

What Makes Goals Choiceworthy? A Qualitative Study of Hedonic, Eudaimonic, and Structural Motives

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Abstract

Research on goal choice has been limited by restricted explanatory categories, unidimensional quantitative ratings of goal importance, and limited samples in academic settings. Open-ended inquiry can yield a much richer picture of goal choices. This grounded theory interview study with 11 college graduates assessed goal importance three times over four months. The grounded theory of goal importance had four coding levels: three theoretical categories (hedonic motives, eudaimonic motives, and structural motives), seven thematic codes, 19 axial codes, and 56 basic codes. Very diverse reasons were reported for goal choice, reflecting aspects of many goal pursuit theories. Respondents gave multiple reasons for pursuing each goal, often in multiple theoretical categories. Basic codes provided the most explanatory information, with higher-level categories offering more descriptive information. Results suggest that only complex theories of goal pursuit can encompass the range of goal motives and that qualitative inquiries complement quantitative research by ensuring this breadth.

Key words: goals, motivation, eudaimonic, hedonic, goal hierarchy, prosocial, qualitative research, grounded theory

Word count: 14,931

Psychologists have a longstanding interest in studying goal pursuit, focusing primarily on which goals individuals pursue and why they pursue those aims. The descriptions and explanations of goal pursuit have taken many forms, ranging from drive theories to goal orientation theories. Contemporary investigators study goal pursuit primarily through providing a list of goals and asking respondents to rate the goal on several dimensions, such as importance, efficacy, control, and ownership. Such quantitative methods dominate goal research and have been very productive. We propose a qualitative approach that complements quantitative research by studying a broader range of goals with deeper inquiry into the reasons individuals choose their goals.

Goal researchers have restricted their investigations and thereby limited what they can find in four major ways. First, some theorists and researchers have restricted the goal contents to be studied. At its most extreme, goal pursuit research was constrained to physiological drives. Second, goal pursuit scholarship began by restricting goal pursuit to a causal determinative process, but recent scholarship has begun to explore it as an agentic process. Third, most researchers have restricted goal contents to researcher provided goals. This approach may unduly limit goal content to those deemed important by investigators, which may or may not match the actual goals individuals seek. These studies investigate why individuals pursue particular goals with ratings of generic motivations such as “importance” or “success likelihood.” Quantitative ratings of goal motives do allow assessments of the relationships among various dimensions of goals and other variables of interest (e.g., life satisfaction), but such ratings are unlikely to capture the richness and resonance of what makes goal pursuit worth significant effort and sacrifice. Finally, much research and theory have been limited to the academic setting. This research has been informative about academic pursuits, but it is unlikely to can provide a broader account of less structured or more long-term goal pursuits. Over the years, researchers have progressively broadened and deepened research on goals, and we report here on a qualitative study of goal pursuit that continues these trends, focusing on why individuals choose the goals they do.

Drive Theories

Early attempts to describe goals and explain goal-oriented behavior were formulated as drive

theories, in which behavior is compelled by physiological drives, with or without conscious awareness or choice. These theories assumed that a tissue need residing within the body (e.g., thirst) stimulates behaviors to reduce the drive (e.g., drinking water) (Woodworth, 1918). Early drive theorists produced evidence that drive states and stimulus-response associations predicted behavior (e.g., Hull, 1943). One advantage of this approach is that the questions of which goals are pursued and why they are pursued could be neatly explained by physiological requirements. However, drive theory was unable to explain a wide variety of behaviors with no obvious associations with physiological drives, such as spontaneous behaviors, curious investigation, and eating when one is not hungry (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Given the limitations of a purely physiological approach, Murray (1938) developed a theory of psychological drives. Murray's theory described goal content in terms of thirty basic human psychological needs within six domains: ambition, materialism, defense of status, human power, affection between people, and exchange of information. He theorized that all behavior is motivated by this set of innate psychological needs. Others followed this approach by developing theories of universal needs, such as Maslow's (1969) hierarchy of needs culminating in self-actualization and self-transcendence.

Learned Drive Theories

Theorists have since broadened goal research to include learned motivations rather than seeing all goals as innately given. Atkinson (1964) and McClelland (1961) developed Need-Achievement theory, which includes learned psychological motives. They suggested that behavior can be motivated to achieve success or avoid failure. Similarly, Atkinson's Value-Expectancy theory (1964) explains that individuals view goals as worth pursuing to the degree they have learned to expect success. What these theories have in common is that achievement motivation and expectancy for success are formal goal categories within which they believed any goal content could be encompassed. Eccles et al. (1983) elaborated value-expectancy theory with four task-values: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost. Attainment value refers to how well goal pursuits match one's real or idealized self-schema (e.g., masculinity or competence). Intrinsic value focuses on the personally derived enjoyment from pursuing a goal. Utility value is based on how much a goal facilitates other goals. Costs refer to disincentives such as

fear of failure, required effort, and lost opportunities when pursuing a goal.

Framing goal pursuit in this way eliminated the first major constraint of goal pursuit research: the drive theory restriction of goal contents to specific lists of physiological or psychological drives. By dispensing with specific lists of goals, learned drive theories productively broadened the domain of goal contents to include the full range of human goals. These theories also present general conceptions of what might make a goal worth pursuing (e.g., achievement or intrinsic value). In addition, these theories have inspired considerable research on these variables in aggregated groups. We believe this research can be complemented by studies that explore the significant individual variation in the motives individuals are likely to have for pursuing goals, which can be obscured in aggregate analyses. For example, individuals could have utility motives of very different sorts, with some pursuing a graduate degree in order to make more money and others pursuing a graduate degree for the sake of becoming qualified to pursue a career that may not be lucrative. Thus, learned drive theories cannot help us understand why an individual would prefer one form of value or achievement over another, and how these forms of value come to motivate the pursuit of any particular goal. This study is focused on these individual differences in the interest of complementing previous research and theory. For this reason, we chose to investigate the motives for individuals' goal pursuit through in-depth interviews that allow the exploration of individual differences in goal selection.

Goal Orientations

Goal orientation theories provide an alternative to drive theories of all forms (Covington, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). **These theories view individuals as agents making conscious choices and having reasons for choosing particular goals rather than seeing goals as effects of impersonal causal forces, thus overturning a second major restriction in goal pursuit research.** Goal orientation theories suggest "that all actions are given meaning, direction, and purpose by the goals that individuals seek out and that the quality and intensity of behavior will change as these goals change" (Covington, 2000, p. 174). While initially designed to clarify differences in student learning behaviors (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007), goal orientation has been very widely adopted in the goal achievement literature (DeShon &

Gillespie, 2005). These theories also have the advantage of being general theories about goals; virtually any goal can be encompassed within a goal orientation. Yet there are many ways to understand goal orientations with no consensus in sight (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Pintrich, 2000). As DeShon and Gillespie (2005) summarize it, “the multiple definitions of goal orientation provide an unstable foundation for research on the antecedents and consequences of the goal orientation construct” (p. 1101).

A primary thread of goal orientation research has focused on two orientations: learning and performance goal orientations within academic and employment settings (Covington, 2000; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Learning or mastery goals are a form of intrinsic motivation, focused on increasing one’s enjoyment, aptitude, and understanding of material being learned. Performance goals are focused on outcomes such as outshining one’s peers, appearing capable, and avoiding failure. Researchers have recently elaborated the goal orientation model by adding a second approach/avoidance dimension (e.g., Baranik, Barron, & Finney, 2007). In spite of this expansion, this model is unable to account for the social aspects of goal pursuit even within the academic environment (Urduan & Maehr, 1995; Dowson & McNerny, 2001).

Other theories of goal orientation have also been developed, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000), approach and avoidance orientations (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2002), social goal orientations (e.g., Urduan & Maehr, 1995), and instrumental and constitutive orientations (e.g., Fowers, Mollica, & Procacci, 2010). Ford’s (1992) taxonomic model of goal contents organizes specific and idiosyncratic goal contents into two major categories (within person and person-environment) and five subordinate categories. One recent advance in goal orientation research has been to study college students, thereby broadening this line of research beyond adolescent samples.

The intrinsic and extrinsic goal motivations highlighted in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) focus on whether the activity is autonomous or not. The theory has also been elaborated in ways that shed light on some reasons for individuals’ goal selections. For example, extrinsic motivation is based on outcomes such as rewards, punishments, or obligations. The category of intrinsic motivation is less illuminating in itself because intrinsic goal seeking is seen as being pleasant or satisfying in itself, but

the theory does not explain why a person finds pleasure or satisfaction in any particular goal. Vallerand et al. (1992) subdivided intrinsic motivation into three categories that can explain why an individual sees a goal as important: the motivations to know, to accomplish, and to experience stimulation. Fairchild, Horst, Finney and Barron (2005) reported confirmatory factor analytic results that supported Vallerand et al.'s three intrinsic motivations. This suggests that the simple distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is insufficient, and that further research investigating an even wider range of reasons for goal pursuit may be fruitful.

Two important restrictions remain in place in most goal orientation research. First, investigators generally provide a limited set of goals that respondents can endorse. Little (1993) suggested that using researcher provided goals lacks ecological validity because that source of goal content may artificially restrict the types of goals that are studied. It is unclear whether participants view researcher provided goals as meaningful or representative of the participants' actual goals. Individuals sometimes have unexpected or idiosyncratic goals. They may want to spend more (or less) time with friends or pay more (or less) attention to their feelings. Similarly, Ford (1992) suggested that "to represent the idiosyncratic features of a person's goal content in a truly precise way, it is necessary to use an idiographic approach" (p. 96). Researcher provided goals may also bias research results in favor of researcher preferred goal orientations because the goals are likely to be consonant with the theory of goal orientation under study.

Little (1993) recommends transcending the limitations of researcher provided goal content by simply asking participants to provide their own goal content. Participant-generated goals offer greater ecological validity and make it possible to study a greater variety of goals because this method better captures individual's actual and unique goals. This method has been successfully used in a number of studies (Fowers et al., 2010; McGregor & Little, 1998; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004).

Second, researchers ask participants provide quantitative ratings of perceived goal characteristics, such as importance, challenge, ownership, and so forth (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Sideridis & Kaissidis-Rodafinos, 2001). In this approach, the importance ratings of goals are seen as a primary assessment of why individuals pursue particular goals. Studies of goal importance tend to focus on the

relationships between ratings of goal importance and outcomes, such as academic behavior (Sideridis & Kaissidis-Rodafinos, 2001), work-place goal outcomes (e.g., Harris, Daniels & Briner, 2003), satisfaction with life (e.g., Emmons & Diener, 1986), and medical treatment outcomes (e.g., Orbell, Johnston, Rowley, Davy, & Espley, 2001). Quantitative rankings of investigator provided goals have shed light on relative rankings of goals and how goal importance relates to other variables. At the same time, goal importance ratings can only tell us *how important* a goal is, but we need another approach to learn *why* that particular goal is important or choiceworthy.

The use of participant provided goals is a beginning for overcoming the third major restriction in goals research: limiting goals to those provided by researchers. This innovation opens the door to investigating the idiosyncratic reasons individuals choose particular goals. In other words, attending to participants' actual goals puts us in a position to better understand the reasons that individuals choose some goals over others through in-depth exploration of those choices. Sheldon et al. (2004) took one step in this direction by studying the degree to which individuals had autonomously chosen their self-reported goals. These researchers found that both goal content and the degree of autonomy were independently related to well-being, very interesting results that supported the predictions of Self-Determination Theory. We are interested in extending such research by seeking to clarify *why* an individual autonomously selects a particular goal, not just the degree to which the choice is autonomous.

Qualitative Goal Research

Although quantitative approaches to goal research have shed light on many important aspects of goal pursuit, we believe that qualitative research on understanding goal selection can be quite valuable as a complement. The purpose of this study is to learn more about why individuals choose the particular goals that they do. The range of possible responses to why particular goals are deemed choiceworthy is likely to be very expansive and to have many idiosyncratic features. Given the expected richness and nuance in individuals' accounts of why their goals are worth pursuing, a qualitative investigation may be better suited for exploring this topic. By exploring some respondents' views on why they chose and persist in specific goals, we can improve our understanding of goal seeking motives. Pursuing this more

open-ended form of investigation follows the trajectory of the goal pursuit literature, which begun with physiological drive theories and has expanded to include interest in agents who choose particular goals and pursue them through goal orientations they deem fitting. We now review two studies showing the unique forms of information that can be obtained through qualitative studies of the choiceworthiness of goals.

Dowson and McInerney (2001) broadened the exploration of goal pursuit by conducting a qualitative study of middle-school students' reasons for choosing and pursuing school and career goals. Their interviews and field observations indicated that the categories of mastery and performance orientations were insufficient to account for their respondents' goal pursuit. In particular, work avoidance, social affiliation, and social responsibility to other students were important factors that were independent of mastery and performance. Dowson and McInerney's study shows that unexpected, theory expanding information can be obtained by asking participants about their goals in an open-ended manner.

Yeager and Bundick (2009) studied the extent to which adolescents' career goals were "motivated by at least one intention to have an impact on the world beyond the self" (p. 428). They coded the responses in a 2X2 matrix, contrasting the intrinsic value of the work goal with its extrinsic benefits and whether those benefits were expected to accrue to the respondent or to others. Almost all of their participants (98%) identified a future job and 87% stated why that job was important to them. Approximately two-thirds (68%) of the adolescents gave more than one of the four types of reasons for their work goals. Yeager and Bundick also found a positive relationship between the participants' goal to benefit others with measures of purpose in life, meaning in life, and the meaningfulness of schoolwork. This study illustrates the value of qualitative inquiry in this area because the open-format responses allowed the participants to discuss more than one reason for their goals, making it clear that the categories of reasons for pursuing goals were not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, this study focused on a very distal goal for the adolescents, and, as the authors noted, they "focused on only one category of purpose—work—and ignored other potentially purposeful domains" (p. 447). The rich and unanticipated results of these qualitative studies exemplify a useful way to overcome the restriction of goal content and motives to

researcher provided categories.

The Present Study

Our review of the goal pursuit literature echoes other reviewers' conclusions that the field lacks theoretical integration and has limited our understanding of what makes goals important by using pre-determined goal content and goal importance ratings in only a few settings (Covington, 2000; DeShon & Gillespie, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). These limitations remain evident. In addition, **the field has remained focused on adolescents and college student samples, the fourth restriction in goals research.** It is important to broaden our knowledge base to other populations. DeShon and Gillespie (2005) pointed out the importance of evaluating and integrating multiple theories of goal pursuit. They noted that "it is as though multiple conceptualizations of goal orientation are being researched in parallel over time but not interacting with each other or engaging in debate over the most productive conceptualization or boundary conditions" (p. 1104). We hope that the integrative nature of our introduction and results and discussion sections can facilitate discussion across goal pursuit theories.

We report on an interview study that was an in-depth, open-ended exploration of goal choice and what makes goals choiceworthy in a sample of college graduates. By studying college graduates, we are taking one small step in broadening the populations in which goal pursuit is studied. We used a semi-structured interview to allow the richness of individuals' motives for choosing particular goals to emerge, hoping to contribute to Pintrich's (2000) recommendation that "at a minimum our measures should...reflect an accurate and faithful assessment of the student's own personally constructed goals" (p. 98). We discussed the goals that respondents deemed most important, without restricting goals to a specific life domain. We explored what made these goals worthwhile to them. We used grounded-theory analysis to develop an ecologically valid, full-bodied account of the multi-faceted question of why goals are choiceworthy. We were also interested in the extent to which individuals would spontaneously offer more than one reason why a given goal was important and the degree to which they would spontaneously refer to the goal motivations that have been theorized by scholars in this area. It is also important to note that we followed the qualitative theory convention of conducting a detailed review of the literature *after*

we had analyzed our data (Strauss, 1987). This is important in order to prevent a detailed knowledge of the literature from exerting so much influence on our interpretations that the grounded theory of goal pursuit we developed in this study would not be clearly grounded in the data.

METHODS

Participants

We recruited a purposive sample of 11 individuals who had been hired by Teach for America (TFA) in the metropolitan area of a large southeastern city. TFA is a two-year service program in which paid volunteers teach in under-privileged public schools across the nation. We purposively sampled TFA volunteers as information-rich respondents for two reasons. First, we believed that people who had committed two years to this program would likely have given considerable thought to their personal goals and values. Second, because the majority of TFA volunteers are recruited for the years following graduation from college, we knew that our participants were likely to be emerging adults, an intensely goal-oriented developmental period.

Of the 11 participants, eight (72.7%) were female and three were male. The sample overwhelmingly fell into the emerging adult life stage (81.8%, or nine participants, were aged 22 – 26), with an overall mean age of 25.5. Ethnically, four participants identified as White (36.4%), three as Black-Caribbean (27.3%), two as biracial (18.2%), and one each as African American, and other (7.7% each). None of the participants were married and only one was engaged.

Procedures

We recruited participants through announcements on a local TFA listserv. Participants then contacted the investigators if they were interested in participating. Participants completed standard informed consent forms.

We assessed the participants' goal commitments at three time points. At the first time point, participants responded to an Internet survey on which they listed their five most important personal goals and a key action that helped them reach each of their goals.

The participants then took part in a 90-minute face-to-face semi-structured interview with an

investigator (Time 2). The participant was given the choice of meeting the interviewer at the University or in the participant's home. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, private room. There were two interviewers, one female and one male, both authors of the study. The interviewers jointly developed the interview protocol and conducted mock interviews to establish proficiency in managing the interview, attending to relevant content, and following up on important aspects of the responses. The interviewers also participated in coding, which afforded ongoing opportunities to maintain high quality interviews with fidelity to the purposes of the study.

The interview protocol contained five standard elements, with follow-up questions specifically tailored to how the participant answered the initial queries. First, the interviewer introduced and explained the interview process and answered participant questions. Second, the interviewer reviewed each of the 5 goals that the participant provided in the online goals questionnaire and asked if the participant wanted to revise those goals. Third, the interviewer asked the participant what led them to choose each of the five goals. This choice was explored in depth with each goal before proceeding to the next goal. For example, one interviewee was participating in a master's degree program. Follow-up questions included queries about the reasons for choosing to pursue graduate education and the reasons for choosing the particular field of study. Fourth, the interviewer asked if the participant prioritized his or her list of goals in any way. The nature of the participants' prioritization was explored in depth. Some participants prioritized their goals in terms of importance, others in terms of chronological order. Follow-up questions explored the nature of the prioritization and the reasons for it. Finally, the interviewer asked if the participants had any other important goals they did not list in the questionnaire, and these goals and goal choices were explored with the same sequence of questions used to explore the five goals initially provided.

Four months after the initial interview, the participants had a follow-up face-to-face semi-structured interview (Time 3). The protocol for this interview was similar to the first interview. First, the interviewer explained the purpose and structure of the follow-up interview and answered any questions. Second, the interviewer reviewed the important findings of the first interview and inquired if the research team's understanding was accurate. This constituted a member check for the first interview. Third, after

reviewing the content of each goal, the interviewer asked about the degree of progress the participant had made in achieving the goal. Fourth, the interviewer explored whether the participant had revised his or her goals over the past four months and whether new goals have emerged. Finally, the interviewer and participant discussed whether the participant's priorities for his or her goals had changed.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The investigators also took field notes to capture body language and other non-verbal data, which were shared with the coding team when appropriate. Participants were compensated with \$100 for participating in the study.

Analysis

We used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data (Strauss, 1987). Our primary objective throughout the coding was to understand the participants' goals with depth and complexity so that we could clarify the reasons they saw these goals as worth pursuing. We focused on what the participants' explanations revealed about why the goal was of importance or value. We developed a grounded theory of goal importance by coding interviewees' responses. The analysis began with open coding, in which each meaningful segment of a participant's response is assigned a code. The grounded theory is developed through organizing the codes in progressively more comprehensive categories. Axial coding is based on the grounded theory method of constant comparison—comparing the codes to the primary text with which they were originally associated to discern its most salient features or characteristics and comparing codes to one another within and across interviews to identify relationships between them. We deleted codes or allowed them to be subsumed by other codes if they were not used often enough to represent a significant pattern or were very similar to other codes. We developed four levels of coding categories to organize the data. As we developed this theory, we systematically explored and tested the relationships between the four levels of codes (core category, thematic categories, axial categories, and codes) by inspecting textual examples to confirm or disconfirm the theoretical relationships and maintain fidelity to what the participants said. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously. We reached the point of saturation (when interviews stop providing new information) with 11 participants and stopped data collection at that point.

In addition to the method of constant comparison, we also employed persistent observation through in-depth interviewing and prolonged engagement through the follow-up interview. We included multiple researchers in all coding sessions. This approach allowed constant evaluation of the credibility of our findings through revising and refining the codes and the relationships between codes. Each co-author participated in coding, and each code was the product of extensive discussion and consensus. Disagreements about codes were resolved through in-depth review of the interview text and the code. These discussions resulted in consensus about the code through appropriate revision or its elimination. A detailed audit trail of the grounded theory process is available from the senior author.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews produced 480 transcript pages. The open coding phase resulted in 1186 initial codes. In this report, we focused only on the 170 codes that were related to goal importance. We further distilled and classified these codes through axial coding, resulting in a set of 56 codes for this study. Finally, we utilized selective coding to create a meaningful order and classification of the codes into 19 axial categories under which the codes were arranged. The axial categories were organized into 6 thematic categories, which were subsumed in three theoretical categories (one of which did not have axial categories). This formed our grounded theory of goal importance, summarized in Table 1 and described in detail in this section. Table 1 also includes the number of respondents who were coded in each category.

As we discuss our findings, we note a number of parallels with other theories of goal pursuit. Noting such parallels is good scientific practice in general, but is especially important as a way to develop more integration in the fragmented goal pursuit literature (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Nevertheless, the parallels we found were intermittent and spread across several theories. Therefore, the parallels cannot be seen as clear corroboration of any single goal pursuit theory. Our purpose is only to facilitate the development of more comprehensive theories of goal pursuit by highlighting common findings.

Three theoretical categories of goal motivations emerged, and all participants were coded in each of these categories. The first was *hedonic goal motives*, in which participants defined the value of goals in terms of specific outcomes such as emotional experiences, university degrees, income, and their perceived

efficacy pursuing these outcomes. That is, the goal is achieved when the outcome is attained. Second, participants also frequently explained the importance of goals in terms of a way of being or a way of life involving personal growth, authenticity, or meaning, which we termed *eudaimonic goal motives*. That is, the goal is never finally achieved, but is pursued as a manner of living. The distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic motives has been in use since the ancient Greeks (e.g., Aristotle, 1984), and it has been renewed in contemporary philosophy (e.g., Broadie, 1991) and psychology (Fowers, 2005; Fowers et al., 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010). The term eudaimonia refers to a flourishing life, which is comprised of the kinds of ongoing activities that an individual finds inherently choiceworthy. We coded goals reported to be worthwhile because they contribute to personal growth, authenticity, and meaning as eudaimonically motivated. In contrast, we coded a goal motive focused on an end-point in a specific outcome or emotional experience as hedonically motivated. Our understanding of this distinction is in what it means to achieve the goal. Hedonic motives are aimed at a specific desirable outcome (emotional or achievement-oriented), and eudaimonic motives are aimed at an ongoing process that is desirable as a way to live. It is widely recognized that although the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic motives is important and illuminating, it is not dichotomous. Clearly, goals that have eudaimonic motives also involve specific achievements and emotional experiences associated with them. The difference is that eudaimonically motivated goals include both outcomes and ways of being. For example, some respondents focused on attaining a graduate degree simply because they wanted that achievement, which we coded only as hedonic. Other interviewees discussed graduate education as an important way to develop their personal capacities or as part of becoming an educated person. Such goals were coded as both hedonic (to acknowledge the outcome portion of the goal) and eudaimonic (to acknowledge the way of life of being an educated person).

The third category of goal importance coded participants' statements their goals being motivated by how they fit with other goals, which we called *structural motives*. Goals were sometimes worthwhile because they were a step toward another goal or because attaining the goal would "open doors."

The distribution of responses coded in the three theoretical categories was not even, as some

participants described more motives than others, and some participants described a preponderance of eudaimonic motives, whereas others had a more even distribution of hedonic and eudaimonic motives. The distribution of coded responses is shown in Table 2. We explored differences in gender, race/ethnicity, romantic relationship status, religiosity, undergraduate major, and career plans to see if any of these variables could shed light on the differential responses, but we could find no meaningful pattern in these variables and the differential responses. Because our sample was imbalanced in favor of female participants, we examined the responses for gender differences. There were no differences evident in how females and males responded to the three theoretical categories ($\chi^2 = 3.53$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.17$). No gender differences in interview tone or emphasis were apparent to the interviewers in the study.

One of the interesting findings in this study is that participants consistently described their goals as having more than one type of motive. Each participant provided five goals, resulting in a total of 55 goals in the sample. In terms of the three theoretical categories, 28 goals (51%) were coded with all three theoretical categories, 19 goals (35%) were coded in two categories, and 8 goals (15%) were coded in one category, clearly demonstrating that the respondents usually had multiple motives for a given goal. In particular, 41 goals were coded with a hedonic motive and 36 of those (88%) were also coded with a eudaimonic motive. In all, 47 goals were coded with a eudaimonic motive and 36 of those goals (77%) were also coded as hedonically motivated. The latter finding is particularly salient because our sample consists of TFA core members, whose two-year commitment to reducing the educational achievement gap in difficult circumstances could be very reasonably be interpreted as quite prosocial, even altruistic. Of course, TFA focuses both on highly specifiable outcomes and on larger questions of educational justice, and it is interesting that TFA core members echo this dual focus so clearly in their personal goals.

These results make it very clear that there is little validity in dividing our participants into hedonically or eudaimonically motivated individuals. This differentiation is only occasionally valid even at the level of a specific goal. This study raises questions about theories that assume such clear divisions among individuals or goals, whether hedonic/eudaimonic, intrinsic/extrinsic, or learning/performance. This finding is very similar to the multiplicity of goals found by Yeager and Bundick (2009) with

adolescents, suggesting that mutually exclusive goal orientation categories may need to be reformulated.

Hedonic Goal Motives

We were able to account for 98 utterances in 17 codes under the theoretical category of hedonic motives for goal pursuit. We arranged these codes in the thematic categories of *Efficacy*, *Get Stuff*, and *Subjective Well-being*.

Efficacy Category

The *efficacy* thematic category organizes axial categories that capture the idea that some goals are important because achieving the goal will demonstrate efficacy to oneself or others. Two axial categories capture efficacy: *self-efficacy* and *other perceived efficacy*.

Self-Efficacy. This axial category included codes that suggest respondents view goals as worthwhile because they support the participant's belief "in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1994). This category is consonant with Eccles et al.'s (1983) concept of attainment value, in which a goal is important because it confirms salient aspects of one's self-schema. Three codes combine to form self-efficacy: *flexibility*, *practicality*, and *scope of impact*.

Goals were often important to participants because they afforded them greater *flexibility*. Several participants mentioned the importance of a goal leading to career flexibility in type of job, geographic location, schedules and the financial flexibility to pay for things like a home or vacation. One participant noted "I decided I wanted to do my PhD so I could teach and have more flexibility...I do not want to do that corporate 9 to 5."

Many participants viewed goals as worthwhile due to their current and future *practicality*, referring to a goal's convenience, utility and rationality. A participant commented repeatedly on the utility of to-do lists, noting that they "have been the most effective thing for me... love my lists." Goals valued for their practicality could be either widely applicable to life, such as learning about cultures or narrowly applicable to a particular interest, as in gaining credentials for a job.

Several participants mentioned that a goal's importance was strengthened by its *scope of impact*

on others and the world. They intentionally pursued goals that would allow them to augment their impact whether through the number of people touched or the quality of the influence they had on them. One teacher stated, “Now I have a classroom of 19 kindergartners. I can do the best that I can do and be the best teacher and my reach extends to 19 students per year. As a staff member with Teach for America I would be supporting 30 to 35 teachers...So by supporting those teachers I am ultimately impacting thousands of children as opposed to just the 19 that are coming through my classroom.”

Other Perceived Efficacy. Many participants shared that they chose to pursue goals because they hoped the outcomes would lead others to recognize their efficacy. The codes in this axial category included *demonstrating competence*, *external standards of success*, *praise from others* and *prestige*. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2000), all of these goal motivations would be an extrinsic form of motivation. That is, the interest is in *demonstrating* (as opposed to experiencing) competence is an extrinsic motivation.

A common motivation for goal pursuit was *demonstrating competence* to others in their current jobs and on their resumes. One participant said, “I think I get that praise from people too and I like that. Like, ‘Oh my God, you’re so good, you’re so on top of it,’ you know? I guess I like...it’s like a competency thing. Like she can handle it, she can do it.” This statement was also an instance of *praise*. Conversely, participants said the lack of competence recognition and praise was demotivating. At times, *competence demonstration* also extended into outperforming others. This focus on outperforming others recalls the concept of performance motivation in goal orientation theory (Covington, 2000).

External standards of success held by other individuals or institutions were often a strong source of motivation. Institutional standards frequently governed the way teachers taught and pushed them to help their students achieve. One teacher expressed fear of negative consequences if she did not measure up to TFA’s standards. Another external standard was the way in which one individual’s personal appearance superseded her individual health, contributing to problematic eating behavior and limiting her social activities when she did not meet the standards.

Many participants valued goals for the *prestige* they might confer, such as a high-level career or

graduating from a prestigious university. Some expressed the belief that prestige would open doors for their career or academic opportunities. One respondent commented, “I think that a prestigious top 10 law degree would be accepted anywhere or welcomed.” Prestige was also portrayed as conferring control/autonomy within a job. Some participants said they persevered with their two-year commitment at TFA largely to avoid the loss of prestige that prematurely quitting would entail. (More on this below.)

Get Stuff

Participants often pursued goals because of the *tangible or psychological benefits* they offered. They discussed the importance of goals such as marriage, family life, sleeping, and reading in terms of benefits. One said that her motivation to remain a part of TFA was based almost entirely on the benefits it offered, such as bolstering her resume, getting her into law school, and teaching her to solve problems.

Tangible Benefits. Respondents chose goals that have *tangible benefits*, such as *finances, higher education, gaining experience* and *career advancement*. All of these categories have utility value (Eccles et al., 1983) and represent extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Many participants focused on the importance of *financial benefits* ranging from getting a paycheck, to budgeting, and investing for the future. The importance of a budget was a key area for many participants, which included reducing expenses and debt and managing expenses. One participant focused on how a regular income was instrumental in attaining financial “peace of mind.”

In addition, many participants valued goals related to *completing higher education*. Often, they described this as getting a degree, which is a tangible achievement, in distinction from becoming educated. One respondent explained her motive as “I want another degree under my belt, I guess.”

Similarly, participants frequently cited the importance of *gaining experience* to “build a resume.” For many, TFA was a way to gain externally valued experiences. Some individuals focused more on the outcome of “completing their commitment” rather than the actual experience of teaching.

Career advancement motivated many goal related activities including education, TFA experience, and journal publications. These activities were often valued for facilitating career goals rather than for any inherent meaningfulness. Completing their two-year TFA commitment was often a means by which

participants hoped to advance unrelated careers, such as becoming an attorney or business leader.

Psychological Benefits. Many participants discussed the importance of *psychological benefits* in goal pursuit. They referred to three key areas of psychological benefits: *control*, *feeling valued*, and *simple pleasures*.

Several respondents noted that *feeling control* over themselves or their environment motivated many goals, including owning a house, using drugs, getting a Ph.D., and reducing drinking. One interviewee said, “So yeah, I think it makes me feel good to be in control of things.” Participants valued higher education because it would give them greater control over their future or owning a house because it allowed more control over their living environments. These reasons for goal choice were related to efficacy (Bandura, 1997), expectancy (Atkinson, 1964), and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Often, participants were motivated by *feeling valued* by employers, their students, or the community. The esteem from others encouraged them to work hard and to be attached to their students, whereas being seen as expendable was very discouraging. Pursuing a goal because it increases one’s value to others is a good example of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The value placed on life’s *simple pleasures or comforts* motivated many goals. Many participants spoke of enjoying routine activities like school, work, and even checking things off of a to-do-list. Others engaged in leisure activities such as exercising, reading, writing, or traveling for the sake of simple pleasures. Some participants emphasized how financial or educational resources would help them have a comfortable environment. One indicated that pleasure made exercise possible: “I’m thinking the ways that I like to exercise...they are really fun, which is why that's how I wanted to accomplish that goal.” Pleasure in goal pursuit is seen as an intrinsic motivation by value-expectancy theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Subjective Well-being

Almost every participant described some goals as worthwhile in relationship to their subjective well-being. Many described goal importance as accentuating the positive or minimizing the negative. For this reason, we describe subjective well-being as dimensional, including some aspects described above as

one pole of the dimension. Common contrasts included feeling well/avoiding suffering, efficacy/avoiding regret or reproach, and control/avoiding stress. The unique aspect of this thematic code is the emphasis on avoidance. The dimensional nature of this category mirrors Elliot and Thrash's (2002) approach and avoidance goal orientations. The negative pole of these goal pursuit dimensions recalls avoidance of goal costs in value-expectancy theory (Eccles et al., 1983).

Often respondents described pursuing their goals to *avoid suffering* or conversely, and somewhat less commonly to *feel well*. Participants discussed avoiding psychological suffering such as self-criticism, unhappiness, and needless worry. Some mentioned avoiding people that induced suffering in them. Many participants also described attempts to reduce their current or future physical illness. Goals designed to avoid suffering or feel well included career advancement, weight loss, exercising, sleeping more, and managing working hours. They reported that the high demands of TFA exacerbated their perfectionism and reduced their health through overwork. These participants were focused on getting more sleep, taking more time off, exercising regularly, reducing stress or even quitting TFA to reduce suffering.

Many interviewees pointed to the importance of acting to *avoid regret* as in feelings of grief, worry, remorse, or fear. Participants sought to *avoid regret* by reducing alcohol intake, retaining or terminating employment, or budgeting money. With regard to finishing a graduate degree, one person said, "Once I complete this...I won't have to look back and have to worry about it." *Avoiding reproach* from others was also an important motivator. Reproach can come from failure to succeed in a goal or social standard or getting a bad reputation. Goals such as weight management, career development, education, and TFA performance were sometimes motivated by reproach avoidance. Interestingly, some individuals worried about getting into a rut of moving from accomplishment to accomplishment without purpose. Some felt driven to avoid disgrace by completing academic goals and professional commitments. One participant worried about leaving TFA, even for good reasons. She said, "I don't want that, like, 'You dropped out?' You know? That rep."

As described above, some individuals found approach motivation such as *other perceived efficacy* or getting *tangible benefits* for similar goals. These participants pursued the positive goal of academic

success or paying off a familial debt directly rather than the avoidance of regret or reproach.

Participants were also motivated by *stress avoidance*. Many removed themselves from difficult situations to reduce stress. Feeling *control* was another goal designed to reduce stress. One participant described her exercise goal as helping her manage current and future stress. Other participants were motivated to pursue goals relating to a healthy diet, prioritizing, and planning because they are calming.

Eudaimonic Goal Motives

In addition to the motives focused on simple pleasure or specific outcomes, all of the participants described motives for some goals in terms of the thematic categories of *making a good life*, *benevolence*, and *relationships*. Although many goals scholars would classify this set of responses as intrinsic motivation, we have grouped these themes in the theoretical category of eudaimonic motives because they reflect the personal development and flourishing indicated by eudaimonia. We chose this because the emphasis in most accounts of intrinsic motivation is the autonomy, subjective satisfaction, or pleasure that an individual experiences in the goal pursuit. In contrast, our participants did not say they chose these goals because they were satisfying or pleasurable. Rather, they took pains to clarify that the goal itself was important, and it is the choiceworthiness of the goal that gives rise to the pleasure they experienced in pursuing it. The question of autonomy showed up primarily in the axial category of *authenticity*. We were able to account for 181 utterances in 26 codes in this theoretical category. The contrast in hedonic and eudaimonic motives and their overlap in our results are consistent with previous theory and research on eudaimonia (Fowers, 2005; Fowers et al., 2010; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Waterman, 1993).

Making a Good Life

Individuals frequently conveyed the importance of *making a good life*, which they each interpreted in their own way. The four axial categories that comprised this thematic category were *personhood*, *life-defining choices*, *authenticity*, and *meaning/purpose*.

Personhood. The *personhood* axial category captured respondent statements about their efforts to becoming the best person they can be. Five codes combine to form *personhood*: *good person*, *personal growth/challenge*, *excellence*, *self-reflection*, and *knowledge and understanding*.

Many respondents saw their goals as choiceworthy in order to become a *good person*, such as becoming a more productive and positive part of society, being more responsible and accountable, and doing what one knows to be right. Some people noted conflict between becoming successful and becoming their best self, because some of their ideals could be waylaid in pursuit of some forms of success. One interviewee described traveling as a way to become a more well-rounded person, reducing his biases and preconceived ideas about different cultures. Another person said, “I feel like I was here to accomplish something and to be a productive and positive part of society and I know that attending church regularly does that for me.” The goal of becoming one’s best self recalls attainment value in value-expectancy theory because it can confirm salient aspects of one’s self-schema (Eccles et al., 1983).

Many participants valued goals partly because they are challenging for them, leading to *personal growth*, and they discounted goals that did not lead to self-improvement. As one individual stated “I value, first and foremost, constantly learning, constantly improving myself.” Personal growth motivated respondents to stretch themselves and they chose activities to maximize their self-enhancement, such as attending church, improving teaching skills, giving up control, exploring potential life paths, and yoga.

Participants discussed the importance of *excellence* in their goal pursuit and discounted the value of goals in which they did not or could not shine. Some interviewees focused on academic success and others placed value on being an excellent teacher at TFA. One said that it was not enough for a job to feel meaningful; she also needed to excel at it. A few people took an even more extreme position and talked about being “the absolute best that I can be.” The emphasis on choosing goals in pursuit of challenge or excellence recalls Vallerand et al.’s (1992) intrinsic motivation for accomplishment. DeShon and Gillespie (2005) also highlighted personal growth goals in their motivated action theory.

Many participants valued goals that fostered *self-reflection*. One person explained that doing yoga was important in part because it helped her to self-reflect. Other interviewees said that part of their motivation for joining TFA was that it would help them to reflect on and understand themselves better.

Commonly, respondents viewed gaining *knowledge and understanding* as the motive for their goals. They discussed their work as an avenue for increasing their knowledge. Many were students in a

local master's program, which they valued because it offered insight into their students and taught new methods of teaching. Participants' interest in gaining knowledge seems to express Vallerand et al.'s (1992) intrinsic motivation for knowing.

Life-Defining Choices. The *life defining choices* axial category is focused on structuring their life activities in the best way. The life choices were related to the three codes: *habit formation*, *fulfillment*, and *health*.

Many respondents valued goals focused on cultivating *good habits and avoiding or controlling bad habits*. Some focused on lifestyle habits, such as good sleeping habits, exercise, balancing a budget, eating well, and becoming more well-rounded. Controlling bad habits included reducing alcohol intake, working fewer hours, controlling unhealthy dieting practices, and curtailing perfectionism. They saw their teaching goals as worthwhile because they were cultivating good habits in their students such as citizenship, learning, conflict resolution, ethics and respect. They also valued helping their students control bad habits such as aggression or poor etiquette.

The majority mentioned the choice of a career or a spouse was guided by anticipated feelings of *fulfillment*. One respondent described teaching a classroom of kindergartners as "hands-on, knee-deep, helping other people...I've just learned...how amazing that can be and how fulfilling that can be." In contrast, they found that pursuing goals that lacked meaning or purpose was unfulfilling and sought to eliminate such activities. One person said of her current job, "I hate it. I was depressed. I was like, I can't stand going in every day and not loving, or at least feeling some kind of positive emotion about what I'm doing."

Through experiences with illness or injuries, some participants became very focused on goals that promoted good physical *health* because it affected everything in their lives. They discussed exercise, diet, and sleep goals that were valued for their contribution to their health. One participant was emphatic: "I would like to do whatever I can to make sure that I am as healthy as possible."

Authenticity. Participants spoke with feeling and at length about choosing goals based on *authenticity*, placing value on being true to who they are. Four codes form the *authenticity* axial category:

personal expressiveness, love of learning, passion, and using one's unique skills. This was one of only two axial codes that applied to all of the respondents. These codes recall Eccles et al.'s (1983) attainment value.

Many interviewees valued goals that represented *personal expressions* of their current or desired character, values, and interests. They pursued many goals that they saw as expressing who they are, including career choice, learning, traveling, teaching music, reducing debt, being productive, helping people, staying organized, and writing. Goals were less important when they lacked personal expressiveness: "You just don't want to lose all of yourself because you have to fit in and adapt."

Interviewees frequently cited the value of a goal deriving from their *love of learning*. This specific desire to learn was seen as deeply authentic, with learning being rewarding in itself. Many expressed deep devotion to writing, reading, being in a school setting, and learning through travel or hands on experiences. One said "I'm a fiend for education. I love school. I love being taught. I love learning." These responses call to mind Vallerand et al.'s (1992) intrinsic motivation to know.

Many participants explained their goal motivation in terms of feeling *passionate* about the goal. One individual said, "I think when you're passionate about something, you don't mind going to work. It's not a chore. You feel like there is a greater purpose. You feel good about it, happy to pursue it." Interviewees distinguished passion-based goals with terms like enjoyable, purposeful, and meaningful, while suggesting passionless goals were limiting, boring, and lacking worth.

Some interviewees cited the importance of *using their unique skills*. One participant noted the satisfaction she felt when applying the things she learned from her master's classes to the class she teaches. The importance of using one's unique skills is consonant with the Self-Determination need of competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Vallerand et al.'s (1992) intrinsic motivation to accomplish.

Meaning/Purpose. Participants often described the importance of goals in term of their *meaning or purpose*. Four codes form the *meaning/purpose* axial category: *life purpose, meaningful activity, meaningful pleasure, and family/cultural/religious value.*

Interviewees described goals as important because they represented *purpose in life*, which the

majority of respondents saw as helping others and making the world a better place. One participant poignantly defined this as “becoming one of those educators who can be inspiring to people, that is...if I knew that I was that type of person, I could die happy.” Another person reflected, “the whole point in life...is to just make the world a better place.” These comments identify purpose with making a positive difference in the world, as Damon (2008) found in his study of adolescent purpose.

Respondents described *meaningful activities* as motivating their goals. They described their work as meaningful because it involved working with others or filling a need. Two interviewees described the attachment to their students as meaningful in teaching. They found meaning in activities such as writing, making important life decisions, and completing a master’s degree. Participants were willing to sacrifice time, effort and money for the sake of meaningful activities. They emphasized how far they would go to complete activities in a meaningful rather than meaningless fashion. Many compared the importance of a goal based on meaningfulness versus money, saying they felt guilty when they chose a monetary or material goal over one that was meaningful in itself. A woman stated that she values her work at TFA because her coworkers are “not just working towards a piece of paper so they can increase their pay by 12%; they really are working for something important.”

Many interviewees pursued goals because they found *meaningful pleasure* in activities, such as yoga, reading, writing, learning, creating music, volunteering, traveling, and spending time with family. These activities were distinct from simple pleasures in that the pleasure they experienced was inseparable from the meaningfulness of the activity for them.

Many goals were important to respondents because of their connection to *family, cultural, or religious values*, such as following through with commitments, feeling passionate about work, moving up in life, being educated, and seizing the day. Other goals were important because of their connection to their religion. Several individuals talked about their faith as a key motivator of many of their goals. Respondents’ faith affected their mode of life, their choice of careers emphasizing service, and even how one person conceptualized her finances. Their faith also motivated church attendance, paying tithing, and remaining connected to the church community.

Benevolence

We identified *benevolence* as a thematic motive for participants' goals. One of the most frequent motives for a goal was the value of helping others, particularly their students. Most said that benefitting others was deeply meaningful to them, as highlighted by Damon (2008), Yeager and Bundick (2009), and Grant (2007). This category had two axial categories: *societal benevolence* and *individual benevolence*.

Societal Benevolence. All respondents were motivated toward *societal benevolence*, or beneficial changes in the world. Societal benevolence was the second axial code that applied to all respondents, likely due to the emphasis on the societal benefits of TFA. Five codes formed this axial category: *making the world better*, *equal opportunity/justice*, *mission*, *making people's lives better*, and *legacy*.

Participants actively pursued teaching and volunteerism in order to "*make the world better.*" They spoke of this enthusiastically and in detail, also demonstrating deep behavioral commitment to this motive in their current and past activities. They saw teaching as a central way to improve the world, with one person commenting that she might help uncover the next Einstein or Marie Curie, with "the potential to solve major world problems and be great leaders and [without good teachers] those opportunities get cut off and this potential is just wasted and lost."

Respondents' goals often focused on promoting *justice and equal opportunities*. Many found value in rectifying the misfortunes of others, especially youth in low-income communities. Many had internalized the TFA premise that inequality can be overcome by shrinking educational achievement gaps between low-income and high-income students. For example: "I believe in the idea that every child deserves the same opportunities." This motivated herculean planning and preparation for the sake of effective teaching. The majority mentioned barriers their students faced, such as poverty, violence, and a devaluation of education. One spoke of "giving back": "So I think this is work that I should do to just try to bridge those gaps because once that was bridged for me, like it changed everything for me."

Many respondents were motivated to work in an organization with a strong *mission*. Individuals related differently to TFA's mission, but many felt it was very meaningful. One person stated "what I like about that goal [improving children's prospects] is it's almost like a mission or like a purpose in my life,

and so after I finished teaching for the year, I started working at a youth center where I'd been before.” This theme may be quite specific to this sample because the respondents were drawn to TFA's mission.

Many participants saw value in *improving people's lives*, or “contributing to...the common good and the welfare of the people around you. I think it is the reason why we have jobs.” They emphasized that they tried to embody their goals, by being goal directed, enjoying learning, showing others goodness instead of reflecting negativity, and giving students more choices for their future through education.

Many people focused on leaving a *legacy*, such as shaping young people's lives or leaving money for others. Some referred to their future children, while others took a more societal view of their legacy. When asked what she meant by a legacy, one participant clarified “we're all involved in something that's meaningful to us. Something that we take pride in and something that we believe is bettering ourselves and the people that we surround ourselves with. So a legacy is more of social responsibility.”

Individual Benevolence. Many respondents discussed the importance of goals that helped particular individuals, including family members, friends, and most often, their students. Three codes form the *individual benevolence* axial category: *creating citizens*, *education is empowering*, and *being a good role model*.

Participants were often motivated to *create good citizenship* in their students, including efforts to explicitly and implicitly develop their students' characters. They focused on ethics, cooperation, valuing differences, and non-violence to foster responsible citizenship. One participant summarized: “There's nothing better than creating 15 citizens in a society that can function and perform well.” Another person commented that character development had become more important than the academic part of teaching.

Many interviewees said that the idea that *education is empowering* motivated their goals. They focused on empowering their students through classroom success. Part of empowerment also seemed to be giving students the opportunities and skills necessary to transfer success outside the classroom. “Because I was so blessed as a kid I think I'm obligated to work with others that haven't been as blessed and to hopefully empower others that aren't as blessed.”

Respondents often saw *being a role model* as a primary motivation for their goals. They talked

frequently and at length about role modeling as embodying valued activities such as exercise, learning, life skills, moral behavior, and citizenship for their students and others.

Relationships

Some participants saw value in goals that focused on maintaining positive, close relationships, including romantic, family, and student relationships. This was the least frequently applied axial code in the study, perhaps due to the developmental stage of respondents wherein adult relationships have not yet been fully solidified. Two codes formed the *Relationships* thematic category: *enhance relationships/reduce relationship problems* and *romantic partner's goals*. This interest in goals that emphasize good relationships recalls the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) need for relatedness as a key motivator of action. DeShon and Gillespie (2005) also placed affiliation as one of the highest goals in their motivated action theory.

Participants were motivated to *enhance relationships or reduce relationship problems* with important people in their lives, including traveling to see family, attending events important to others, deciding where to live, and accepting important differences with others. They emphasized valuing relationships above money, temporary conflicts, differences in backgrounds, or personal pride. Respondents felt that their relationships with students and colleagues enhanced the fulfillment they felt in their work. The bonds they felt with their students deepened the meaning of their students' accomplishments for the participants. Respondents were motivated to form relationships characterized by respect, loyalty, harmony, and shared interests. Individuals said they *wanted* to honor their obligations to others rather than feeling burdened by them. Their primary focus was on wanting the best for the people they cared for, whether friends, partners, family members, or students.

Many individuals discussed the need to *reduce relationship problems*. They were motivated to do this by drinking less, taking care of financial obligations, and offering apologies or "peace offerings." Avoiding or reducing relationship difficulties evoked dramatic actions. In some cases, they felt they had to let go of relationships that had intractable problems.

Participants noted that some goals were important because they were their *romantic partner's*

goals, such as church attendance or a wedding. They were motivated by their partner's joy in jointly pursuing the goal, more than by their own personal enjoyment. One said it this way: "I would say that one of the things that draws me...most to [my fiancé] is the fact that like I see our lives being completely intertwined...that's something that I never thought about, like I was looking for in a husband, but with him it's like what most excites me, that he's just like right there with me and we're like 100% partners."

Structural Motives

In addition to the hedonic and eudaimonic motives that explained goal importance, participants sometimes pursued one goal to facilitate another goal, clarifying a structural organization of goals. *Structural Motives* are more than just an arrangement of goals. Goal structure provides the primary reason for pursuing some goals, as in pursuing short-term goals needed for long-term goal success. Four thematic categories emerged: *stepwise progression*, *goal hierarchy bases and stability*, *goal structure cohesion*, and *developmental stage*. We accounted for 75 utterances in 13 codes in this theoretical category.

Stepwise Progression

Most participants discussed some goal pursuit as a *stepwise progression*, indicating that smaller goals are necessary to attain a larger goal. They often consciously planned this stepwise progression. Two codes were included in this theme: *means to another goal*, and *enhances long-term goal*. The stepwise progression category exemplified utility value in value-expectancy theory (Eccles et al., 1983), which emphasizes how the pursuit of one goal facilitates progress toward another goal. DeShon and Gillespie (2005) also suggest "higher level goals specify the purpose ("why") of action" (p. 1105).

Many goals were important only as a *means to another goal*. Participants' commitment to long-term financial, career, academic, relational, and organizational goals led them to pursue shorter-term goals such as saving money, getting a degree or dating. They also saw these intermediary goals as opening doors to future opportunities. Interviewees recognized that new goals emerged as necessary steps in pursuing a chosen goal. One participant's focus on starting a family made it clear that he needed to become financially stable, get married, and reduce his drinking. Some respondents valued goals because the goals would enable career change by shifting their academic focus or obtaining an advanced degree.

In some cases, short-term goals functioned to *enhance long-term goals*, rather than just being a step along the way. Participants discussed graduate training as enhancing their ability to do the work they want to do, even if the degree is not a direct step to their career. Participants discussed short-term goals such as being sensitive to how they expressed themselves, improving their interpersonal skills, or taking time to reflect on how their actions affected their relationships. They believed these goals would enhance the quality of their long-term relationships and career prospects without being a direct step along the way.

Goal Hierarchy Bases and Stability

Participants spoke easily and in rich detail about the hierarchical structure of their goals. Five codes combined to form the *goal hierarchy bases and stability* category: *chronological order*, *goals as foundational to another goal*, *importance*, *meaning*, and *hierarchy reordering*. Carver and Scheier (2001), DeShon and Gillespie (2005), and Ford (1992) described goal pursuit as hierarchically structured.

Several participants discussed prioritizing their goals based on the *chronological order* of life events, focusing on temporally pressing goals such as finding a job or developing a healthy work-life balance, above accomplishing more distal goals. For example, one participant said her goals “are really chronological,” and she planned to join the TFA permanent staff, study for the GMAT, and get an MBA.

Some participants saw *goals as foundational* to their long-term goals. They cited goals such as health, financial security, and trustworthiness as foundations for pursuing all of their other goals. For example, an eye infection led one woman to recognize the foundational importance of sight: “How am I ever going to read if I don’t have my [sight]?” All this [career, education] will be meaningless.”

Many participants arranged the hierarchy of their goals in terms of *importance*. One assessed the importance of a goal by asking herself “if I’m old and on my deathbed, what would I be so upset that I didn’t do?” These goals included both achievements such as a graduate degree or their students’ test scores and important ongoing aims such as establishing a career or being healthy.

Some participants arranged their goal hierarchy in terms of *meaningfulness* of specific goals, often with an explicit or implicit focus on figuring out “what I am here for.” Some described their devotion to a “quest” for meaning in everyday life whether it was keeping in touch with family, having a

healthy work-life balance, finding a rewarding job, or taking the time to "soul search." The top goal in the importance hierarchies varied from travel to completing an advanced degree. This focus on meaning is reminiscent of Damon's (2008) finding that purpose is often a key guiding feature in action.

During the second interview, some participants noted that some of their goals had shifted in importance, leading them to rearrange their goal hierarchy. One placed a higher priority on staying in touch with friends and family following a sudden illness in the family. Another decided to become a full time student rather than split her time evenly between her day job and her studies. People changed their activities to allow them to focus on another goal, sometimes in dramatic fashion. Participants were generally satisfied with their reordered goal hierarchies, seeing the changes as necessary and important to them. However, one person reflected that a change in her priorities had occurred unintentionally. She was displeased by the change and was struggling to reverse it.

Some respondents changed their goal priorities after reflecting on their goals. Others changed their goal priorities due to a gut-level shift in goal importance without much reflection. Some participants only seemed to recognize changes in their goal priorities during the interview, taking some of them by surprise. In the second interview, a man recognized that getting over a romantic relationship break-up was a very high priority, but he had not listed it as an important goal. He reflected that "Maybe I'm just trying to pretend like it's not bothering me or trying to sweep it under the rug sort of thing...?"

Goal Structure Cohesion

This category refers to the ways goal cohesion and conflict affected different aspects of participants' lives. Four codes combined to form *goal structure cohesion*: *goal conflict*, *work-life balance*, *goal convergence*, and *overarching goals*.

Participants often experienced significant *goal conflict*. Goals were often impossible to pursue simultaneously, forcing them to prioritize goals temporally, defer less important goals or to stop pursuing a goal altogether. This conflict was particularly salient for our respondents, given the intense time and energy commitment TFA requires, which inevitably conflicted with other personal goals. Many respondents reported sacrificing to be good teachers, including dating, talking to their family, eating,

going out, and looking good. One woman stated that teachers often sacrifice their “well-being with the understanding that they should get it later ...and (that) their kids are getting it right now.”

Due to these intense goal conflicts, many individuals focused intently on *work-life balance* as a goal. They decided to take more time for themselves, take more time for family and friends, or relax their work expectations. In contrast to the majority, one teacher chose to pursue balance by dedicating her “entire life and time to [my students] this year.”

Goal convergence also manifested, such that one action contributed to two or more important goals. For instance, participating in a master’s program in education helped many participants accomplish the goals for higher education and benefitting their students. Other examples of goal convergence include a focus on sleeping to maintain physical health and improve performance, working for TFA to get valuable experience and change lives, and teaching to fulfill personal and mission-centered goals. Ford (1992) noted that goals that have more than one source of motivation may be particularly resilient.

Respondents often discussed *overarching goals*, wherein one goal shapes the pursuit of other goals. Overarching goals included self-understanding, health, work-life balance, a relationship with God, having a family, teaching excellence, and being a responsible person. One participant’s goal to work in a nonprofit job that would “most effectively serve children and their families” meant that she needed to pay off debts and develop a modest lifestyle consistent with the salary she could expect. Overarching goals led participants to shape everyday goals to be consistent with their overall life goals. Damon (2008) referred to such goals as identifying life purposes and Emmons (1999) called them “ultimate concerns.”

Developmentally Based Hierarchy

As all but one participant was an emerging adult (Arnett, 2004), most discussed developmental milestones appropriate to this period. These statements were organized in two codes that made up the *developmentally based* category: *attaining adult status* and *exploration*.

Many individuals pursued goals for the sake of *attaining adult status*. They cited developmental milestones such as completing their education, leaving home, becoming financially independent, career development, finding a committed long-term relationship, and having children. Several realized that their

goal hierarchies had shifted due to their transition from student-life to full-time professionals. Goals that acquired heightened importance included home ownership, getting out of debt, limiting the amount of time they work, managing a budget, re-prioritizing family relationships, and aspiring towards careers. They focused more on deep instead of passing friendships, consonant with research indicating that during emerging adulthood, people often make their most lasting friendships (Arnett, 2004).

Many respondents explained goal choices in terms of personal *exploration*; a major theme in emerging adulthood. They mentioned the importance of exploring possibilities prior to making major life commitments. One respondent tied the idea of exploration to vocation: “I feel like I always wanted to find the things that I was put here for...What do I want to do every day and feel fulfilled by?” Others valued how a current goal helped them explore possible career goals by getting experience and working with someone who has what may be their dream job. Still others discussed exploring places to live.

Stability and Change in Motives

Most interviewees discussed important changes in or intensification of their goal motives during the follow-up interviews. They indicated, in many ways, that they had reflected on their reasons for choosing their goals, which some of them altered and others reaffirmed. When looked at in this way, there were four subgroups. Because the subgroups are small, we offer this interpretation very tentatively. The first subgroup is comprised of three individuals (participants 1, 8 and 10 in Table 2) who expressed their motivations strongly in eudaimonic terms throughout the interviews, and integrated all hedonic motives with eudaimonic motives. The second subgroup of two individuals (3 and 9) discussed their hedonic motivations largely separate from their eudaimonically motivated goals. A third subgroup of three respondents (4, 6, and 11) seemed to endorse hedonic motives partly in response to the demands of TFA. That is, they seemed to focus on specific outcomes rather than goals related to ways of being. One participant said her focus shrank to what her supervisor held her accountable for: “if you don’t care about it why am I wasting my time with it? You know? So I just weeded out the things that weren’t meaningful I guess, that just weren’t having end results.” This was also exemplified by the person who remained in TFA partly to avoid the “quitter” label. The fourth subgroup included three individuals (2, 5,

and 7) who had some fluidity in the linkages between hedonic and eudaimonic motivations, with a tendency to develop more a more eudaimonic way of understanding their goal choices over time that seemed to represent a deepening of their engagement in teaching. This was exemplified by an interviewee who said that she had not learned the value of helping to improve others' lives prior to her TFA experience, but since has learned "how amazing that can be and how fulfilling that can be and just how much good it can bring to other people."

Persistence is another form of stability in motives that was discussed by every participant in our longitudinal study. They explicitly described many daunting and occasionally overwhelming challenges in their work, such as financial sacrifices, health concerns, performance pressure, long work hours, and relational conflicts. In some cases, they maintained their motivation through focusing on clear outcomes (e.g., resume building, avoiding the quitter label). Yet one of the clearest themes in all of the interviews was the respondents' conscious decision to persevere because they saw teaching and helping their students as deeply meaningful and expressive of their deepest commitments. One person described "telling myself that I can do it even if like everything else is saying, "Stay in bed! Call in sick!" So like I can actually make myself get out of bed and go and try another day...it's really hard for me to do it." She related that part of what kept her going was to become an effective teacher and part of it was that "the program is a really great way for people to contribute to their communities and to help kids."

This result is consistent with Grant's (2007, 2008) laboratory and field experiments on prosocial motivation, which suggest that when work includes personal relationships wherein one can see a beneficial impact (i.e., teaching), it tends to motivate and inspire individual's commitment to and persistence even when the work is difficult. His studies suggest that contact with beneficiaries increases awareness of one's impact and the degree to which one cares about the welfare of those individuals. Two psychological states—*affective commitment to beneficiaries* and *perceived impact on beneficiaries*—appear to mediate the relationship between contact with beneficiaries and persistence in the task (Grant et al., 2007). The TFA program emphasizes all of the predictors in Grant's (2007) Job Impact Framework, particularly the magnitude and scope of impact, the frequency, duration, and depth of contact with

beneficiaries, and the two mediators just mentioned. Our study adds to Grant's experimental findings because our participants voiced explicit and conscious commitments to the often grueling work they did in TFA because it benefitted their students. As a thematic category, benevolence was a key motive of the self-described goals of all participants.

CONCLUSIONS

In this qualitative study of the reasons for choosing particular goals, our participants spoke fluently and at length about what made their goals choiceworthy. In contrast to drive theories of goal pursuit, we found that each of our participants identified many reasons for pursuing their goals, and that their reasons for goal choice did not fall within any one given theory of goal pursuit, much less within one type of goal pursuit (e.g., intrinsic motivation). In fact, we found that our participants were quite promiscuous theoretically, citing reasons for the importance of their goals that matched aspects of virtually every published theory. Their goals were worthwhile for reasons relating to material goods, pleasure, prestige, purpose, justice, affiliation and many other motives. Thus, one of the key conclusions of this study is cautionary with regard to attempts to theorize simple or trait based explanations for why individuals choose the goals that they do.

Of course, a critic could claim that the verbal expressions of the participants may be epiphenomenal to drives, needs, or situational factors that "really" control their behavior. This study can only contribute indirect evidence that this view is incorrect. Clearly, no one has complete knowledge of the sources of their behavior, yet there is evidence that individuals' beliefs do influence their behavior. Research participants' beliefs about willpower influence the amount of willpower they exert (Job, Dweck, & Walton, 2010). Individuals emphasize different goals and engage in those goals more or less based on their views of intelligence as either a fixed or fluid entity (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006). Individuals' view of a goal as either extrinsic or intrinsic and their views on the amount of autonomy they have in goal setting significantly altered participants' persistence in the goal (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Thus, even if one doubts the veracity of the teachers' stated reasons for pursuing their goals, the information they provided still gives us insight into

the way that they perceive themselves and the world, and these perceptions likely shape their behavior.

We organized our results in a theory of goal importance that included three theoretical categories: hedonic goal motives (goal pursuit aimed at particular outcomes), eudaimonic goal motives (goal pursuit aimed at a way of being or a way of life), and structural motives (goals chosen because they make other goals possible). We found that this theoretical structure allowed us to incorporate all of the codes relating to goal importance that appeared more than once or twice in the interviews. Through the method of constant comparison, we found that this theory made it possible to both organize the data and remain faithful to the statements made by our participants.

Similar to most other observers of goal pursuit, we organized our observations in the high level, relatively abstract categories of hedonic motives, eudaimonic motives, and structural motives. In the introduction, we critiqued such abstract concepts as lacking explanatory value for goal choice. Indeed, we see the more abstract categories in our grounded theory more as high level descriptions of goal pursuit than as explanations. We found the best explanations for goal choice at the more concrete levels of our analysis. The participants' specific explanations for their goal choices were the best way to understand why a goal was chosen, and we organized them into 56 codes. The axial categories, such as tangible benefits or authenticity still provide some explanatory value, but as abstraction increases, the reasons for particular goal choices become more opaque. This is the opposite of the typical explanatory logic in psychology, with greater abstractions being seen as providing greater explanatory reach and power. Yet the inverse relationship of abstraction and explanatory power in this case appears to be a direct result of taking the participants' self-understandings seriously rather than imposing structured assessments on their goal-related activity. The contrast between qualitative and quantitative results clearly suggest, therefore, that methods draw strongly on theoretical assumptions and that theoretical formulations are equally dependent on the particular methods used to derive and test them.

In addition to the wide variety of theoretical concepts participants cited as motives for their goals, all of our participants gave multiple motives for virtually every goal, a result seldom noted by other researchers (see Ford, 1992 for an exception). They explained many of their goal choices with motives

across all three major goal motive categories, as summarized in Table 2. Of particular interest, the majority of interviewees' goal choices included all three forms of motives. Another third of the goals were explained by two motives. The large majority of goals had both hedonic and eudaimonic motives. This result is inconsistent with some goal orientation theories that suggest that individuals pursue a given goal for either mastery or performance reasons (Covington, 2000) or for either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This result is, however, consistent with some quantitative studies in which participants were free to characterize their activities as hedonic or eudaimonic (e.g., Huta & Ryan, 2010; Waterman, 1993) and some qualitative studies that allowed individuals to discuss their goal motivations in an open-ended manner (e.g., Yeager & Bundick, 2009). The unique contribution of this study and Yeager and Bundick's results is that the frequency with which multiple motives explain goals is made fully evident in adolescents and in emerging adults. The fact that the majority of participants in both studies cited multiple goal motives is typically lost in the aggregate analyses conducted in quantitative research, and this information is a very important addition to the literature. We conclude that the tendency in previous theory and research to find evidence that goals are more singularly motivated is an artifact of the aggregate analyses typical of most goals research. When participants have the opportunity to discuss their motives, they tend to report multiple rather than singular reasons for their choice of goals.

We selected participants for this study purposively because we believed that core members of TFA would be excellent informants about goal pursuit. TFA hires individuals who are demonstrably goal-oriented, and this organization is very outcome-oriented. Consistent with this expectation, our participants were voluble about their goal pursuit, producing 480 pages of interview transcripts. Given the purposive sampling and the particular characteristics of this sample, no generalizations to the adult population can be justified. This study does indicate that among individuals who are reflective and intentional about their goals, there is a very wide variety of reasons that they pursue their ends. Adequate theories of goal pursuit must therefore be capacious enough to account for this breadth of human motivation.

Acknowledgement: This study was supported by a grant from the University of Miami Ethics Program and the Arsht Ethics Initiatives.

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