

## **GOALS, CONGRUENCE, AND POSITIVE WELL-BEING: NEW EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR HUMANISTIC THEORIES**



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### Summary

Although some have suggested that humanistic theories and quantitative methodologies are inherently contradictory, this article will try to demonstrate that they can be quite complementary. To this end, the authors will review their own findings with regard to the nature of “positive motivation,” research that has been based in humanistic theoretical ideas but that also has employed state-of-the-art quantitative methodologies, longitudinal designs, and causal



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modeling techniques. First, the article discusses numerous studies that have shown that striving for authentic, self-concordant reasons yields greater goal attainment and enhanced well-being. Second, the article reviews evidence that well-being and relationship quality are also better when people orient toward *intrinsic* values such as intimacy, community, and growth, rather than *extrinsic* values such as status, money, and image. The authors conclude that the positive psychology movement offers important new opportunities to bridge the gap between humanistic and more mainstream psychologies, to the potential enrichment of both fields.

#### QUANTIFYING HUMANISM AND HUMANIZING QUANTIFICATION: AN EXAMPLE POSITIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM

As graduate students in psychology, both of us were trained in mainstream, quantitatively oriented programs. Our lives and classes were full of surveys, statistics, and experiments, and our mentors strove to convince us of the importance of obtaining quantitative empirical evidence to justify and support claims about personality and human experience. At the same time, however, the theoretical approaches to human experience that most attracted us were those deriving from humanistic and existential thought. The ideas of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Eric Fromm, R. D. Laing, Rollo May, and others seemed to us to offer a wealth of insight into human functioning. Moreover, these writers provided a metatheory that was not only respectful of people but also seemed to us very accurate in its depiction of fundamental life issues, such as the struggle of the human self to grow and develop. We ourselves struggled to understand how we might be both empiricists and humanists at the same time.

In looking around for role models, we found relatively few. Most humanists work in clinically related areas and, when they pursue research, tend to do so in a more qualitative, case study manner. Indeed, some humanistic writers have argued that quantitative research is necessarily dehumanizing and reductionistic and that the attempt of mainstream personality researchers to understand human functioning via numerical methodologies is doomed to failure

(Giorgi, 1987, 1993). Yet, when we spoke with prominent researchers within our graduate departments, we found few who agreed with these criticisms and even fewer who subscribed to humanistic theoretical perspectives. Instead, most tended to view humanistic ideas as too “fuzzy,” “soft,” or “Pollyannaish” to be of much use. For example, the Big Five model of personality traits, the social-cognitive model of rewards and regulatory mechanisms, and the social-contextualist view that behavior is largely determined by roles and situations, all seemed to have little place or patience for the phenomenal self and its struggle for meaning and authenticity.

Our problem of reconciling empiricism and humanism was further exacerbated by the fact that neither of us yet held academic jobs, and we wondered how successful we would be in that endeavor if we continued to pursue the theories that were most interesting to us. That is, although both of us resonated strongly with the insights of humanists, we were not oblivious to the stigma that is sometimes attached to such perspectives in mainstream academic psychology. Certainly, some psychologists before us have successfully conjoined humanism and empiricism, but it seemed to be a risky undertaking on which to hinge our own professional futures. Despite this, we persisted. In fact, there did seem to be some hope for eventual employment because we both enjoyed using statistics and quantitative methodologies. Furthermore, we both believed that for our research to be most useful and to become widely accepted, we would need to publish in top-notch mainstream academic journals with their rigorous empirical and statistical standards. This we attempted to do.

Imagine our pleasure to find, some years later, that our work has been well received in mainstream psychology and that we are both nearing tenure in excellent departments. Imagine our further pleasure to find that the field of psychology as a whole has recently been moving in a direction that parallels that of our own early careers. That is, although we can surely claim no credit for its initiation, a movement called *positive psychology* is afoot that is wrestling with some of the very same theoretical and methodological divides with which we have struggled.

Positive psychology is an attempt to understand healthy aspects of people, that is, fundamental human strengths and resources (Seligman, 1998). Although mainstream researchers have in the

past tended to focus on problems such as trauma, disorders, and malaise, positive psychologists are instead interested in investigating “the good life” and the psychological factors that can promote it. Emerging research topics include the nature of altruism, wisdom, growth, creativity, spirituality, forgiveness, gratitude, community, hope, and love, to mention just a few (see Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Thus, as can be seen, positive psychology is reexploring many of the same questions and issues in which humanistic psychologists have long been interested.

However, positive psychology is also invested in studying these topics in as scientifically rigorous a manner as possible. That is, rather than eschewing quantitative methodologies, positive psychology researchers embrace them because of their usefulness for testing, supporting, and rejecting theories. Of course, such an approach is based in the assumption that psychological knowledge is not just an arbitrary cultural construction. That is, there really *is* a reality “out there,” and thoughtful use of quantitative empirical techniques can help reveal some of its outlines. As noted above, however, humanistic psychologists have long been skeptical of the promises of quantitative research, fearing that the person may become lost within such methodologies or that myopic, simplistic, or reductionist theories readily dominate such approaches. Nevertheless, given the emergence of the new positive psychology, with its greater appreciation for optimal human experience, and given also the emergence of many new methods and modeling approaches within the past 30 years, we suggest that these concerns may be less pressing than in the past.

Hoping to show concretely that “quantitative methodology” and “sensitive humanism” can be in harmony rather than in opposition to one another and, further, that bringing them together can yield substantial new understanding and explanatory power for all of psychology, we describe in this article our own decade-long research program into the nature of *positive human motivation*. Specifically, we have been studying the factors that positively or negatively affect personal goal striving, that is, people’s proactive attempts to make improvements in their lives. We believe that our research program has taken some significant steps toward validating some important humanistic theories and perspectives and thus that readers of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* might like to be

introduced to them. We also hope to introduce this audience to some mixed idiographic/nomothetic methodologies that we believe can successfully quantify subtle but important humanistic concepts, without sacrificing the life meanings of individual participants.

## DEFINING POSITIVE MOTIVATION

The work of classic humanists provides an admirable first approximation of the meaning of positive human motivation. For example, Carl Rogers (1961), perhaps the most influential humanistic psychologist, argued that fully functioning humans are those who are acting in accordance with an “organismic valuing process” occurring within themselves. By means of this process, they are enabled to perceive their underlying condition and to best choose what to do in order to further their own adaptation and development. Such development, over time, is characterized by a movement toward greater openness, awareness, and self-acceptance, and a movement away from contingent self-esteem, dependence on social approval, and psychological defenses. Maslow (1968) also proposed an innate need for self-actualization, as did Angyal (1941), Goldstein (1939), Rank (1936), and Adler (1927) before him. Indeed, this *positive* growth-based assumption may be the most important characteristic shared by the person-centered theories (Ryan, 1995).

All of these theorists have also acknowledged that the movement toward “the best in oneself” is fragile and can readily become derailed. Rogers (1961) argued that when a child experiences unresponsive caretaking or when the caretaker only provides love contingent on the child’s adherence to rigid standards, the child will often suppress his or her organismic valuing process and may eventually lose touch with it altogether. Maslow (1968) viewed the self-actualization drive as one relatively faint voice among a cacophony of lower level needs. Angyal (1941) and Rank (1936) viewed the struggle between heteronomy and homonomy as an inescapable conflict within humans. In short, classic humanistic psychology postulates a potential conflict between self and interpersonal milieu, which can hamper the developing personality by crippling its ability to fulfill personal needs and to captain its own developmental process. Positive motivation, in this view, is that which solves this problem—that is, motivation that both enables the indi-

vidual to meet his or her own maintenance and growth needs, while relating to others and integrating himself or herself into society (assuming that the dominant social order is not evil or corrupt).

## INTRODUCING SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

These types of issues have been carefully examined within the 30-year empirical research program of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985, 1991, in press). Their self-determination theory (SDT) attempts to specify the basic motivational, developmental, psychosocial, and phenomenological underpinnings of self-organized and societally integrated behavior, and Deci and Ryan have also provided rigorous empirical documentation for each component part of their comprehensive theory. Because our own work is rooted in this theory, we will review it below.

SDT begins with the concept of intrinsic motivation, viewing it as the prototypically self-organized state, in which the individual is striving to master environmental challenges, purely for the satisfaction of doing so. Such behavior is assumed to be automatically self-integrated, and thus, the individual has full access to his or her cognitive and creative resources. Intrinsic motivation shares much with the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and the “peak experiences” described by Maslow (1968) in that when people are intrinsically motivated, they typically feel intense interest and absorption in activity and may lose track of both time and self while so engaged. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation is thought to express and represent the individual’s inherent “organismic growth process” in that such states are most likely to occur in areas of life in which the individual has long-term expanding interests and commitments. An early discovery of SDT researchers was that extrinsic incentives readily undermine intrinsic motivation. For example, a person who solves puzzles in order to get rewards is less likely to spontaneously pick up the puzzles afterwards, a finding that has important implications for the question of how coaches, teachers, parents, and supervisors should try to motivate their charges.

According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is most likely to occur when three inherent psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Stated differently, SDT posits that all indi-

viduals have basic needs to feel free and uncoerced in their behavior, to feel close and connected to important others via their behavior, and to feel effective and competent in their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Intrinsic motivation is more likely to occur when people have these qualities of experience within their lives and, reciprocally, when states of intrinsic motivation themselves enhance the likelihood of obtaining these three types of experience. Psychological need satisfaction is importantly influenced by the interpersonal and organizational contexts that people encounter. Contexts that fail to support people's autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are likely to inhibit their ability to express intrinsic motivations and, indeed, to grow as people. Unfortunately, space prohibits a full consideration of SDT's psychological needs concept (for a thorough exposition, see Deci & Ryan, in press); primarily, we would like to point out the obvious similarities between these ideas and the proposals of classic humanist writers concerning the nature of psychological needs, growth, well-being, and actualization. In contrast, mainstream (cognitive) perspectives are notably reluctant to posit inherent psychological needs within humans (Deci, 1992).

SDT theory is particularly interested in what humanistically and existentially oriented theorists might call *authenticity*. That is, SDT recognizes that sometimes people act out of their deepest, most whole-hearted and growth-oriented motives and needs, whereas other times, they act out of feelings of pressure, coercion, or bad faith. As noted above, early versions of SDT simply contrasted intrinsic (i.e., authentic) motivation with extrinsic motivation (i.e., behavior undertaken only to obtain anticipated rewards or avoid punishment). However, this dichotomy proved to be too simple. More recently, the theory has subdivided extrinsic motivation into three types: external (acting to get rewards or avoid punishment), introjected (acting to avoid self-imposed guilt or anxiety), and identified (acting in accordance with felt personal values) (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Although all three types of extrinsic motivation can give rise to behavior that is not intrinsically pleasurable, the three extrinsic motives vary in the degree of self-integration or authenticity they represent. For example, a man might change his baby's diaper only because he knows his wife will scold him if he doesn't (external motivation), only because he'll feel bad about himself if he doesn't (introjected motivation), or only because he cares about

the baby and endorses hygiene as a value (identified motivation). In the latter case, the behavior has been fully internalized into the self, and thus, the behavior is considered to be authentic and self-determined, even though attending to a diaper explosion is hardly an enjoyable experience.

Together, external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic motivations are conceived of by SDT as representing a continuum of “perceived locus of causality” (PLOC) for behavior, ranging from completely external to completely internal. Interestingly, the four dimensions of the PLOC continuum nicely represent the essence of important past theories of human motivation. Intrinsic motivation corresponds well to the innate motives for curiosity and growth that humanistic and organismic psychologists have insisted are vital to human functioning and development. Of the three extrinsic motivations, external motivation corresponds to tenets of operant behaviorism, in which disliked behavior only takes place in anticipation of concrete rewards. Introjected motivation corresponds to ideas discussed by Perls, Rogers, and various psychodynamic theorists, in which a person acts out of an internal sense of pressure or guilt, as one part of the self attempts to force the compliance of another part. Identified motivation corresponds to tenets of existentialist theory, in which maturity involves finding meaning and feeling a sense of choice even in the face of disliked necessities. A final advantage of the PLOC continuum is that it can represent a crucial issue within psychosocial developmental theory (Erikson, 1963), namely, whether people have internalized the doing of socially valued tasks (such as voting, jury duty, and diaper changing) that may have little intrinsic appeal.

As can be seen from this brief review, SDT shares many meta-theoretical assumptions with humanistic and existential ideas, including notions of self-actualization, true self, authenticity, and psychological needs. In our own work, we have attempted to apply these ideas to understand the nature of healthy goal setting. Specifically, we have been interested in both *why* people pursue their goals and *what* types of goals they pursue. As will be seen momentarily, both of these questions raise important issues concerning healthy human functioning, and our attempts to answer them have lent new empirical support for many of the ideas propounded by humanistic and existential theorists.

THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES  
OF AUTHENTIC GOAL PURSUIT

Much SDT research has focused on measuring people's PLOC within particular social-contextual domains, such as work, school, or sports. The question of interest is, Can a person feel self-determined given the forces operative within that particular domain? For example, What types of authority communication styles or motivational systems promote or detract from internal PLOC within a domain and, correspondingly, promote or detract from intrinsic motivation, creativity, satisfaction, and well-being within that domain (Deci & Ryan, 1985)? In our research, however, we have applied PLOC to the study of "self-generated personal goals," that is, people's proactive and trans-situational attempts to effect life change. In a nominal sense, personal goals are automatically self-determined in that the person himself or herself created them. However, this does not mean that they always *feel* self-determined. In our work, we have been investigating the consequences of failing to feel a sense of ownership of one's own self-generated goals. Before we describe these findings, however, we will first briefly describe the nature of personal goal assessment, as such assessment is central to our work.

Personal goal assessments typically begin by asking participants to write down 5 to 15 goals that they pursue or will be pursuing. Little guidance is given participants with regard to what goals to list or how to select them, and thus, the goals listed can be quite unique to the participant and his or her situation and also be quite meaningful to him or her. This gives the methodology strong personological and social-ecological validity (Little, 1993), compared to typical inventory-based methods of personality assessment. Despite the diversity and potential uniqueness of listed goals, rigorous measurement and hypothesis testing are also possible. This is because participants' goals can be coded and counted, or participants can rate all goals on conceptual dimensions of interest, such as PLOC (i.e., they can rate to what extent they pursue each striving for external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic reasons). Such ratings, aggregated across the set of goals to create summary goal system variables, can then be used to predict positive outcomes of interest, such as efficiency of functioning, quality of relationships, and level of ego development.

In our personal goal work, we have employed PLOC in two different ways. When measured in terms of people's characteristic personal strivings (i.e., what they typically find themselves trying to do in life) (Emmons, 1989), we construe PLOC as indicative of *organismic personality integration*. The issue is, Has the individual achieved a mature sense of ownership of his or her characteristic motivated behavior? Our early work with this construct showed that those who score high in this measure demonstrate many personal qualities one would expect, such as higher measured self-actualization, creativity, life-satisfaction, high positive and low negative mood, openness to experience, interpersonal empathy, and autonomy orientation (Sheldon, 1995; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

Sheldon and Kasser (2000) recently used this striving PLOC measure to investigate personality integration across the life span, in a study of Missouri adults ranging in age from 18 to 85. Our study was an attempt to explain the higher psychological well-being that older persons often evidence, as demonstrated by a number of studies (for a review, see Argyle, 1999). Specifically, we hoped to examine whether older persons are happier precisely *because* they have more integrated personalities. We found that age was positively associated with well-being (i.e., high positive mood and life satisfaction, and low negative mood), just as in other recent work (Argyle, 1999). Moreover, we found that age was also positively associated with our striving-based measure of organismic personality integration. In terms of the four specific PLOC dimensions, we found a negative association of age with introjected motivation and a positive association of age with identified motivation. In other words, although older persons were no different from younger ones in terms of intrinsic and external motivation, they did differ in terms of striving less for reasons of self-applied guilt, and more for reasons of genuine personal conviction. Most important, causal path analyses supported a mediational model in which organismic personality integration (partially) accounts for the association between age and well-being. In other words, it appears that the passage of time (represented by chronological age) tends to bring about greater personality integration, which in turn helps to bring about greater well-being. The "positive" conclusion that we drew from this study is that on average, people continue to "get better" as they "get older."

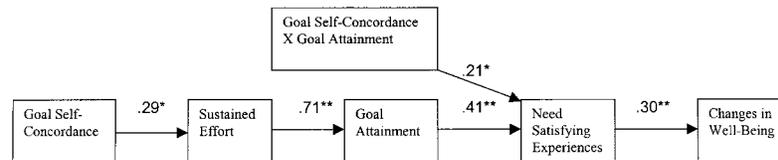
When measured in terms of people's short-term personal projects (i.e., their initiatives for the next 2 months) (Little, 1993), we

construe PLOC as indicative of “self-concordant” goal selection—that is, the extent to which the chosen set of goals well represents the person’s implicit interests and values. According to this view, self-concordant goal selection is a difficult skill, one which requires substantial contact with one’s own organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1961). Those too distracted by the potentially insensitive dictates of others or of their culture may fail to perceive their own meanings and needs and thus may fail to select goals that can forward the development of their personality.

Extensive longitudinal studies have shown that those pursuing self-concordant goals invest more sustained effort into those goals. That is, their intentions do not readily “fade away” in the manner of many New Year’s resolutions, presumably because those intentions better represent stable and enduring aspects of personality. Accordingly, people better attain such goals (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Furthermore, people derive more experiential need satisfaction from the pursuit of self-concordant goals (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) in that their daily activities and experiences are most likely to yield experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Finally, people gain the most when they actually attain self-concordant goals in that they experience the largest increases in global mood and well-being from the beginning to the end of the goal-striving cycle (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998).

Figure 1 illustrates an integrated path model of these processes, which was recently supported by causal modeling procedures (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). At the beginning of the semester, study participants generated a set of six semester goals, rated their PLOC for those goals, and also rated their global well-being (i.e., their general mood and sense of life satisfaction at that time). Their ongoing effort and current attainment with regard to each of those six goals were then assessed at three separate points during the semester. In addition, their life experiences were assessed on 8 different days during the semester. Specifically, we measured the feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that accompanied (or did not accompany) time-consuming daily activities. Finally, participants’ global well-being was measured again at the end of the semester. Summary variables representing participants’ averaged goal PLOC, averaged goal effort and attainment, averaged need satisfaction, and aggregate well-being were created.

As can be seen in the figure, all of the hypothesized paths were significant. In addition, overall model-fit statistics were also very



**Figure 1: Longitudinal Effects of Self-Concordant Goal-Selection Upon Sustained Effort, Later Attainment, Daily Need Satisfaction, and Global Well-Being Changes**

SOURCE: Sheldon and Elliot (1999). Reprinted by permission.

NOTE: Goodness of fit for the model = .94.

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

good. To present the findings verbally, moving from left to right, those who managed to select self-concordant goals (i.e., those who pursued goals for intrinsic and identified reasons, more so than introjected and external reasons) put more sustained effort into those goals, which enabled them to better attain the goals. Goal attainment in turn was associated with stronger feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness occurring in daily life, and such need-satisfying experiences, cumulated over time, tended to produce higher global well-being at the end of the semester. More important, goal attainment was *especially* predictive of need satisfaction when the goals were self-concordant ones (i.e., the self-concordance and goal-attainment variables interacted to predict need satisfaction).

Most recently, Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2000) used short-term personal projects and PLOC assessments to test a two-cycle “upward spiral” model of freshman adjustment to college. They hypothesized that students who enter college with self-concordant motivation are most poised for a self-perpetuating process of continued growth and self-expansion. Causal path modeling procedures were again employed to show that those entering college with self-concordant first-semester goals better attained those goals, which led to increased adjustment at the end of that first semester. More important, first semester attainment also led to even *more* self-concordance for the second semester’s goals, which led to even *more* attainment during the second semester, which led to even *further* increases in adjustment (all compared with the first semester). In addition, yearly goal attainment predicted increased levels of ego development from the beginning to the end of the freshman

year. These findings indicate, contrary to contemporary genetic determinist claims with regard to well-being (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), that people may be able to continually improve their level of well-being and adjustment, via ongoing self-appropriate goal pursuit. In other words, people grow.

In short, measuring PLOC (the person's felt ownership and internalization of personal initiatives) provides one important way to approach "positive" motivation and difficult humanistic concepts such as "true self" and "authenticity." In addition to measuring such constructs in a way that remains true to the participant's personal meanings, the research described above has also used longitudinal and causal modeling techniques to demonstrate how critically important such constructs are for health and thriving. Thus, we view the work as confirming humanistic theory, hopefully in a way that is more fully convincing to those within other schools of thought.

#### THE CONTENTS OF GOALS ALSO MATTER

Another humanistic perspective on "positive motivation" emphasizes that it is important to not only understand *why* a person does things (i.e., for authentic or inauthentic reasons) but also *what* a person does. In other words, it is important to attend to the *content* of individuals' goals. For example, both Maslow and Rogers discussed how some values and goals are expressive of lower level, deficiency-oriented needs, whereas others represent higher callings of the human spirit to obtain meaning, grow as a person, and be connected with other people. Similarly, Fromm (1976) distinguished between a "having orientation" focused on obtaining wealth, possessions, and status, and a "being orientation" focused on the actualization of one's true self.

Drawing from these ideas and from SDT, we have endeavored to better understand the difference between the pursuit of these two different types of goals or values, which we have labeled *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). According to theory, extrinsic goals are those motivated primarily by defensiveness and security needs and are reflected in pursuits for wealth, possessions, status, popularity, attractiveness, and image. Ultimately, such goals involve hinging one's sense of worth on others' opinions and approval, and thus, they can be frustrating and unsatisfying. Furthermore,

they oftentimes distract people from their underlying psychological needs. Another drawback of extrinsic pursuits is that they orient the individual toward behaviors that are unlikely to be enjoyable for their own sake but that instead can be quite irritating and stressful (i.e., working longer hours than one wants to, slaving away in front of the mirror, strategizing about how to defeat one's rivals). In contrast, intrinsic values are in theory directly motivated by psychological needs. Intrinsic values are exemplified by those for personal growth and self-acceptance, affiliation and intimacy, and a sense of generativity and connection to the broader community. Such values are more likely to lead people to engage in behaviors and have experiences that are satisfying in their own right and that contribute strongly to individuals' growth and psychosocial development.<sup>1</sup>

Our research on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values has relied on several different methodologies to assess individuals' value orientations. In some studies, we have used a rather straightforward survey methodology in which individuals are simply presented with a variety of different aspirations they might have for the future or guiding principles they might have in life, and asked to rate or rank the importance of these different goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, in press). In other studies, we have used the idiographic/nomothetic goal-striving methodology already described (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998, 2000), in which participants first list their unique goals and then make various ratings concerning those goals. To measure the intrinsic versus extrinsic content of these self-generated goals, we ask people to rate how much each of their goals helps bring about different "possible futures" that represent intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes. For example, in one study, a participant listed the goal "grow with God" and rated this goal as very likely to help take her toward the intrinsic possible futures of "self-acceptance" and "helping the world be a better place." In contrast, another participant, who listed the short-term goal "lose 15 pounds," rated this goal as mostly helping to take her toward the extrinsic possible futures of heightened attractiveness and social popularity. As can be imagined, these two individuals showed very different profiles in our data.

Regardless of the methodological procedure, our interest is always in obtaining a numerical measure of the relative importance to the person of intrinsic goals (such as personal growth, affiliation, and community feeling) compared with extrinsic goals (such as

money, status, and image). With such measures in hand, we have tested a wide variety of hypotheses suggested by humanistic, phenomenological, and existential theories. For the purposes of this article, we review three sets of findings that may be of particular interest.

First, we have explored how peoples' values relate to their well-being. It is clear from humanistic theory that individuals focused on intrinsic goals should be relatively high in well-being, as they are oriented toward experiences likely to satisfy their needs and help them grow and actualize (Fromm, 1976; Rogers, 1961). In contrast, those focused on extrinsic goals should report relatively low well-being, as such an orientation signals an alienation from one's true self, a probable deficit in the satisfaction of one's security needs, and a high concern with others' opinions rather than one's own perceptions and meanings.

Thus far, our research has strongly supported this hypothesis in a variety of different samples. For example, Kasser and Ryan (1993) showed that intrinsically oriented college students reported greater self-actualization and feelings of vitality, and less depression and anxiety, whereas the reverse was true for materialistically oriented individuals. In a socioeconomically diverse group of 18-year-olds, Kasser and Ryan (1993) further showed that intrinsic values were associated with higher overall functioning (as rated by interviewers) and less symptoms of conduct disorders, with the reverse pattern again obtained for extrinsic values. Other studies employing samples of college students and U.S. adults have shown that a relatively strong focus on intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) values is associated with greater positive affect in daily life, greater overall happiness and life satisfaction, greater openness to new experiences, higher self-esteem, reduced narcissism, fewer physical health complaints, and less drug and alcohol abuse (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, in press; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998, 2000).

It is also worthy of note that these basic findings with regard to well-being have been replicated in Germany (Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000), Russia (Ryan et al., 1999), and South Korea (Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2000), indicating that the phenomenon is not unique to the United States. Thus, it is clear from this body of research that as humanistic theory would predict, a focus on values reflective of positive, growth-oriented movements within the psyche is associated with greater personal thriving, whereas a focus on desires reflective of concerns about status and others' opinions is

associated with greater distress. Although the direction of causality for these associations is not yet clearly established, there is some longitudinal evidence to indicate that intrinsic value pursuit leads to higher well-being, rather than vice versa (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998).

A second, more recent concern of our research program has been to understand the interpersonal relationships of people highly focused on intrinsic or extrinsic values. Some critics have interpreted humanistic theorizing about self-actualization and personal growth as reflecting a narcissistic bent, one that values “selfish individualism” and self-absorption more than duty and service to others (see Capps & Fenn, 1992). We believe such criticisms fail to understand the nature of healthy human functioning and that in fact there is no necessary conflict between the truly growth-oriented individual and his or her society (although at times, individuals must indeed break with the social order to fully express their beliefs and values). According with our organismic metatheoretical assumptions, we believe that true human thriving necessarily entails *integration*, within whatever sphere is examined. In the social sphere, integrated functioning entails connecting with others and enhancing the character and functioning of the groups to which one belongs. Those narcissistically absorbed in their own pleasures typically fail at this task, as the humanists have long recognized.

The research we have conducted is strongly supportive of this position. For example, Sheldon and Kasser (1995) found that extrinsic values are associated with weaker feelings of empathy for others, whereas the reverse is the case for intrinsic values. Intrinsically oriented individuals also report longer and more satisfying relationships with lovers and friends than do extrinsically oriented individuals (Kasser & Ryan, in press). Other work shows that Indian, Danish, and U.S. students who are highly focused on extrinsic values are more likely to “objectify” others in their relationships and feel alienated from society (Khanna & Kasser, 2000). Extrinsically oriented individuals are also more likely to have emotional and physical conflict with their romantic partners (Flanagan & Sheldon, 2000). Finally, compared with extrinsically oriented individuals, people who strongly value intrinsic goals are more cooperative and prosocial within their groups and thus are better able to solve social dilemmas (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000; Sheldon, Sheldon, & Osbaldiston, 2000) to their own (and their

group's) ultimate benefit. In sum, it is clear that the interpersonal relationships of individuals who value intrinsic aspirations typically have many more positive characteristics than do the relationships of people who greatly value image, status, power, and wealth.

The final set of research results we will briefly mention here concerns the developmental environments that lead people to become strongly focused on extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic values. Again, we have drawn from humanistically and existentially oriented ideas to investigate this question. Maslow, Rogers, and others have clearly suggested that children are most likely to grow and actualize when their environments and mentors provide optimal support, empathy, and choices. In contrast, unhealthy emotional and behavioral patterns are likely to arise when parents and authorities treat their charges without regard for their unique perspectives and/or send messages that they will be loved "only if" certain standards are met.

Supporting this general perspective, Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995) showed that late adolescents whose mothers were cold, critical, controlling, and nondemocratic were more likely to focus on extrinsic, materialistic values at the age of 18, whereas teens whose mothers who were warm, accepting, and democratic were more likely to have developed intrinsic values by age 18. Similar results have been reported by Williams, Cox, Hedberg, and Deci (in press), who found that high school students highly oriented toward extrinsic values, in comparison with intrinsic values, perceived their parents as less likely to support their autonomy and choices.

To summarize then, when people are focused on goals with intrinsic content (self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling), they are more likely to satisfy their higher psychological needs and thus have many of the characteristics of "fully functioning" individuals, including psychological health and strong interpersonal relationships. In contrast, a focus on extrinsic goals (financial success, popularity, appearance) signals a disjunction from one's true self and a focus on security needs, likely due to nonoptimal childhood models and environments. As a result, extrinsically oriented people tend to become "stuck in a vicious cycle" in which they continually experience psychological distress and conflictual interpersonal relationships, not knowing how to escape the cycle.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we hope that readers agree that our approaches to conceptualizing positive motivation are quite consistent with prior humanistic theorizing and are helping to validate such theories in new ways. Furthermore, we hope readers agree that the work does not “dehumanize” our research participants; instead, our focus on participants’ self-generated personal goals is consistent with phenomenological theorists’ insistence that research be grounded in participants’ subjectivity. Finally, we would point out that although it derives largely from humanistic ideas, the work is also consistent with mainstream psychology’s demand for “hard data” and “causal models,” which has helped it be published in some of the most respected journals in the field.

To return to our opening remarks, then, during our careers we have found that there is no necessary conflict between quantitative methodology and humanistic perspectives, contrary to what some humanists and mainstream academicians have suggested. Instead, there appears to be potential for a very happy marriage between the two. For these reasons, we are pleased to see that the new movement of positive psychology shares some of the same goals we have been pursuing in the past decade—namely, understanding the nature of “right” motivation and living. It seems that positive psychology’s efforts to focus on the higher and broader reaches of human nature may portend important changes within psychology as a whole, legitimizing areas of discourse formerly considered out of bounds by many. However, just as mainstream psychologists are expanding their theoretical vision, we would like to encourage humanistically oriented psychologists to expand their empirical vision, giving greater attention to quantification and hypothesis testing. If they do so, humanistic wisdom will gain the strong voice within this new discourse that it deserves.

## NOTE

1. Confusion sometimes arises because one of the perceived locus of causality (PLOC) dimensions is also labeled *intrinsic*. That is, the same term is used to label a type of *reason* for striving (i.e., “because the process

is inherently interesting and enjoyable to me”) and a type of striving *content* (i.e., rewarding objectives such as intimacy, community, and self-knowledge). The same term is used in both places because in both cases it describes a goal that is inherently enjoyable to pursue. Similarly, the term *extrinsic* is used to label some PLOC dimensions (specifically, the three nonintrinsic motivations) and to label a type of striving content (i.e., objectives such as money, beauty, and fame). The same term is used because in both cases it describes a goal that is focused on ends beyond the activity itself, such that activity is typically not inherently enjoyable.

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