eta^2 = .68$), indicating, overall, that participants assessed their three most important goals and life longings differently with respect to the tested characteristics. We further found a significant multivariate main effect for age ($F(26, 132) = 2.00$; $p = .01$; $\eta^2 = .28$), indicating age-related differences in the overall assessment of goals and life longings. However, follow-up analyses showed that there were no significant univariate age effects ($ps > .05$) on individual assessment dimensions. The “construct \times age” interaction did not reach significance ($F(26, 132) = 1.14$; $p = .31$; $\eta^2 = .18$).⁴

On which dimensions did goals and life longings differ? As summarized in Table 2, univariate follow-up analyses revealed that participants evaluated life longings, in comparison to goals, as involving a stronger sense of incompleteness, and as being more long-term oriented and emotionally ambivalent. Personal goals, relative to life longings, were evaluated as being closer to everyday actions and more attainable. Participants also regarded their goals as more controllable, that is, they reported to have more elaborate knowledge about, and more access to, the means necessary to attain their goals than to the means necessary to approximate their life longings. Goals were also rated higher in intentional choice and disengagement than life

³ We also explored sex differences. The analyses showed that neither the multivariate main effect of sex nor the “sex \times construct” interaction were significant ($F(13, 62) = 1.11$; $p = .37$; $\eta^2 = .19$ and $F(13, 62) = 1.33$; $p = .22$; $\eta^2 = .22$, respectively).

⁴ Again, analyses showed that neither the multivariate main effect of sex nor the “sex \times construct” interaction were significant ($F(13, 63) = 1.03$; $p = .43$; $\eta^2 = .18$ and $F(13, 63) = .90$; $p = .91$; $\eta^2 = .10$, respectively).

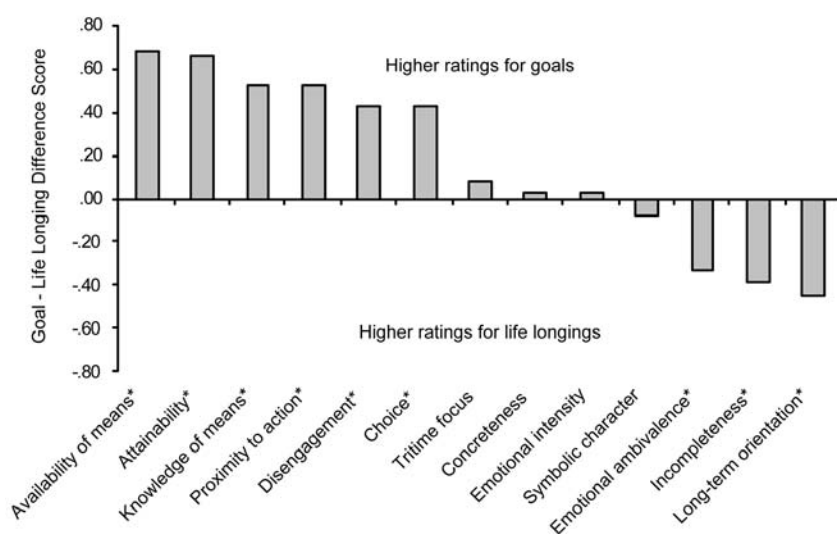


Figure 1. Difference scores between ratings of goals and life longings. Positive values denote higher ratings for goals; negative values denote higher ratings for life longings. Scales are ordered by the magnitude of mean differences between the two constructs. An asterisk after the scale name indicates that the difference is significant at $p = .001$. Response options ranged from 1 to 5 except for the Tritime Focus scale (see Table 2 for item format).

longings, that is, participants reported that they were able to choose their goals more on their own initiative, and that their goals were easier to give up intentionally than their life longings. Participants' assessments of life longings and goals did not differ significantly on the dimensions of concreteness, symbolic character, tritime focus, and emotional intensity. Findings are graphically summarized in Figure 1.

Additional analyses were performed to examine the time foci and emotional composition of goals and life longings in more detail. First, as shown in Table 2, goals and life longings did not differ in the extent of their overall tritime focus. That is, averaged across all three time foci, no differences between both concepts were found. To examine if a single time focus was more pronounced in one concept than in the other, we compared the points participants had distributed among the three time periods for goals and life longings (see second sample item of "tritime focus," Table 2). T -tests revealed a stronger past focus of life longings ($t(80) = 3.64, p = .001, \eta^2 = .16$), whereas goals were more strongly related to the future ($t(80) = 4.08, p = .001, \eta^2 = .15$). No concept differences emerged for a focus on the present ($t(80) = .42, p = .67, \eta^2 = .00$). Findings are illustrated in Figure 2.

Second, goals and life longings did not differ in emotional intensity, but life longings were assessed as more emotionally ambivalent than goals. Follow-up analyses compared the specific emotional composition in terms of positive and negative emotions. The analysis of the short adjective checklist (happy, cheerful vs. unhappy, sad) is remarkable in several respects. First, the positive valence was higher than the negative valence for both concepts ($t(80) = 11.09, p = .001, \eta^2 = .30$ for life longings; $t(80) = 19.35, p = .001, \eta^2 = .63$ for goals). Yet, the positive valence of goals was more pronounced than the positive valence of life longings ($t(80) = 2.77; p = .01, \eta^2 = .10$) and the negative valence of life longings was more pronounced than the negative valence of goals ($t(80) = 4.25, p = .001, \eta^2 = .24$). The difference between positive and negative emotions

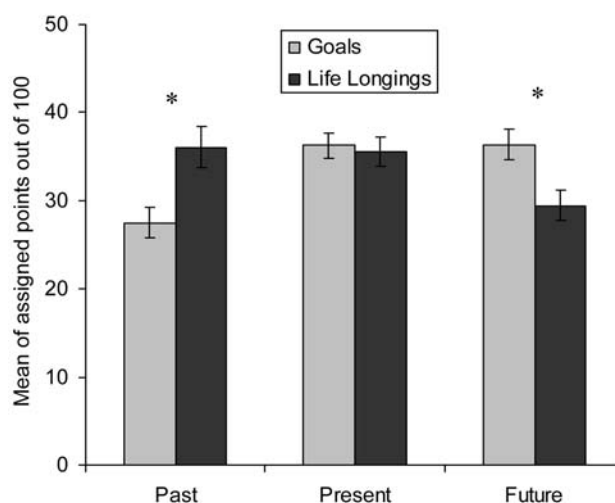


Figure 2. Time foci of goals and life longings. The task was to distribute 100 points among the three time periods according to the extent to which each is related to goals/life longings. Error bars present double standard errors, which range from 1.68 to 2.35 points. * $p < .05$.

was significantly higher for goals than for life longings ($t(80) = 4.60; p = .001, \eta^2 = .20$), which supports the hypothesis that life longings are more ambivalent than goals. Even though the positive aspects are prevalent for both life longings and goals, the difference between positive and negative aspects is less pronounced for life longings. Findings are illustrated in Figure 3.

Associations of Goals and Life Longings with Life Satisfaction

As a further indication of the distinctiveness of goals and life longings, we explored whether their characteristics are differ-

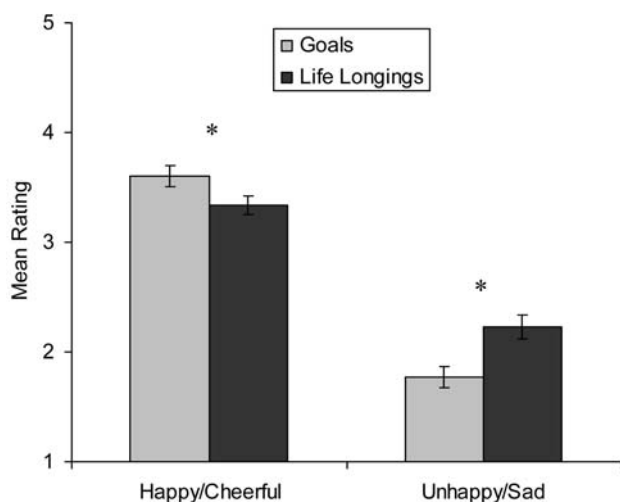


Figure 3. Emotional composition of goals and life longings. Response options ranged from 1 to 5. Error bars present double standard errors, which range from .08 to .11. * $p < .05$.

entially predictive of an individual's life satisfaction. Stepwise regression analyses with life satisfaction as dependent variable showed that the 13 goal dimensions accounted for a significant increase in explained variance when they were entered after statistically accounting for the 13 life longing dimensions ($R^2_{\text{life longings}} = .33$; $R^2_{\text{life longings and goals}} = .68$; ΔR^2 : $F(13, 51) = 4.39$; $p = .001$). The increase in explained variance was not significant, however, when entering the goal dimensions firstly and the life longing dimensions secondly ($R^2_{\text{goals}} = .56$; $R^2_{\text{goals and life longings}} = .68$; ΔR^2 : $F(13, 51) = 1.53$; $p = .14$). This indicates that characteristics of people's goals explain variance in life satisfaction above and beyond characteristics of these people's life longings. The reverse, however, does not hold; life longing characteristics do not explain variance in life satisfaction above and beyond goal characteristics. In the regression models, the most important goal dimensions predicting life satisfaction were "availability of means" ($\beta = .37$; $p = .01$) and "incompleteness" ($\beta = -.66$; $p = .001$); and the most important life longing dimension was "incompleteness" ($\beta = -.44$; $p = .001$).

Initially Not Disclosed Goals and Life Longings

In the follow-up questionnaire on previously not disclosed goals and life longings, 12% ($n = 10$) of the participants reported to have additional goals and 27% ($n = 22$) reported to have additional life longings that they had not disclosed before under the standard instruction setting. The difference in frequency was significant ($\alpha = .05$; $\chi^2_{(1, 95\%)} = 4.5$). This suggests that under normal instructions participants were more selective in their reporting of life longings than in their reporting of goals. A closer look at the contents of these additional goals and life longings –

the questionnaire included a list with possible contents as well as the possibility to give idiosyncratic descriptions – indicated that originally not disclosed goals ($n = 10$) pertained to sexual experiences (60%), infidelity, one's own death, and hurting others (20% each). Three participants (30%) added further aspects (e.g., "insult"). The originally not disclosed life longings ($n = 22$) pertained to sexual experiences (64%), infidelity (27%), one's own death and death of others (18% each), and revenge (5%). Six participants (27%) endorsed other kinds (e.g., "love," "a child despite my age").

Free Report of Differences between Goals and Life Longings

"In your opinion, what are the differences between goals and life longings?" This request for a direct comparison of both concepts at the very end of the study represented an additional method of testing our hypotheses. Responses typically consisted of two or three sentences and included the description of multiple aspects in which life longings and goals differ (e.g., "Goals are more realizable, life longings are like a vision; but you can transform life longings into goals" or "You can tackle a goal. You want to achieve it and you know how to do it. Life longings are more like wishes. They possibly remain unfulfilled forever").

Table 3 displays the percentages of responses in each category. Note that only two out of 73 answers specified differences between goals and life longings that were directly incompatible with our hypotheses. One participant considered goals and life longings to be the same ("There are no differences, my life longings are my goals"), and one participant denoted a difference opposite to the assumptions of the present study ("Goals are more strongly associated with feelings"). Some answers involved aspects not considered in our hypotheses. Twenty-four answers (32.9%) emphasized the utopian character or idealized mental representation of life longings, and seven answers (9.6%) indicated that "life longings do not need to be fulfilled." The remaining statements were consistent with the hypotheses of this study.

As can be seen in Table 3, differences in the perceived attainability of goals and life longings were mentioned most frequently, followed by concreteness. About two thirds of participants characterized goals as more attainable and about one third described goals as more concrete than life longings. The frequently mentioned differences in action-related aspects (characterizing goals, in comparison to life longings, as being more proximal to action, more attainable, more accessible to conscious choice, and as being associated with a better knowledge of necessary means) are consistent with respective differences between participants' nomothetic evaluations of goals and life longings described above. The often-mentioned difference in concreteness, however, does not correspond to

Table 3. Frequencies of responses to the open question about differences between life longings (LLs) and goals

Category and hypothesis	Frequencies of answers corresponding to hypotheses	Frequencies of answers contrary to hypotheses
<i>Cognitive aspects</i>		
Concreteness (Goals > LLs)	25 (34.2%)	0 (0%)
Symbolic character (goals < LLs)	4 (5.5%)	0 (0%)
Utopian character of LL (no hypothesis)	24 (32.9%)	
<i>Emotional aspects</i>		
Emotional character (goals < LLs)	16 (21.9%)	1 (1.4%)
<i>Action-related aspects</i>		
Proximity to action (goals > LLs)	19 (26.0%)	0 (0%)
Sense of choice (goals > LLs)	7 (9.6%)	0 (0%)
Attainability – “can attain” (goals > LLs)	43 (58.9%)	0 (0%)
Attainability – “need not attain LLs” (no hypothesis)	7 (9.6%)	
Knowledge of means (goals > LLs)	14 (19.2%)	0 (0%)
<i>Rest Category</i>	6 (8.2%)	1 (1.4%) ^a

Note. One answer usually comprised more than one category. $n = 73$. ^aThe answer “There are no differences, my LLs are my goals.” was coded here.

the respective nonsignificant difference of evaluations of goals and life longings on the nomothetic assessment dimension of concreteness. A further remarkable point is that participants did not refer to temporal differences when answering the open question. This suggests that temporal aspects do not immediately come into mind when thinking about differences between goals and life longings.

Summary of Results

Analyses revealed that participants evaluated goals, in comparison to life longings, as more closely linked to everyday actions, more strongly linked to the future, and more controllable (in terms of their development and disengagement, their attainability, and the knowledge and availability of required means). Life longings, relative to goals, were evaluated as being more emotionally ambivalent, long-term oriented, more strongly related to the past, and as involving a stronger sense of incompleteness. Participants' assessments of goals and life longings did not differ significantly on the dimensions of concreteness, symbolic character, tritime focus, and emotional intensity. Additional analyses highlighted four further aspects that differentiate goals and life longings. First, among the 13 life domains, goals were more strongly related than life longings to finances, work/education, and physical well-being, whereas life longings were more strongly related to religiosity. Second, goal characteristics explained variance in participants' life-satisfaction beyond life longing characteristics, but not vice versa. Third, participants did not disclose their life longings as frankly as their goals, and finally, participants emphasized the higher attainability and – not corresponding to the nomothetic assessment

– concreteness of goals when asked to directly compare goals and life longings.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate whether two concepts related to life planning and management – goals and life longings – can be empirically differentiated. Results support the assumption that goals and life longings are empirically distinct concepts. We found structural differences between goals and life longings in three domains of investigation, namely, cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics.

Results indicate that individuals differentiate goals and life longings particularly with respect to action-related aspects. Although goals are not necessarily put into action (e.g., Heckhausen, 1989), participants evaluated goals, in comparison to life longings, as being more strongly linked to actions and as being more controllable. The difference in the perceived attainability of goals and life longings turned out to be most important in this respect. The higher attainability of goals was the most frequently mentioned aspect in open descriptions of differences between goals and life longings and nomothetic attainability assessments accounted for more variance in distinguishing life longings and goals than any other nomothetic assessment scale in our study. These results support our proposal that goals and life longings are located at different levels in an individual's hierarchy of motivational tendencies. As hierarchically higher-order constructs, life longings may provide a general orientation for development, without having an immediate impact on everyday behavior. Goals, in contrast,

appear to be more directly linked to everyday affordances in people's lives.

Another aspect of perceived control – the possibility to intentionally select and disengage from goals and life longings – also deserves attention. Interestingly, the mean ratings for *both* goals and life longings were higher ($t(80) = 21.91, p = .001, \eta^2 = .78$) for the sense of choice when *selecting* goals and life longings (“I have chosen this goal/life longing myself.”; $M = 4.31$) than when *disengaging* from them (“I can give up this goal/life longing if I really want to.”; $M = 2.45$). That is, it generally seems to be easier to select a striving than to disengage from it.

Results further confirmed our prediction that goals and life longings differ with respect to emotional aspects. People perceive emotions accompanying life longings as being more ambiguous and mixed than emotions accompanying goals. Our interpretation of this finding is informed by the observed lower controllability of life longings. The awareness that one's life longings are perfect – but too perfect to come true – may result in a mixture of joy and sadness (Baltes, in press; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007), whereas goal-related emotions may more strongly depend on one's awareness of how fast and successful a given goal is approached (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Contrary to our predictions, there were no differences in people's nomothetic evaluations of emotional intensity – Although in their open descriptions of differences between goals and life longings, about 20% of the participants described life longings as being more emotional in character than goals. The unexpectedly high emotional intensity of goals evident in the questionnaire data may be the result of their strong link to everyday action. The pursuit of goals is likely to be emotionally involving because it concerns one's current life. Although people perceive life longings to be highly emotional experiences, the topicality of goals may cause equally intense emotions.

Concerning the cognitive aspects examined in the present study, two of our hypotheses were clearly supported by the data: The prediction that life longings involve a stronger sense of incompleteness and the prediction that life longings are more long-term oriented than personal goals. These findings are consistent with the view that life longings originate from the awareness of a lack in one's life, whereas the existence of goals does not necessarily point to a perceived imperfection. Results also showed that people perceive life longings to extend over a longer period of time. Drawing on the *Zeigarnik Effect* (Zeigarnik, 1927), this persistence may be seen as a result of the utopian and unattainable character of life longings: They stay in mind because they are not fulfilled.

Not supporting our predictions related to time perspective, however, was that the temporal aspect was not brought up by our participants in their answers to the open question. Furthermore, in the nomothetic assessments, participants did not ascribe life longings a stronger overall tritime focus than goals. Surprisingly, results indicated that goals may rather be seen as temporally comprehensive than as exclu-

sively linked to one's present and future. More detailed analyses showed, however, that goals focus more strongly on the future and life longings more strongly on the past, which is an important qualitative difference between the two concepts.

Mixed results were obtained for the concreteness of goals and life longings. No differences were found in the questionnaire data, whereas remarkable differences were observed in the responses to the request for a direct comparison of goals and life longings. Here, one third of the sample described life longings as more abstract and comprehensive than goals. These inconclusive results may be due to a methodological problem. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to list criteria that would characterize the fulfillment of a given goal or life longing. Afterwards, they rated these criteria in terms of how easily they came to mind and how clearly they would indicate the fulfillment of the goal or life longing. This operationalization might have led participants to describe life longings on a relatively concrete level, whereas the open question did not suggest a particular answer, and revealed that life longings were seen as more abstract than goals. Yet, no final conclusion can be drawn so far.

Findings did not support our hypothesis that life longings have a more symbolic character than goals. This may be explained by our assumption that goals and life longings are hierarchically linked to each other in a person's hierarchy of strivings. The life longing “to become an adventurer,” for example, may stand for the life longing for freedom and autonomy. Goals derived from this life longing, such as “to start skydiving,” are strongly related to this life longing and their symbolic meaning may therefore be comparably endorsed.

A further notable finding concerns the number of goals and life longings revealed in the anonymous follow-up questionnaire. The frequency of participants with previously nondisclosed life longings (27%) was very similar to the frequency Scheibe, Freund et al. (2007) found in an earlier study (35%). In both instances, about one third of the participants did not want to completely disclose highly intimate and/or socially undesirable life longings. The greater number of originally nondisclosed life longings than goals suggests that life longings have a more intimate character than goals. It also implies that results of the present study may be an underestimation of true differences between goals and life longings. Because participants appear to control themselves more when reporting life longings, some life longings in this study may be more similar to goals than the life longings that were held back. For example, if a person does not disclose an intimate life longing for love or a socially undesirable life longing for revenge and instead reports a life longing for recognition along with the goal “professional promotion,” the similarity between the reported life longing and the reported goal may be inflated.

An alternative explanation for the difference in the frequency of nondisclosed goals and life longings may be a possible difference in the “base rate” of the two constructs.

Do people generally have more life longings than goals and can accordingly come up with more? Because we did not assess the base rate number of goals and life longings in this study, this point remains speculative. Drawing upon our participants' descriptions of goals as more concrete, one might expect, however, that people rather have a higher number of goals than a higher number of life longings.

In line with previous research (e.g., Emmons, 1996; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007), both goals and life longings were shown to be related to individuals' life satisfaction, although to a differential degree. The finding that life longing characteristics did not predict life satisfaction beyond goal characteristics may indicate that goals are more relevant to well-being than life longings. However, life satisfaction is only one among many different indicators of well-being. It is possible that life longings are more strongly (and positively) related to meaning or personal growth aspects of well-being rather than to happiness (Scheibe, Kunzmann et al., 2007). Notably, goals were not only positively linked with life satisfaction, an issue rarely addressed in previous research. The more goals addressed something essential missing in life (incompleteness), the lower was individual's life satisfaction. Further research is needed to shed light on the associations of goals and life longings with different aspects of well-being.

Young and older participants largely agreed on the structural differences between their goals and life longings, but differed in the contents of reported goals and life longings. This finding is consistent with previous investigations on age-related differences in the contents of goals or life longings (e.g., Nurmi, 1992; Scheibe, Freund et al., 2007). In each age group, goals and life longings appear to be directed at current developmental tasks and themes, such as work/education in young and middle adulthood and health and generativity-related themes (family, politics) in later adulthood.

Limitations

Overall, the study supports our prediction that goals and life longings are distinct concepts. Methodologically, however, the question may arise: To what extent did the instructions used to elicit goals and life longings suggest the obtained results? When designing the study, we took care that instructions describe the concepts of goals and life longings as clearly as possible, while limiting references to characteristics under investigation. We believe that results are not merely a reflection of instructions, and often go beyond them. For example, even though our instruction mentioned aspects related to intensity or temporal extension, participants did *not* evaluate life longings as more emotionally intense than goals and they did not emphasize temporal aspects in their responses to the open question. In answering the open question, they also added more aspects than were included in the definition, such as the point that "life longings do not *need* to be fulfilled." The differences in the

contents of goals and life longings further support our conclusion that goals and life longings are distinct concepts; our findings cannot plausibly be a consequence of how the two concepts were introduced to participants. Nevertheless, a follow-up study eliciting goals and life longings without giving prior definitions of the two constructs might be useful in further corroborating findings of this study.

The present study was based on self-report. Convergent evidence is therefore needed to support the validity of our findings. Using a multi-method approach (e.g., Eid & Diener, 2006), the differentiation of goals and life longings could be investigated with further types of measurement (e.g., experience sampling) or in specific life contexts (e.g., restricting the report of goals and life longings to a specific life domain). By using self-report, we also proceeded from the assumption that people can and want to report on their goals and life longings. The willingness to disclose goals and life longings was further controlled for by including the anonymous follow-up questionnaire. Yet, there certainly is the possibility that people sometimes may not consciously know what they are striving for (e.g., Boesch, 1998; Wilson, 2002). Future research should therefore concentrate on implicit methodological approaches to investigate goals and life longings that may not be accessible to conscious awareness.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

Results of this study have implications for theories of self-regulation (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998). Goals and life longings may be differentially important and functional in the process of self-regulation. It is a prevalent idea that people regulate their behavior through processes of feedback control, such as monitoring their success in diminishing the distance to their goals. However, as the hierarchical model suggests, people typically have multiple goals and life longings that are not given equal amounts of attention at a given moment in time. As long as goal progress is satisfactory, behavior likely is regulated at intermediate levels of the goal hierarchy (but see Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). In this context, goals and goal pursuit should be salient and little consideration should be given to life longings.

However, life longings likely come into the foreground when the discrepancy between the idealized and actual life reality becomes too large to remain undetected, leading to intensified negative affect. As the experience of life longings is associated with life reflection, it may promote a re-consideration and possibly reprioritization of goals. To date, these considerations remain speculative. It is an intriguing quest for future research to investigate these ideas, for example, in longitudinal or experience-sampling designs.

Another issue for investigation is a comparison of the

correlates of goals and life longings beyond overall life satisfaction. How, for example, are goals and life longings related to other characteristics of a person, such as mood, perseverance, or self-complexity? Finally, research should investigate how goals and life longings can be differentiated from further concepts accounting for representations of alternative realities, including regrets, daydreams, hope, wishes, life tasks, and possible or ideal selves (see e.g., Scheibe & Freund, 2007).

Summary and Conclusions

The present study supports the assumption that goals and life longings – both denoting internal representations of desired life realities – are empirically distinct concepts. Results indicate differences in several cognitive, emotional, and action-related characteristics. In particular, goals were evaluated as more closely linked to everyday actions, more strongly linked to the future, and more controllable than life longings. Life longings, in contrast to goals, were evaluated as more emotionally ambivalent, more long-term oriented, more strongly related to the past, and as involving a stronger sense of incompleteness. It may be concluded that the two constructs are located at different levels in an individual's hierarchy of motivational tendencies. As higher-order constructs, life longings may stimulate the selection and pursuit of goals, which in turn have greater impact on everyday behavior. In terms of self-regulation and feedback control, we further suggest that goals are salient when progress is satisfactory, whereas life longings come to notice when one realizes an insurmountable discrepancy between actual and desired states of life.

Acknowledgments

We thank Paul B. Baltes for initiating and supporting the study, Dulce Erdt and Ulrike Altmann for their help in conducting the study, and Alexandra M. Freund and the SOC team at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development for fruitful discussions. We also appreciate the time and effort our participants invested in this research.

References

- Austin, J.T., & Vancouver, J.B. (1996). Goal constructs in psychology: Structure, process, and content. *Psychological Bulletin*, 3, 338–375.
- Bagozzi, R.P., Baumgartner, H., & Pieters, R. (1998). Goal-directed emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 12, 1–26.
- Baltes, P.B. (in press). Entwurf einer Lebensspannen-Psychologie der Sehnsucht: Utopie eines vollkommenen und perfekten Lebens [A lifespan psychological approach to the study of *Sehnsucht* (life longings): Utopia of a perfect and complete life]. *Psychologische Rundschau*.
- Baltes, P.B., Freund, A.M., & Scheibe, S. (2002). *Developmental psychology of Sehnsucht (life-longing): Central propositions and outlook for a new project*. Unpublished manuscript, Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Self-regulation of motivation and action through internal standards and goal systems. In L.A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 19–85). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Belk, R.W., Ger, G., & Askegaard, S. (2003). The fire of desire: A multisited inquiry into consumer passion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30, 326–351.
- Boesch, E.E. (1998). *Sehnsucht: Von der Suche nach Glück und Sinn* [Longing: About the search for happiness and meaning]. Bern, Switzerland: Huber.
- Brandtstädter, J. (1999). The self in action and development: Cultural, biosocial, and ontogenetic bases of intentional self-development. In J. Brandtstädter, & R.M. Lerner (Eds.), *Action and self-development: Theory and research through the life span* (pp. 37–67). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brunstein, J.C., & Maier, G.W. (1996). Persönliche Ziele: Ein Überblick zum Stand der Forschung [Personal goals: An overview of the present research]. *Psychologische Rundschau*, 47, 146–160.
- Carver, C.S., & Scheier, M.F. (1990). Origins and functions of positive and negative affect: A control-process view. *Psychological Review*, 97, 19–35.
- Carver, C.S., & Scheier, M.F. (1998). *On the self-regulation of behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Chojnowska, M. (2001). *Nach Sinn oder nach Taten streben? Wie beeinflusst die Art der Zielformulierung die Zielverfolgung?* [Striving for meaning or action? How does the formulation of goals influence goal pursuit?]. Unpublished master's thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 1105–1117.
- Ebner, N.C., Freund, A.M., & Baltes, P.B. (2006). Developmental changes in personal goal orientation from young to late adulthood: From striving for gains to maintaining and preventing losses. *Psychology and Aging*, 21, 664–678.
- Eid, M., & Diener, E. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of multimethod measurement in psychology*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Emmons, R.A. (1989). The personal striving approach to personality. In L.A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 87–126). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Emmons, R.A. (1996). Striving and feeling: Personal goals and subjective well-being. In P.M. Gollwitzer, & J.A. Bargh (Eds.), *The psychology of action: Linking cognition and motivation to behavior* (pp. 313–337). New York: Guilford.
- Freund, A.M. (2006). Age-differential motivational consequences of optimization versus compensation focus in younger and older adults. *Psychology and Aging*, 21, 240–252.
- Freund, A.M., & Baltes, P.B. (2000). The orchestration of selection, optimization, and compensation: An action-theoretical conceptualization of a theory of developmental regulation. In W.J. Perrig, & A. Grob (Eds.), *Control of human behavior, mental processes, and consciousness: Essays in honor of the 60th birthday of August Flammer* (pp. 35–58). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Freund, A.M., & Riediger, M. (2003). Successful aging. In R.M. Lerner, M.A. Easterbrooks, & J. Mistry (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Vol. 6. Developmental psychology* (pp. 601–628). New York: Wiley.
- Gollwitzer, P.M., & Moskowitz, G.B. (1996). Goal effects on thought and behavior. In E.T. Higgins, & A.W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 361–399). New York: Guilford.
- Heckhausen, H. (1989). *Motivation und Handeln* [Motivation and action] (2nd ed.). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Holm, O. (1999). Analysis of longing: Origins, levels, and dimensions. *Journal of Psychology*, *133*, 612–630.
- Little, B. (1983). Personal projects: A rationale and method for investigation. *Environment and Behavior*, *15*, 273–309.
- Nurmi, J.-E. (1992). Age differences in adult life goals, concerns, and their temporal extension: A life course approach to future-oriented motivation. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *15*, 487–508.
- Oatley, K., & Johnson-Laird, P.N. (1998). The communicative theory of emotions. In J.M. Jenkins, K. Oatley, & N.L. Stein (Eds.), *Human emotions: A reader* (pp. 84–97). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Palaian, S.K. (1993). The experience of longing: A phenomenological investigation (emotion, desires). (Doctoral dissertation, The Union Institute, 1993). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *54*, 1678B.
- Pervin, L.A. (1989). Goal concepts: Themes, issues, and questions. In L.A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 473–479). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Ravicz, L. (1998). The experience of longing (desire, yearning). (Doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *60*, 2958B.
- Riediger, M., & Freund, A.M. (2004). Interference and facilitation among personal goals: Differential associations with subjective well-being and persistent goal pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *12*, 1511–1523.
- Roese, N.J. (1997). Counterfactual thinking. *Psychological Bulletin*, *121*, 133–148.
- Rushton, J.P., Brainerd, C.J., & Pressley, M. (1983). Behavioral development and construct validity: The principle of aggregation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *94*, 18–38.
- Ryff, C.D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 1069–1081.
- Scheibe, S. (2005). *Longing (“Sehnsucht”) as a new lifespan concept: A developmental conceptualization and its measurement in adulthood*. Doctoral dissertation, Free University Berlin, Germany. Retrieved on January 6, 2006, from <http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/2005/159>.
- Scheibe, S., & Freund, A.M. (2007). *Differentiating Sehnsucht (life longings) from goals, regret, and the ideal self: Evidence for divergent validity in subjective conceptions*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Scheibe, S., Freund, A.M., & Baltes, P.B. (2007). Toward a developmental psychology of *Sehnsucht* (life longings): The optimal (utopian) life. *Developmental Psychology*, *43*, 778–795.
- Scheibe, S., Kunzmann, U., & Baltes, P.B. (2007). Wisdom, life longings, and optimal development. In J.A. Blackburn & C.N. Dulmus (Eds.), *Handbook of gerontology: Evidence-based approaches to theory, practice, and policy* (pp. 117–142). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Schlenker, B.R., & Weigold, M.F. (1989). Goals and the self-identification process: Constructing desired identities. In L.A. Pervin (Ed.), *Goal concepts in personality and social psychology* (pp. 243–290). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Skinner, E.A. (1996). A guide to constructs of control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*, 549–570.
- Vallacher, R.R., & Wegner, D.M. (1987). What do people think they're doing? Action identification and human behavior. *Psychological Review*, *94*, 3–15.
- Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Arndt, J., & Routledge, C. (2006). Nostalgia: Content, triggers, functions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *91*, 975–993.
- Wilson, T.D. (2002). *Strangers to ourselves: Discovering the adaptive unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Zeigarnik, B. (1927). Das Behalten erledigter und unerledigter Handlungen. [On finished and unfinished tasks.] *Psychologische Forschung*, *9*, 1–85.
- Zeigarnik, B. (1984). Kurt Lewin and Soviet Psychology. *Journal of Social Issues*, *40*, 181–192.

About the authors

Sabine Mayser received her diploma in psychology at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. The present paper is based on her master's thesis conducted at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development. She currently works as a consultant organizational psychologist.

Susanne Scheibe received her doctoral and part of her postdoctoral training at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany, and is now a postdoctoral research fellow at Stanford University. Her research focuses on self-regulatory processes across the lifespan and the psychology of *Sehnsucht* (life longing).

Michaela Riediger is a research scientist at the Center for Lifespan Psychology of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, Germany. Her research interests pertain to the development and social foundations of affective and motivational processes across the lifespan.

Susanne Scheibe

Stanford University
Department of Psychology
450 Serra Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-2130
USA
Tel. +1 650 725-2458
Fax +1 650 725-5699
E-mail scheibe@stanford.edu

Appendix

Instructions Used to Elicit Life Longings

Perhaps you are not always completely aware of your longings. We would therefore like to take you on a mental journey through your life. That is, we would like to ask you to visualize important images from five periods of your life, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age. We hope this will help you become aware of the longings that are linked with different times in your life. Depending on your age, some of these periods of life will be in the past, whereas others will lie ahead. In the latter case, please try to imagine your future. In the following, we will go through the five life periods one by one. While you visualize each life period, you will not have to write anything down. Only after you have pictured each life period, we will ask you to add something to the blank paper in front of you.

We will now begin the mental journey through your life. Please try to sit on your chair as comfortably as possible. Find a comfortable position. If you like, close your eyes. Try to let go of all the concerns and worries you have in your mind today. Try to relax your muscles. Please let your thoughts wander off to your childhood now.

Maybe there are *particular places* that are especially linked to your childhood, such as a town, a house, a room,

or a particular landscape or scenery. Picture these places. Take your time until these images appear in your mind's eye. (*Pause for 15 seconds*)

Maybe there are *special persons* who are important during this life period. Picture these persons. Take your time until you can see these individuals in your mind's eye. (*Pause for 15 seconds*)

Maybe there are also *particular events* linked to your childhood, for example a vacation, a celebration, a conversation, or a personal project. Picture these events. Take your time until these events come to your mind's eye. (*Pause for 15 seconds*)

Now you have visualized your childhood by means of these images. At this point, we want to turn to your longings. Maybe you have longings that are linked with this period of your life, that is, longings which you had had in your childhood and which are still present today – or longings for this period in your life, or for particular people, places or events belonging to this period in your life. If this is the case, please make a note of each of your longings on the paper in front of you. (*Pause for approximately 1–2 minutes*)

Note. The instruction was repeated in abbreviated form for the periods of adolescence, young, middle, and old adulthood. Prior to the warm-up task, participants were given a blank page entitled “List of Life Longings” to be filled in during the task.