

1. INTRODUCTION

At the age of 53 years, David Bowie was asked in an interview how he had managed to stay one of the most mercurial pop performers for more than three decades. He responded:

It was perseverance, perseverance to understand that every day you can start again and ... I think I abide by that particular philosophy that we are very much creatures of our own decisions. So, I think you sit down and decide what life is gonna be like. And then you go ahead and create that life. That's how my future is made. (Nadeau, 2000)

Bowie's conception of his own development corresponds with a theoretical stance in current developmental psychology. This is the position that one cannot understand human development without understanding ways in which people themselves influence their life course (e.g., Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999). Setting and pursuing personal goals play an important role in this active management of life (Freund & P. B. Baltes, 2000). Through the selection of personal goals, people give direction to their lives. Setting goals, however, is only the first step to attaining them. This also requires the engagement in goal-directed action.

The selection and pursuit of personal goals occurs in a reality of biological and societal constraints, finite resources, and a limited human agency. Moreover, the level of conscious awareness of motivational tendencies can vary. Given these limitations and constraints, are there characteristics of goals and goal-directed behaviors that differentiate people who manage their lives successfully from those who don't? This question gave rise to the empirical investigation in the present dissertation.

This study focused specifically on the interrelations among a person's multiple goals. A person's goals may conflict with each other, for example, when the pursuit of a career goal takes away time from the pursuit of a goal in the leisure domain. Goals may also facilitate each other, for example, participation in a professional development program can simultaneously offer opportunities for advancing one's career and for getting to know new people. Finally, goals may also be independent of each other.

By applying a new assessment instrument, the present study investigated whether younger and older adults report differences in the nature of the relations among their goals. Furthermore, the study investigated whether people with varying degrees of conflict

and mutual facilitation among their goals report differences with respect to their psychological well-being, their everyday behavior and experiences, and the degree to which they actually work on and realize their goals throughout a longer period of time.

With the aim of obtaining objective information about people's longer term goal realization, the present study was conducted in the context of an a priori selected goal, the intention to start regular physical exercise. All participants in the present study were exercise beginners. They reported three important personal goals they currently had besides exercising and evaluated the interrelations within this set of goals. The study comprised two measurement points with an average interval of 4.2 months. Sports facilities provided objective information about the frequency of the participants' attendance during that time. A subsample of participants also took part in a diary phase shortly after the first measurement point. These participants kept nine diaries in which they gave detailed reports on their emotional well-being and activities.

This dissertation is organized as follows. First, I will introduce the theoretical background, research questions, and hypotheses of the study. Following a detailed description of the sample and design, I will introduce the analyses and results of both parts of the study. I will conclude with a discussion that links the main results to the question of how people successfully manage their own development. In this discussion, I will also refer to the strengths and limitations of the present study, and outline directions for future research.

The following sections describe the theoretical background of the study. I will first discuss the role that goals and goal-directed action play in human development, and the limitations and constraints which confine people in their attempts to actively influence their own life course. Following that, I will discuss the notion of "adaptive" behaviors. I will give an overview of definitions and criteria that have been proposed for the evaluation of developmental success. Then, I will introduce the model of selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC-model, P. B. Baltes & M. M. Baltes, 1990), which provides the theoretical framework for the present study. The SOC-model specifies three fundamental processes of developmental regulation. In the context of active life management, these three processes are reflected in behaviors involved in setting personal goals (selection), pursuing personal goals (optimization), and counteracting losses in goal-relevant resources (compensation). Within this framework, the present study investigates one facet of the selection process. After reviewing available research on characteristics of adaptive

goal selection, I will explain the focus of the present study on the nature of the relations among a person's goals. Following a critical review of the previous research on intergoal relations, I will develop a rationale for the extended assessment of intergoal relations, introduce the hypotheses of the present study, and discuss the available theoretical and empirical support. Following that, I will introduce the shared goal context of starting to exercise, and specify the relevant hypotheses in the context of that goal. After a brief discussion of health-psychological theory and research on the topic of intergoal relations, I will conclude the theoretical part with a summary of the research questions and predictions of the present study.