

The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns

*Motivation and
Spirituality in Personality*

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For Yvonne and Adam

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beddedness increased the likelihood that the men would be interested in making a generative contribution to society, by increasing their sense of obligation and responsibility and transcending their long-standing self-centeredness.

CONCLUSIONS

Divided consciousness appears to be part and parcel of the human condition. Conflict is also paradoxical. On the one hand, it is potentially destructive. It leads to poor physical and mental health, interferes with healthy communication in relationships, and disrupts performance and problem-solving on a variety of tasks. Conflict prevents a person from effectively regulating goal-directed action. Without the direction and coherence supplied by a dominant integrative pattern, life seems fragmented or aimless. Optimal psychic health and well-being occur when different elements of personality are integrated into a more-or-less coherent whole. On the other hand, conflict is also required for personal growth, and has been empirically linked with creativity (Sheldon, 1995).

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) has argued persuasively that humanity's fate rests on the establishment of "the complex self"—differentiated (individual uniqueness) and integrated (active concern for the well-being of others). To direct evolution, we must first transform the self. Similarly, Kovac (1996) has contended that "the progressive evolution of mankind depends predominantly on the primary transformation of man" (p. 193). Spirituality, in its essential nature, is concerned with personal transformation. "Integration is the direction in which evolution must progress to secure us a liveable future," writes Csikszentmihalyi (1993, p. 157). There may be no greater need than for integration of the self, which is of greater significance than the desire for personal happiness and well-being. Personal spiritual transformation may be a surer road to wholeness than other strategies that have been attempted and that have failed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Personal Goals and Life Meaning

When author and theologian C. S. Lewis (1970) was asked which of the world's religions gives to its followers the greatest happiness, he replied "While it lasts, the religion of worshipping oneself is the best" (p. 33). He explained that he did not turn to religion to make him happy: He always knew that a bottle of port wine would do that. Although much of the scientific literature on subjective well-being may lead one to a different conclusion, there is more to living a good life than being happy. For instance, there is a difference between a meaningful life and a happy life. In some cases the two may be correlated, but in others they may not be. Some researchers have called for a broader definition of well-being than what has commonly been adopted in the literature, convinced that systematic investigation of concepts such as wisdom, meaning, and purpose in life should supplement the widely adopted measures of happiness and life satisfaction (Ryff & Singer, 1998). The previous chapter examined the role of spiritual goals in fostering personality unification and integration. As we saw, integration can occur quite independently of whether a person is satisfied or happy with his or her life, yet it is a crucial part of an overall sense of well-being.

This chapter is concerned with the examination of "personal meaning" as an empirical and theoretical construct. As ultimate concern is often centered around existential issues, it is time to address the meaning construct and see how it might enable us to better understand linkages between spirituality, motivation, and personality.

Personal goals provide a basis for evaluating hedonically based models of well-being and meaning-based conceptions. At this point we need to confront the relation between these two conceptions and what the implication is for understanding the good life. Empirically, meaning and happi-

ness are relatively independent components of well-being that are often associated with different predictors. For example, some research shows that having children predicts meaning in life but not happiness (Baumeister, 1991). Meaningfulness appears to be a necessary yet insufficient condition for long-term happiness. A meaningful life is one that is characterized by a deep sense of purpose, a sense of inner conviction, and assurance that in spite of one's current plight, life has significance. Whereas it is possible for a life to be imbued with significance yet devoid of happiness, (e.g., the lives of some religious martyrs), it is impossible for long-term happiness to occur in a life devoid of meaning. Although meaningfulness may not guarantee high levels of positive emotional well-being, an absence of meaning and purpose portends unhappiness. A meaningful life will be a life filled with rich and varied emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant. The philosopher Robert Nozick (1989) persuasively demonstrates this conception in the following quote:

It is not clear that we want these moments [of happiness] constantly or want lives to consist wholly and only of them. We want to experience other feelings too, ones with valuable aspects that happiness does not possess as strongly . . . we want experiences, fitting ones, of profound connection with others, of deep understanding of natural phenomena, of love, of being profoundly moved by music or tragedy . . . experiences very different from the bounce and rosiness of the happy moments. What we want, in short, is a life and a self that happiness is a fitting response to—and then give it that response. (p. 117)

Variables that provide both a sense of meaning and purpose as well as enjoyment and pleasure should be especially strong predictors of overall well-being. Relationships are one example. Most people find their interpersonal relationships both deeply meaningful and a prime source of positive emotions. Goals have consistently predicted well-being outcomes because different characteristics of them are associated with both enjoyment and meaning. For example, B. R. Little (1989) found that high-level, abstract projects were associated with greater meaningfulness whereas low-level, more short-term projects were linked to greater immediate enjoyment (the meaningfulness vs. manageability trade-off). Religion may exert its powerful influence on well-being through this dual process as well, serving not only as a framework for meaning but also as a deep and lasting source of joy and hope (Myers, 1992).

There is perhaps no more powerful example of the need to bring together both psychological and theological perspectives than in the study of how people cope with the inevitable adversities and suffering of life.

Psychological trauma “leads us into the realm of the unthinkable and fundamental questions of belief” (Herman, 1992, p. 7). Dealing with personal trauma requires a person to become a philosopher, therapist, and theologian.

MEANING AND GROWTH THROUGH SUFFERING

Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

—JAMES 1:2–4, NIV

The presence of suffering in people's lives poses a challenge for theories of subjective well-being. That suffering is endemic to the human condition is an inescapable conclusion that derives from centuries of philosophical, theological, and psychological literatures. One of the basic truths that forms the cornerstone of virtually all of the world's great wisdom traditions is that life is suffering. For example, the first of the Four Noble Truths of Gautama Buddha is that life inevitably involves *dukkha* (suffering). At the same time, the psychological literature on subjective well-being has concluded that “most people are happy” (Diener & Diener, 1996). In survey research, most people, around the world, whether living in advantaged or disadvantaged circumstances, report a positive level of well-being. How can most people be happy given the ubiquitousness of suffering, pain, and adversity? Is it possible for this apparent paradox to be resolved? Perhaps people are masterful self-deceivers who fool themselves into thinking they are happy when they are really miserable. On the other hand, perhaps they are masterfully adaptive creatures who able to transform adverse circumstances into opportunities for personal growth, lasting happiness, and quality of life even in the face of pain and suffering. Most of the world's great religious traditions embrace suffering in the name of spiritual growth, as the quote from James's epistle at the outset of this chapter reveals. While the self-deception hypothesis cannot be totally ruled out, it is this second alternative that will be defended in this chapter. Evidence will be reviewed demonstrating that life is often elevated to the sublime precisely under those conditions that might be expected to produce the most pain and misery. The purpose of this chapter is to review the current state of psychological knowledge regarding adjustment to extreme life circumstances. In particular, the literature on the construction of life meaning following adversity will be presented and synthesized. The following questions will be addressed: What are the sources of human suffering?

What are the psychological and interpersonal consequences of suffering? What are the responses to suffering? How are people able to derive meaning from traumatic circumstances? What elements are involved in the reconstruction of meaning? Specifically, the chapter will focus on the concept of “stress-induced growth,” the general term for positive well-being that appears to occur not only in spite of suffering and adversity, but perhaps even because of such trials. Paradoxically, it may be that deep and lasting well-being requires a modicum of suffering. Understanding how suffering can eventually result in heightened sensitivity to life’s pleasures, and the role that personal goals play in coping, are the major purposes of this chapter.

THE NATURE OF SUFFERING

The nature of human suffering—its sources and the human response to it—have been preeminent concerns throughout the history of humankind. Although the problem of suffering is traditionally considered to fall within the purview of theology, psychological and theological forces recently have joined together in an attempt to unravel the mysteries of suffering. Many excellent modern treatises on suffering have been written from a psychotheological perspective (e.g. Anders, 1994; Fichter, 1981; Peters, 1994; Pruett, 1987; Taylor & Watson, 1989; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Vash, 1994). Clark (1958), in his classic psychology of religion text, distinguished two primary loci of suffering: external and internal origins. External sources include both natural catastrophes as well as atrocities suffered at the hands of others. Internal suffering is that which is brought about by a person’s own actions. These internal sources include temperament, neurosis, conflict, and separation from God, according to Clark. A contemporary expansion of Clark’s taxonomy might include addiction and other self-defeating traits, and disease-prone characteristics such as hostility and self-centeredness. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) compare and contrast religious and psychological perspectives on suffering. One of the more thorough modern treatments of suffering was contributed by ethicist David Little (1989), who delineated four categories of “legitimate suffering”: retributive suffering, therapeutic suffering, pedagogical suffering, and vicarious suffering. He viewed these as a critical minimum to classify experiences and events as producing suffering. Both therapeutic (psychological growth) and pedagogical (becoming wiser as a consequence) suffering are germane to this chapter. Little points out that one of the purposes of religion is to provide a meaningful account of why people suffer. For the purpose of this chapter, it is also important to distinguish between the experience of

pain and the experience of suffering. Some individuals are born without the capacity to feel physical pain and thus undergo considerable suffering in their lives due to this rare condition. Then there are those unusual persons who actually enjoy physical pain. The focus of this chapter will not be on physical pain, but rather on psychic pain that occurs in response to extreme life circumstances, and the positive changes that appear to be potentiated by this psychic pain.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the current period in history could be depicted as the “age of trauma.” The use of trauma and suffering language is often stretched to refer to nearly any unpleasant event, no matter how slight in severity (“I suffered through my pastor’s sermon,” “I just broke up with my boyfriend of 2 weeks and it was so traumatic”). Not long ago I was walking down the hallway near my office and I overheard a student confiding in her friend, “I’m turning 22 on Sunday and I feel so old.” This chapter will focus not on these “garden-variety” traumas, but instead on massive upheavals that have the capacity to produce changes in every realm of a person’s life. Psychologists cannot scientifically address the why of human suffering; that is usually left up to the theologians, philosophers and even anthropologists like Geertz (1966), who noted that the problem of suffering is “an experiential challenge in whose face the meaningfulness of a particular pattern of life threatens to dissolve into a chaos of thingless names and nameless things” (p. 46). Psychologists specialize in studying the human response to suffering. In the context of well-being, psychologists can and have examined the personal and social resources that enable a person to transcend tragedy, to grow, and to experience gains in the face of significant loss. After a review of the literature on positive outcomes of suffering, the second part of this chapter reviews the concept of meaning as it applies to suffering and well-being and personal goals.

STRESS-INDUCED GROWTH

The possibility that life’s adversities may serve as a catalyst for personal growth is a familiar theme in psychological, philosophical, and theological writings. Sapolsky’s (1994) tongue-in-cheek analysis of the commonplace nature of these reports depicts stress-induced growth as “the trendiest subject in the field” (p. 250). In his study of self-actualizers, Maslow (1955) noted that “the most important learning experiences . . . were tragedies, deaths, and trauma . . . which forced change in the life-outlook of the person and consequently in everything that he did” (p. 23). Until recently, the psychological evidence for the general proposition that losses may lead to gains has been limited mostly to anecdotal re-

ports using global measures of perceived growth. Recently, significant strides have been made as researchers have begun to empirically assess the degree of personal growth in the aftermath of severe life stressors. These efforts have included the development of theoretical models designed to account for the processes by which traumas can lead to benefits (Aldwin, 1994; Antonovsky, 1987; Schaefer & Moos, 1992; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Vash, 1994), empirical investigations of the relations between various forms of traumatic experiences and subsequent reported positive life changes (Folkman & Stein, 1997), and the design of self-report questionnaires to measure individual differences in perceived positive life changes following personal crises (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Schaefer and Moos (1992) formulated a conceptual framework designed to account for the processes by which positive outcomes of life crises occur. They postulated three major types of positive outcomes: enhanced social resources (primarily deeper, more satisfying relationships), enhanced personal resources (becoming more self-reliant, positive changes in values and goals), and enhanced coping skills, including emotion regulation. Schaefer and Moos identify several specific crises that can generate these positive outcomes, including divorce, bereavement, and chronic or terminal illness. Finally, they specify four sets of factors that affect the likelihood that positive changes will in fact follow these significant life crises: event-related factors, personal factors, environmental factors, and coping resources. Event-related factors include characteristics of the stressor such as its controllability, its duration, and its expectedness. Personal resources include temperament, prior exposure to crises, and resiliency factors such as dispositional optimism, hardiness, self-control and self reliance, and a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). Environmental factors pertain primarily to adequacy of social support and community resources.

The theoretical framework offered by Schaefer and Moos served as the basis for Park et al.'s (1996) study of stress-related growth in college students. These authors developed the Stress-Related Growth Scale (SRGS), a 50-item inventory designed to assess perceived positive changes in personal resources, social relationships, and coping skills. Operating from a standpoint of stress-initiated growth, items are phrased in terms of what the person learned as a result of confrontation with a significant stressful life event (e.g., "I learned to accept myself," "I learned to be nicer to others," "I learned to ask others for help"). Park et al. report that the scale is unidimensional and possesses both high internal consistency as well as test-retest reliability. In terms of validity, scores on the scale are significantly associated with reports of growth by significant others and are uncorrelated with social desirability. In a prospective study, the SRGS predicted increases in optimism, social support,

and positive affect over a 6-month period. Significant predictors of stress-related growth included the initial stressfulness of the event (greater stressfulness predicting more growth), intrinsic religiousness, and the coping strategies of positive reinterpretation and acceptance.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) have formulated a model of personal transformation following suffering, and have been engaged in a series of studies to test their model. They describe three broad categories of perceived benefits that arise from the struggle with adversity: self-confidence, enhanced personal relationships, and changed philosophy of life. These bear close resemblance to the three categories of benefits described by Schaefer and Moos (1992). Tedeschi and Calhoun then present a self-regulation model to account for the process of growth following trauma: It begins with changes in higher-order schemas regarding the nature of reality, followed by a positive evaluation of the self and the world in terms of meaningfulness, manageability, and comprehensibility. Central to their formulation is the intriguing notion that positive changes occur in the person as a result of the struggle with trauma, and "perhaps only because of the trauma" (p. 87).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) developed the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), a 21-item questionnaire wherein respondents are asked to indicate the degree to which various benefits have occurred subsequent to experiencing a traumatic life event. The scale factors into five components, which the authors labeled New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Appreciation of Life, and Spiritual Change. The scale possesses satisfactory test-retest and internal reliability, and is uncorrelated with social desirability. Females scored higher on all factors except for New Possibilities. Scores on the PTGI are modestly positively correlated with the five factors of personality: extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (r 's ranging from .29 to .16). Scores on the PTGI were also shown to distinguish between those who had experienced a severe trauma and those who had not, with the severely traumatized scoring higher on the overall scale and on all factors compared to those who had experienced less severe trauma.

Methodological Issues in Stress-Induced Growth Research

Like other research using mental health outcomes, the research on stress-induced growth is beset by the following criterion problem: How do we know that self-reports of growth are to be taken at face value? To what degree are reports of positive changes following crises real versus illusory? Self-reports of subjective well-being appear to contain substantial amounts of validity (Diener, 1995). Yet there are additional complica-

tions in the measurement of stress-induced growth research. One concerns the operation of demand characteristics for people who have experienced major crises. Given the widespread use of positive illusions (Taylor & Brown, 1988) to manage affect combined with the prevalence of strong normative beliefs concerning stress-induced growth ("If it doesn't kill me, it makes me stronger"), people may feel pressured to acknowledge the benefits of their struggles whether or not any objective benefit has actually accrued. Another argument against the validity of self-reports of growth is that trauma often induces denial and other defenses that prevent the full impact of the event from registering. However, this argument is weakened by the fact that denial is most likely to be an initial reaction to the event, while stress-related growth measures are typically taken well after this initial reaction to the crisis. Yet another problem stems from temperament influences on well-being, which are typically not assessed and therefore not controlled for in these studies. Happiness returns to a set-point rapidly after even major events (Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996), so people may use the covariation between unpleasant events and subsequent positive emotion as an indication of stress-induced growth. Corroboration of self-report through knowledgeable others (Park et al., 1996) is one solution to this problem. Outcome measures of growth and other positive changes need to be sensitive to detecting even minor benefits that might elude a global appraisal. The research on positive growth following trauma is still in its infancy, and future efforts will surely include more sophisticated assessment of the many facets of growth. A recent volume expertly reviews the many challenges that confront researchers intent on understanding how people might benefit from life's adversities (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

GROWTH AS MEANING MAKING

The rapidly accumulating literature on stress-induced growth places considerable importance on the concept of "meaning" as a key theoretical construct mediating between stress and positive change. Meaning is often defined in terms of having experienced positive changes or perceived benefits as the result of the event. Growth is possible to the degree to which a person creates or finds meaning in suffering, pain, and adversity. Interest in the subject of personal meaning has increased dramatically in recent years. While philosophers have cooled to the topic of meaning in life, social scientists have been warming to it and are gradually recognizing that despite its vague and boundless nature, the topic can be seriously and fruitfully investigated (Ryff, 1989; Wong & Fry,

1998). The scientific and clinical relevance of the personal meaning construct has been demonstrated in the personal well-being literature, in which indicators of meaningfulness predict psychological well-being, while indicators of meaninglessness are regularly associated with psychological distress and pathology. Originally arising within an existentialist perspective, contemporary psychological research has shown that *meaning matters*. The conclusions that a person reaches regarding matters of ultimate concern—the nature of life and death, and the meaning of suffering and pain—have profound implications for individual well-being. The meaning construct has been used as an outcome measure in well-being research as well as a proximal predictor of well-being (see Park & Folkman, 1997, for a comprehensive review). Meaning is conceptualized in most research as a relatively independent component of well-being, and researchers have recently advocated including it in conceptual models of well-being, quality of life, and personal growth (Compton et al., 1996; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Recent empirical research has demonstrated that a strong sense of meaning is associated with life satisfaction, while a lack of meaning is predictive of depression (Reker & Wong, 1988; Wong & Fry, 1998). The literature on meaning is enormous; thus, no attempt will be made to extensively cover or synthesize it here (see Wong & Fry, 1998, for a review). Rather, in this next section of the chapter, I will review selected studies on changes in meaning in the aftermath of adversity.

There is a vast area of research dealing with the personal meaning that is derived from various adverse life circumstances, including illness, disability, divorce, and other serious personal losses. Perhaps the classic study on meaning in the face of adversity was conducted by Taylor (1983), in her study of women with advanced breast cancer. She distinguished two forms of meaning: meaning-making attributions regarding the perceived cause(s) of the cancer and future-related meanings pertaining to implications of the disease for their future lives. A variety of attributions were provided to explain why these women believed they had contracted cancer, but, interestingly, no specific attributions predicted adjustment any better than any other attributions. It appeared that it was the ability to find *any* meaning that was crucial. In their study of incest survivors, Silver, Boon, & Stones (1983) came to a similar conclusion. The ability to find *any* meaning in the experience was associated with better social, emotional, and occupational adjustment, whereas those women who continued to search for meaning but whose search had come up empty experienced psychological distress and ruminative thoughts concerning their experiences that continued, in some cases, for 20 or more years after termination of the incest. At least some were able to find positives in their plight. One woman responded, "I learned over

the years that nothing as bad as what I had been through was going to happen again. Now I know there is virtually nothing I cannot overcome" (p. 90).

Schwartzberg (1993) studied how HIV-positive gay men make sense of AIDS. Using an interview format with 19 HIV-infected men, Schwartzberg explored the strategies these men used to make sense out of their plight. Meaning was established in a variety of ways, and their responses were organized by Schwartzberg into 10 categories: HIV as catalyst for personal growth (74%), HIV as belonging (74%), HIV as irreparable loss (74%), HIV as punishment (68%), HIV as a contamination of one's self (58%), HIV as a strategy for personal gain (47%), HIV as a catalyst for spiritual growth (42%), HIV as isolation (37%), HIV as confirmation of one's powerlessness (32%), and HIV as relief (21%). These 10 responses were then collapsed into four overall frameworks, which were labeled (1) high meaning, (2) defensive meaning, (3) shattered meaning, and (4) irrelevant meaning. Of these, the most common pattern was high meaning, in which "subjects were able to transform this information from despair to challenge, from psychological disequilibrium to catalyst for growth, to a reinvigorated appreciation of life" (p. 486). Consistent with the stress-induced growth literature, several of the men viewed their infection as a condition to be valued, that presented for them the opportunity to uncover previously dormant wisdom or inner strength. While these initial findings are intriguing and indicate the potential of life-affirming consequences of adversity, there is as yet little data on how these differential meanings relate to either subjective well-being or to objective outcomes such as mortality or survival time.

Also concerned with HIV, but from the perspective of caregiving, is the research of Folkman and her colleagues (Folkman & Stein, 1997; Stein et al., 1997), who have been engaged in series of studies examining how the caregivers of AIDS patients or HIV-infected men cope with the challenges and demands of their unique situation. They have focused on depressed mood in caregivers following bereavement. A key variable explaining adjustment appears to be finding positive meaning in caregiving. Those caregivers who viewed their caregiving experience as a deeply meaningful one exhibited lower levels of depression following the loss of their partner. Positive meaning in this situation was derived from multiple sources, including the knowledge that one had provided valuable support and reduced the suffering of a significant other to the degree it was possible.

Two other studies offer examples of the positive role of meaning-making in coping with bereavement. Edmonds and Hooker (1992) examined perceived changes in life meaning following the death of a family

member. Grief was negatively associated with scores on the Purpose in Life test, a widely used measure of overall meaning in life. A finding suggesting the presence of stress-induced growth was that the majority of individuals (71%) reported a positive change in life goals as a result of bereavement. McIntosh et al. (1993) found that religious beliefs were used to construct meaning for parents who had lost a child to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Those parents who had found meaning within a religious framework had significantly less distress 18 months postloss as well as greater positive well-being. Both positive well-being and distress were measured separately in this study, and, interestingly, meaning through religion was associated more strongly with positive well-being than it was with the alleviation of distress. This is somewhat surprising in that religion is often turned to for the reduction of pain in the face of inexplicable suffering; indeed, some have taken the extreme position that suffering "is the basic reason for religion" (D. Little, 1989, p. 53). It would appear that when life is viewed from an eternal perspective, suffering in the here-and-now takes on a circumscribed, temporary meaning and is therefore more manageable. A religious or spiritual worldview provides an overall orientation to life that lends a framework for interpreting life's challenges and provides a rationale for accepting the challenges posed by suffering, death, tragedy, and injustice (McIntosh et al., 1993).

Personal Goals and Meaning

Among the elements in a person's meaning system that are used to construct meaning in the face of adversity, personal goals have recently been highlighted (Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998; Folkman & Stein, 1997). Goals appear to be prime constituents of the meaning-making process. As motivational constructs, goals are an important source of personal meaning and provide structure, unity, and purpose to people's lives (Baumeister, 1991; McAdams, 1993; Reker & Wong, 1988). Reker and Wong identified three levels of personal meaning: cognitive, affective, and motivational. The motivational component includes values and goals that provide guidelines for living (Reker & Wong, 1988), orienting a person to that which is valuable, meaningful, and purposeful. Goals play a major role in two forms of coping that will be described shortly. Goals are also attractive units for understanding meaning making in a methodological sense, given the existence of psychometrically sound personal goal assessment methods that were described in Chapter 2.

Although little hard data yet exist on the subject, theorists from various perspectives have shown widespread agreement that adversity contains the potential for reorganizing and refocusing a person's goals, values,

and priorities. Traumatic events precipitate meaning crises, raising questions pertaining to the purpose and meaning of one's life and the nature of suffering and justice in the world, as the person struggles to answer both why the event occurred and what the implications will now be for one's future. Goals are used to construct meaning; finding or creating meaning in the face of suffering often involves changing or revising one's fundamental goals, concerns, and values. Case histories and other anecdotal evidence point to shifting goal priorities in the face of extreme life events (the prototypical example being an increase in "communal" goals following diagnosis of a life-threatening disease). Vash (1994) takes the position that adversity serves as a "wake-up" call that causes people to focus inward and evaluate their lives, including a reexamination of priorities and goals. This reprioritization has been postulated as a common response to affliction in cancer patients (Taylor, 1983), individuals with AIDS or those who are HIV-positive (Folkman & Stein, 1997), heart attack victims (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987), and persons with physical disabilities such as spinal cord injuries (Vash, 1994) and neuromuscular disorders (Keany & Glueckauf, 1993). In a goals framework, adaptation to loss requires relinquishing untenable goals, generating new goals, and developing pathways for their attainment that enable the restoration of meaning and purpose in life. Freund and Baltes (1998) refer to these processes as selection, optimization, and compensation.

Folkman and Stein's Model

Recently, Folkman and Stein (1997) have developed a model of stress and coping that places preeminence on goal processes. Their theory originates within a goal-theoretical perspective of emotion in which affective states are seen as a function of the status and nature of one's goal strivings. Whether affect is examined in terms of discrete short-term states (emotions) or, as described in Chapter 3, long-term individual difference characteristics (subjective well-being), there is widespread agreement that goals and related constructs such as concerns and commitments play an essential role in determining the quality and intensity of affective experience (Frijda, 1986; Klinger, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Oatley, 1992; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). These various goal theories of emotion postulate that discrete emotional states are the results of goal-relevant appraisals (Lazarus, 1991; Oatley, 1992). Affect plays a role in determining one's commitment to goals, affect energizes goal-directed behavior, and affect serves as feedback informing a person of the status of his or her goals.

Folkman and Stein (1997) go beyond this rudimentary formulation and present a theory of coping specifying the conditions under which

various forms of coping lead to adaptive or maladaptive outcomes. Specifically, their intent is to understand how goals are involved in the maintenance of positive emotions under deteriorating life circumstances. Successful coping requires the dual process of recognizing and disengaging from unrealistic and unattainable goals, and the ability to generate new goals that are personally meaningful, realistic, and attainable. To maintain or to recover well-being in the face of adversity, people must be flexible goal-strivers, recognizing when to continue to strive and when to eliminate or revise goals. Folkman and Stein (1997) developed a method for analyzing goal processes in narratives produced by the caregivers of men with AIDS. Caregivers' ability to engage in goal-related activities and events that they found positive and meaningful was a strong prospective predictor of positive psychological states a year following their partner's death. Spiritual and religious goals and beliefs were among those that most strongly helped participants cope with caregiving and bereavement. Their work is notable as it explores the process of goal setting and goal revision in sustaining well-being under difficult circumstances.

Goals may be especially important components of the meaning-making process because they are involved with different coping processes. Pargament (1996) distinguished between two forms of coping: conservational and transformational. Conservational coping refers to the preservation of that which is personally meaningful in the face of threat or loss, while transformational coping refers to the development or acquisition of new sources of meaningfulness after the immediate threat has passed. These two forms of coping exist in a dialectical relation to each other over time and are processes that "guide and sustain the person throughout the life span" (Pargament, 1996, p. 217). Personal goals are likely to be involved in both forms of coping, as the person first seeks to maintain coherence in the face of threat by increased commitment and renewed striving to certain goals and then gradually by reexamination of priorities and goals. Brandstadter and Renner (1990) made a similar distinction between tenacious goal pursuit and flexible goal pursuit, and found that while both styles were related to subjective well-being, flexible goal pursuit attenuated the negative impact of unsuccessful goal attainment on life satisfaction.

As mentioned previously, data on the relation between goals and adjustment in the face of adversity is difficult to come by. The Edmonds and Hooker (1992) study cited earlier asked subjects to indicate if their goals in life were changing as a result of bereavement, and if so, in what ways. The majority of individuals (71%) reported a positive change in life goals. A more extensive attempt to study the role of personal goals in coping with loss was conducted by Emmons, Colby, and Kaiser (1998).

We examined the link between personal goal systems and reactions to personal losses in two studies involving both college student and community adult samples. We anticipated that goals would be used to derive meaning following trauma: Recovery from loss should be partially a function of the development of and investment in new goal pursuits. Relatedly, we sought to determine whether commitment to specific types of goals (e.g., intimacy, personal growth, spiritual) promote the acceptance of and adaptation to loss. A related question was whether goal conservation or goal transformation was more likely following loss. Narrative accounts of loss and probing questions regarding life-goal change revealed that goal change is not a necessary consequence of traumatic loss. While the majority of participants did report change of some sort with respect to their goals, 40% did not. Changes in striving intensity—enhanced commitment, focus, and purpose—appear to be more common than changes in goal setting (i.e., content). Goal conservation appears to be nearly as common a response to trauma as goal transformation. Second, the results of our studies indicated that a lack of goal change, and not goal reformulation, is associated with recovery from experiences of loss. Perhaps the need for continuity during major life transitions fosters both goal conservation and facilitates adaptation to the stressor. Stressful life experiences were also associated with both negative and positive appraisals of one's goals. That is, people who reported more difficult life events were more ambivalent about their goals, rated them as more difficult to attain, and tended to strive for extrinsic reasons. Interestingly, however, these individuals invested more value and appear to be more committed to their goals compared to persons with lower levels of life stress. This might be taken as a further example of stress-induced growth.

Persons who were more committed to intrinsically satisfying spiritual and religious goals were more likely to say that they had both recovered from the loss and found meaning in it. Recovery and finding meaning were associated with being committed to the goals of "pleasing God," "experiencing personal growth," and "engaging in religious traditions." People who rated extrinsic goals of "being popular," "looking young," and "being able to attract a sexual partner" as important were less likely to have found meaning in their loss and less likely to say they had recovered from it. When it comes trying to make sense out of a traumatic experience, the content of what a person is trying to do does matter. Not only that, the meaning-making process, and eventual recovery from the loss, is facilitated to the degree that the content of a person's goals contains a search for the sacred. This finding is in agreement with the extensive and burgeoning literature demonstrating the effectiveness of religion in coping with life stress (e.g., Brown, 1994; McIntosh et al., 1993; Pargament, 1996; Park et al., 1996; Schumaker, 1992). In con-

trast, persons who were primarily preoccupied with self-focused goals were coping more poorly with the loss. The retrospective nature of this research precludes making strong inferences on the role of goals in the coping process. On the other hand, it would be foolhardy to assume that goals are irrelevant to coping with trauma. The goal construct has several advantages over dispositional and coping constructs for research on personality and illness (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998).

Self-transcendent spiritual goals—goals that connect the individual horizontally with others and vertically to a higher power—appear to facilitate the recovery process. In Chapter 5, I described a number of reasons why persons who commit themselves to spiritual goals experience more positive states of well-being. Perhaps the most central of these is that religion or spirituality can provide a unifying philosophy of life and serve as an integrating and stabilizing force that provides a framework for interpreting life's challenges and provides a resolution to such concerns as suffering, death, tragedy, and injustice. For many people, a religious meaning system and its associated goals may be the most reliable way to make sense out of pain and suffering. Taylor and Watson (1989) stated that "suffering stands at the very center of a religious response to the world" (p. 12). Religious beliefs and goals are powerful elements in personal meaning systems as they are relatively immune from disconfirmation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) and allow for conservational as well as transformational coping (Pargament, 1996). Once again, to quote Geertz (1966), "As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable—something, as we say, sufferable" (p. 10). Future research needs to explore what types of religious goals are most effective in restoring meaning in the face of suffering, and the mechanisms by which these goals are effective. For instance, the richness of metaphor that religious systems provide (e.g., viewing major life changes as involving the death and burial of an old life and a resurrection to a new one) may be a potent means of deriving meaning from suffering (Crabtree, 1991; Rambo, 1993).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: GOALS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Although the study by Emmons, Colby, and Kaiser (1998) did not provide definitive answers to how goals can aid in fostering stress-induced growth, it did demonstrate the potential that a goal-theoretical perspective can contribute to the understanding of adaptation following loss. Several changes in the characteristics of goal systems may have a positive

impact on development. For example, it is possible that a reduction of conflict between goals and/or a change in goal content could lead to higher levels of functioning for individuals. Another avenue for growth includes an increase in goal complexity, or the variety of objectives a person is trying to accomplish. For example, the larger the variety of areas in which an individual has vested interests (i.e., work, family, leisure, etc.), perhaps the less likely that a loss in one area will completely devastate the person. Future studies aimed at understanding changes in goal content as a function of the experience of trauma may find it necessary to postulate a stage-related model of change. In particular, change is unlikely to involve a sudden all-or-none transformation; rather, a more gradual metamorphosis in one's purposes may be the norm. Following trauma, there is a powerful need to maintain the integrity of one's conceptual system (Epstein, 1991). As a result, a rapid reorganization of one's goals is both unlikely and ill advised. The need to develop new sources of self-validation through transformation in goal hierarchies must be balanced by maintaining the integrity of one's conceptual system. Indeed, the lack of goal change following a personal upheaval such as loss serves precisely this basic need for self-coherence and continuity. Goal continuity can have a stabilizing effect on the self during life-transitional periods. For example, it has been shown to promote psychosocial adjustment following retirement (Robbins, Lee, & Wan, 1994). Goal transformation might be associated with short-term distress since the process of relinquishing valuable previous commitments can be a wrenching one. Goal conservation, on the other hand, might be linked to short-term psychological benefits but to poorer outcomes in the long run, if the person is unable to move on to new goal pursuits.

In his analysis of the dynamics of religious conversion, Rambo (1993) makes a similar point that conversion is rarely dramatic. He outlines a three-stage process by which persons both develop the necessary orientation for change and consolidate change following initial conversion experiences. Separation, the first stage, involves the repudiation of previously held beliefs that are inconsistent with the new worldview. Transition, the second stage, is characterized by a reprioritization and transformation of beliefs. The third and final stage, consolidation, is marked by the acceptance and affirmation of the new belief system. Goal reformulation following trauma may follow a similar stage process. In this process, the individual must first disengage from or modify previously held goals prior to embracing new sources of meaning.

Breed and Emmons (1996) identified ways in which personal goals might be incorporated into grief management programs. They had 49 participants in a grief support group rate the extent to which they had discussed their respective current personal goals with their deceased partner, whether each goal was one they jointly pursued with that per-

son, and the extent to which they believed the loved one would have supported the goal. Subjects who had discussed the goal with the loved one prior to his or her death and who had pursued other goals together scored lower on measures of psychological well-being and generally appraised their goals more negatively. Perhaps spouses were pursuing the goal out of a sense of obligation to their deceased partners. Recall that not all personal goals are, in fact, personal. Joint pursuit was negatively related to control and project initiation, which offers support for the conjecture that a sense of obligation was involved. Alternatively, perhaps the spouses lacked the skills or personal efficacy to successfully bring the project to completion. Individuals who expressed faith that their loved one would have supported their goal were better adjusted and appraised their goal more positively. Support was associated with perceived project importance, control, and value congruency.

The fundamental task facing the bereaved is that of relinquishing ties to the spouse while simultaneously maintaining an attachment (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Attachments are maintained through symbolic representations, rituals, and living legacies—extensions of the personality or other features of the deceased that are incorporated into his or her self-image. A commitment to personal goals or projects that the deceased person either was personally committed to or that the survivor believed would have been valued by the person appear to play an important role in the continuation of the relationship. At the same time, an enhanced attention to these goals should help the bereaved cope, transform the loss into an eventual gain, and help the survivor to feel as if the loved one's memory is being kept alive. A gradual transition from goals that were jointly pursued with the deceased to a reformulation of goals that would have been supported by the deceased loved one may, at least in the short-term, allow a reasonably adaptive solution to the dilemma of moving on while remaining connected.

MEANING, HAPPINESS, AND WISDOM: THE BIG THREE?

Nozick (1989) posed the question, "What is wisdom and why do philosophers love it so?" (p. 267). Given the recent surge of psychological interest in the topic (e.g., Aldwin, 1994; Baltes & Staudinger, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Kramer, 1990; Sternberg & Ruzgis, 1994), one could rightly rephrase the question to "Why do psychologists love it so?" It is hard to disentangle the concepts of meaning, happiness, and wisdom, and perhaps it would be wise not to attempt a scientific dissection of them at this late point in the chapter. Suffice to say that wisdom is a valuable resource for living the good life; it is intimately a part and

parcel of each of the major topics discussed in this chapter—stress-induced growth, meaning making, and goal striving. The Old Testament writer of the Book of Proverbs phrased it simply: “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom” (Proverbs 4:7, NIV). It can be one of the primary outcomes of stress-induced growth (Aldwin, 1994; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), a resource for the identification of valuable and significant goals (as well as the pathway for reaching those goals), and the knowledge of when to disengage from goal pursuit. Wisdom is “being able to see and appreciate the deepest significance of whatever occurs . . . appreciating the ramifications of each thing or event for the various dimensions of reality, knowing and understanding not merely the proximate goods but the ultimate ones, and seeing the world in this light” (Nozick, 1989, p. 276). The concept of wisdom has not yet made deep inroads in the literature on subjective well-being, perhaps because of a bias toward emotion as a primary indicator of well-being. As conceptual models continue to distinguish among components of positive well-being, the contribution of wisdom to the formula for happiness will eventually be recognized. The goals construct can serve as an important bridge between the psychology of wisdom and research on subjective well-being (Freund & Baltes, 1998).

Two recent empirical studies are relevant to the distinction between meaning and happiness. Rather than demonstrating a complete independence of these constructs, however, the data are suggestive of a moderate positive association. King and Napa (1998) studied folk conceptions “of the good life.” They asked participants to judge the desirability and moral goodness of a person’s life as a function of the amount of happiness, meaning in life, and financial success of the person. Both meaning and happiness determined the desirability of a life, with meaning accounting for slightly more variance. Both of these overwhelmed wealth; meaning had an effect size six times that of wealth, while happiness had an effect size five times that of wealth. King and Napa’s study indicates that meaning and happiness jointly determine overall quality of life, or at least judgments of what the constitutes the “good life.”

McGregor and Little (1998) also emphasized the distinction between meaning and happiness, equating the two with what they referred to as integrity and efficacy, respectively. Integrity refers to how consistent one’s goals are with core aspects of the self, and efficacy refers to how successful one is at achieving the goals. McGregor and Little’s usage of the term “integrity” is quite close to our discussion in the previous chapter on personality integration. In fact, their research creates a bridge between the concepts of integration and personal meaning. Drawing on an associative network perspective, the authors build a model in which hypothesized positive linkages between aspects of the self contrib-

ute to personal meaning, whereas negative or conflictual relationships between elements are hypothesized to contribute to a sense of meaninglessness. Evidence was found to support the hypothesized meaning/integrity and happiness/efficacy links, though the correlations were modest (.22 and .37, respectively). Happiness and meaning were moderately correlated with each other ($r = .46$). Both this study and King and Napa’s (1998) suggest that, in general, meaning and happiness tend to co-occur, although the variables contain enough unique variance to enable them to correlate with different criterion variables.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

As I did in Chapter 3, I would like to conclude this chapter by briefly considering some of the implications of research on goals and meaning for clinical contexts.

One implication of the research reviewed in this chapter involves the distinction between meaning and happiness made by health care professionals. The research of Folkman and her colleagues (Folkman & Stein, 1997; Stein et al., 1997) makes it clear that it is possible to derive meaning from mundane activities even in the face of a deteriorating situation such as caring for a person who cannot recover, and that meaning occurs in the context of the goals toward which a person is striving. Providing avenues for meaning and enabling the person to derive a sense of purpose and meaning is an important and valuable alternative when the gravity of a situation appears to preclude positive emotions. Wong (1998) has developed a meaning-centered counseling program that is especially designed to help clients extract positive meaning from otherwise debilitating life situations. The identification of valuable and meaningful strivings and projects achievable in daily life is a critical component in meaning-centered counseling. Enabling a client to live a life that is deeper and ultimately more fulfilling often entails a reorganization of striving commitments along with increasing sensitivity to opportunities for their realization. Similarly, Lapierre et al. (1997) suggest that it may be possible to redirect the content of an elderly person’s chronic goals from those that provide less meaning and purpose to more meaningful pursuits in conjunction with a life review process.

A second important implication of the research reviewed in this chapter is that given the crucial role that spiritual goals and commitments appear to play in the restoration of meaning, and in the positive changes that follow struggles with adversity, therapists and other professionals need to be both keenly aware and appreciative of their clients’ spiritual and religious orientations (Kelly, 1995; Shafranske, 1996).

There seems to be a growing sensitivity to and acceptance of religion in the lives of their clients on the part of clinicians and an attempt to harness the power of these belief systems for healing.

CONCLUSIONS

It is intriguing (and unfortunate) that the stress and coping literatures and the subjective well-being literature evolved independently of each other and have tended to go their separate ways. The stress and coping framework has historically focused on the amelioration of psychological distress, whereas the well-being field is more concerned with positive evaluations of one's life. Very few studies have explicitly addressed the connection between well-being and coping. With the recent flurry of activity directed toward understanding positive changes produced by stress, the fields may begin to more closely parallel each other. Aldwin (1994) reports that there have been over 10,000 studies on the negative effects of stress and comparatively few on stress-induced positive outcomes, an observation that is reminiscent of Myers and Diener's (1995) claim of a similar imbalance of ill-being to well-being studies. The goals concept may serve as an integrative unit for bridging these separate but interdependent research traditions.

The survey research literature on subjective well-being (Diener & Diener, 1996) indicates that most people are happy. It is also a fact that adversity and suffering are realities of life that comprehensive theories of subjective well-being cannot ignore. Quality-of-life specialists must be cognizant of the ways in which people attempt to extract growth-enhancing features from personal trials and to create and foster conditions under which the potential for positive outcomes is increased. While most people may indeed be happy, their struggles have left them not only with greater opportunity to experience a wider range of emotions, but in many cases with deep transformations in character. Paradoxically, it may be that enjoyment of life is not only possible in the face of suffering, but that suffering may be one road to deep and lasting happiness. The research on well-being reviewed in this chapter suggests that "the good life" is not one that is achieved through momentary pleasures or defensive illusions, but through meeting suffering head on and transforming it into opportunities for meaning, wisdom, and growth, with the ultimate objective being the development of the person into a fully-functioning mature being. On this formula for happiness, age-old wisdom and modern science are in agreement.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Spiritual Intelligence: Toward a Theory of Personality and Spirituality

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to establish a case for including spirituality and religiousness in research and theory in the psychology of personality. I have tried to do this by relating these spheres of human functioning to goal motivation and subjective well-being, matters of central importance in contemporary personality psychology. My goal has been to understand long-term individual differences in affective and cognitive well-being as a function of a person's motivational life. In order to do this, I have found it necessary to invoke a conception of spirituality that is general enough to represent the diverse meanings that spirituality holds for people in today's culture, yet is amenable to rigorous empirical study. As I have argued in Part I of this book, personality can be characterized by patterns of personal strivings, the typical or characteristic goals that people try to accomplish in their everyday lives. We saw in Part II that as a basic category of human experience, spirituality is revealed through ultimate concerns that center on the sacred. When people orient their lives around the attainment of spiritual ends, they tend to experience their lives as worthwhile, unified, and meaningful.

In this final chapter, I place these elements of the approach I have been developing in the first seven chapters into a larger, more inclusive theoretical framework. Recent advances in social-cognitive approaches to personality make possible the location of both personal strivings and spirituality within a common framework, one that represents an alternative way of conceptualizing spirituality within personality functioning. I call this framework *spiritual intelligence*. In this last chapter, I consider the possibility that spirituality might be conceived of as a type of intelli-