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A Higher Purpose: The Sanctification of Strivings.

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Running Head: SANCTIFICATION OF STRIVING

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Abstract

This study extends empirical research on the intersection between personal strivings and spirituality by applying the concept of sanctification to personal strivings. A randomly selected sample of 150 adults (ages 25-56) was studied. In general, participants perceived their top ten personal goals as being connected to God and as having sacred, transcendent qualities. However, strivings focused on religious or spiritual issues, family relationships, altruistic endeavors, and existential concerns were more likely to be sanctified than other strivings. Greater sanctification of strivings was related to higher levels of psychological investment in strivings, as indicated by by self-reported importance, commitment, longevity, and other attributes of strivings (social support, confidence, internal locus of control) that facilitate their pursuit. Based on a series of five phone call interviews about the previous 48 hours, people invested substantially greater pragmatic resources (time and effort) in their two most highly sanctified strivings relative to their two least sanctified strivings. In addition, the sanctification of strivings was related to a greater sense of life purpose and of meaning and joy derived from the pursuit of striving. However, greater sanctification was not linked to fewer psychological or physical health difficulties.

Consistent with the growing interest in "positive psychology"over the past decade (Snyder, 2002), social scientists have begun to highlight the role of personal strivings in people's lives. Personal strivings refer to the typical or characteristic goals that individuals try to pursue in their every day lives (Emmons, 1986). The capacity to articulate specific goals in life and to develop effective ways to reach these destinations is a critical aspect of human functioning (Emmons, 1986; Karoly 1999). Researchers from diverse backgrounds have adopted a goals orientation in an effort to better understand peoples' daily behaviors, motivation, personality, well-being and maladjustment (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Emmons, 1999, Karoly, 1993). Studies indicate that a well-organized and coherent set of personal strivings lends a sense of meaning to peoples' lives and facilitates well-being (Emmons,1999; Karoly, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Some types of personal strivings, however, appear to generate greater commitment and be more beneficial than others. Of relevance to this study, Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani (1998) found that religious or spiritual strivings are marked by desirable attributes (e.g., importance, investment, social support) that facilitate their pursuit, and tend to be tied to a greater sense of meaning and psychological adjustment. This study extends this promising line of empirical research on how spirituality shapes goals by applying the concept of sanctification to personal strivings.

The importance of strivings is highlighted by two key assumptions embedded in theoretical models about strivings: (1) people organize their lives around the pursuit of strivings and 2) strivings can influence peoples' behavior patterns, cognitions, and emotional reactions (Emmons, 1999). Other major assumptions are that strivings exist within a system of hierarchically organized superordinate and subordinate goals where functioning in one aspect of the system has ramifications for other parts of the system, and that strivings are accessible to conscious awareness, although there is no requirement that a goal be represented in

consciousness while the person actively pursues it. Emmons (1999) also argues that strivings are important because they represent a middle level perspective on understanding individual differences. An assessment of strivings offers a more ideographically sensitive description of individuals than traits, but also reveals a more immediate and self-contained picture of personality than complex narratives that people construct of their entire life-spans.

Empirical research verifies that personal strivings have important implications for many aspects of human functioning, including meaning and personal adjustment. Goals are an important source of personal meaning because they provide structure, unity and purpose to people's daily lives (Baumeister, 1991; Reker & Wong, 1988). In addition, the underlying needs subsumed by goals are linked to psychosocial adjustment. For example, the degree to which personal strivings focus on intimacy in social relationships is linked to greater personal happiness and well-being (Emmons, 1991; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). In contrast, a higher proportion of strivings focused on having power over others and extrinsically oriented values (e.g., status, image, money) is tied to poorer adjustment (Emmons, 1991; 1996; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

In attempting to uncover the influence of personal strivings on daily life, researchers have emphasized the motive dispositions that underlie strivings, or the "why" of goals. This includes three core sources of motivation highlighted in psychological research - the desire for achievement, affiliation-intimacy, and power (Emmons, 1999). Other salient motives include establishing psychological independence from others, projecting a positive image of self internally and externally, and developing a generative stance toward others (Emmons, 1999). In contrast to the "why" of strivings, the implications of the "what" or the overt content of strivings appears to have received relatively little empirical attention. Despite this, scholars have argued that different types of strivings can differentially influence both the costs and benefits of their

pursuit (Ryan et al., 1996). In other words, not all goals are equal. Some goals appear to be related to a greater sense that life is significant and valuable as well as to better personal adjustment. In addition, some goals appear to evoke greater levels of investment to their pursuit. For example, strivings that focus on developing interpersonal relationships seem to have a higher priority in peoples' lives and to be linked to better psychological functioning than strivings focused on accumulating wealth (Emmons, 1999, Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

  Of particular relevance for this study, Emmons (1999) has highlighted "spiritual strivings" as a class of personal strivings that have powerful connections with investment, personal meaning, and psychological adjustment. According to Emmons, spiritual strivings refer to goals that involve self-transcendence, and concern ultimate questions of meaning and existence. More specifically, Emmons, Cheung and Tehrani (1998) developed a coding system that categorizes spiritual strivings as those which reflect: (1) increasing knowledge of a higher power (e.g., increase my knowledge of the Bible; seek God's will for my life); (2) developing or maintaining an affective relationship with a higher power (e.g., learn to tune into a higher power throughout the day, increase my faith in God); (3) attempting to live or exercise spiritual beliefs in daily life (e.g., not be judgmental, witness to others) or (4) integrating the person with larger and more complex units of life, including humanity, nature, or the cosmos (e.g., achieve union with the totality of existence, immerse myself in nature and be part of it). Emmons, Cheung, et al. (1998) found that people who endorse a higher proportion of "spiritual strivings" according to the above definition also reported a greater sense of purpose in life, greater life and marital satisfaction, and lower levels of conflict between goals. Compared to non-spiritual strivings, people also described spiritual strivings as more important, less difficult to sustain, and pursued for intrinsic reasons. In another study, participants who endorsed goals pertaining to intimate relationships or spirituality are more likely to say they had found meaning in a personal loss

experience (Emmons, Colby et al, 1998). In addition, among the strongest correlates of recovery from loss were spiritual goals, such as achieving salvation, pleasing God, and engaging in religious traditions. Finally, Emmons (1999) posits that spiritual strivings facilitate a sense of coherence of personality because they help to regulate behavior based on higher-order abstract principles of conduct.

Clearly, preliminary evidence suggests that strivings that tap into the spiritual realm have positive implications. Consistent with the bulk of research in the psychology of religion, Emmons' approach to spiritual strivings emphasizes an individual's relationship with a higher power or personified Divine Being (i.e., God) and assumes that desirable behavior patterns promoted by mono-theistic religious traditions reflect spirituality. From this perspective, goals with overtly spiritual content are differentiated from other types of goals. In this study, we take a different approach. Namely, we endeavor to extend empirical research on the intersection between personal strivings and spirituality by suggesting that virtually any personal striving could be perceived by its owner as having spiritual significance and character. In other words, we propose that a wide range of personal strivings could be invested with spiritual meaning, not just strivings that expressly discuss God, spiritual activities, or values that have been espoused in religious literature (e.g., humility, simplicity, altruism). Of course, some strivings may be sanctified more readily than others. However, rather than presuming that certain classes of strivings tap into peoples' spiritual life whereas other strivings do not, we directly assess the degree to which individuals attribute spiritual meaning to their personal strivings. Consequently, in this study, we extend the construct of "sanctification" to personal strivings.

As is explained more fully elsewhere (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, A. & Murray-Swank, N., in press; Pargament & Mahoney, this issue), the construct of sanctification extends the psychological power of religion and spirituality to many aspects of life, including

many seemingly secular objectives. Sanctification is defined as perceiving objects as having spiritual significance and character (Mahoney et al., 1999; Mahoney et al., in press; Pargament & Mahoney, this issue). Individuals may sanctify objects in nontheistic or theistic ways. In the former case, people may ascribe sacred qualities (e.g., holy, blessed, sacred) to specific aspects of their lives; in the latter case, people may view particular aspects of their lives as being a manifestation of God (e.g., I experience God through this striving). Consistent with prior research on spiritual strivings, we hypothesize that individuals may be more willing to invest time, effort and money to preserve and protect personal strivings that they view as sanctified. In turn, as the spiritual significance of strivings increases, the strivings may yield more benefits to the self and others, including greater personal fulfillment from goals, improved mental and physical well-being, and more constructive outcomes for other people. Results from initial studies we have conducted on the sanctification of marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999), parenting (Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 1999), sexuality (Murray-Swank, N., Pargament, & Mahoney, this issue), the environment (Tarakeshwar, Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2001) and the human body (Mahoney et al., this issue) are consistent with these hypotheses. Thus, preliminary evidence supports the theory that sanctification represents an underlying motivation for personal strivings that is likely to vary across people. For example, for more religious individuals, major life strivings may often be saturated with spiritual meaning, whereas this may not be the case for less religious individuals. In addition, strivings which some people may view as antithetical to some religious traditions may be perceived by others as having spiritual status (e.g., accumulating wealth).

One main purpose of this study was to identify the degree to which people invest various personal strivings with spiritual meaning. As indicated above, the most obvious strivings that people are likely to perceive as being a manifestation of God or as having spiritual qualities are

those that reflect explicitly religious entities (e.g., get closer to God) and behavior (e.g., engage in regular prayer). Nevertheless, most religions also encourage believers to view many other goals in life as connected to the spiritual realm or to reflect a calling from God (Pargament, 1997; Pargament & Mahoney, 2001). Thus, sanctification of diverse types of strivings may be an unrecognized but pervasive psychological process. In addition to strivings that are explicitly religious in content, strivings likely to be sanctified include general existential well-being (e.g., having inner peace), altruism and helping others (e.g., charity work), and family life (Pargament & Mahoney, this issue; Mahoney et al., in press; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank & Tarakeshwar, 2001). Strivings that may be the least likely to be sanctified, at least in a predominantly Judeo-Christian culture, are materialism, careerism, and involvement in recreational activities or mundane daily activities. To better understand what strivings are sanctified, our first goal was to address the following descriptive questions: 1) To what degree do people generally perceive their personal strivings as being a manifestation of God or as having sacred qualities, and 2) What types of strivings are most likely to be sanctified?

The second major goal of this study was to determine whether the sanctification of strivings relates to desirable characteristics of the strivings themselves. Our theory of sanctification suggests that people may be more motivated to preserve and protect aspects of life that are sanctified. Thus, strivings that are sanctified may elicit greater investment because of the spiritual meaning attached to these goals. For example, people may devote more resources to personal strivings that they believe fulfill God's spiritual purposes and in which God plays a role. Likewise, strivings that are perceived as having transcendent qualities, such as sacred, holy and blessed, could be of more subjective importance, taking precedence over other goals and generating greater commitment. In addition, more highly sanctified strivings may evoke greater perceived social support from family, friends, and God. This may occur because sanctified

strivings could be embedded in a religiously-oriented social context in which people acquire and share similar goals with significant others. The sanctification of strivings may also be connected a greater perceived confidence and intrinsic motivation because people who believe their daily endeavors fulfill spiritual purposes may be buffered from ambivalence, obstacles, self-doubt and peer pressure.

The third main goal of this study was to examine the benefits of the sanctification of strivings. Our theory of sanctification posits that greater benefits may be attached to personal strivings that are sanctified, such as: (a) people may derive greater fulfillment, meaning and joy in pursuit of strivings that they believe intersect with the spiritual realm; (b) strivings that are sanctified may be perceived as generating a sense of purpose in life and happiness, even if the strivings also involve sacrifice or effort; (c) greater sanctification may be connected to the degree to which the strivings are constructive for self and others; and (d) finally, greater sanctification may be related to better mental and physical health because these goals are more stable, more satisfying, and provide deeper resources to draw on in times of trouble.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 150 adults randomly drawn from a mid-sized county in the Midwest and was representative of the demographic characteristics of the population in this geographical area based on recent Census data. The sample was 51% male, averaged 41.7 years of age ($SD = 8.2$, range 25-56), and had a racial breakdown of 87% Caucasian, 9.5% African American and 3.5% "other." Sixty-two percent of the sample was married and 38% was single, divorced, or widowed. The sample reflected the full socio-economic spectrum of residents in the local community. The breakdown of annual family income in 1998 dollars was: 11% less than $20,000, 16% between $20-35,000, 23% between $35-50,000, 28% between $50-75,000 and

12% more than $75,000. The highest level of education of the participants was 19% high school graduation, 25% some college, 13% two-year college degree, 27% college-graduate, and 16% graduate or professional training. The sample was predominantly Protestant (53%) and Roman Catholic (26%), with 1% endorsing Jewish, 10% "other," and 11% "none." Participants' self-reported religiousness, based on four marker variables taken from the General Social Survey (NORC, 1998), was consistent with recent national norms. Specifically, the breakdown of frequency of church attendance was: never (11%), twice or less per year (28%), several times per year (13%), one to three times per month (13%), weekly (29%), and several times per week (7%). The breakdown of frequency of prayer was 6.7% several times per week, 30% weekly, 13% one to three times per month, 13% several times per year, 28% twice or less per year, and 11% never. An item on self-rated religiousness yielded a mean of 2.6 (*SD* = .87), based on a 4-point Likert scale with anchors of "not religious at all," "slightly religious," "moderately religious," and "very religious." A parallel item on self-rated spirituality yielded a mean of 3.0 (*SD* = .88). For primary data analyses, these four religious items were combined into one "general religiousness" score ($\forall$ = .79).

Design and Procedure

To recruit participants, we purchased 5,000 names from a national polling company, along with corresponding addresses, telephone snumber, gender, and age. We targeted an equal number of males and females, ages 25 to 55. We randomly selected 800 names to form the initial pool of candidates for the study. An additional 217 names were later randomly selected to ensure a representative sample. Specifically, we oversampled male participants and participants from zip codes areas that corresponded to low income and/or minority racial groups. All prospective participants were initially sent a postcard which briefly described the study, offered them $50 to participate, and informed them that they would be contacted by phone. The research team then

attempted to contact these people by phone to recruit them into the study.

Up to three phone calls were made to request participation. Of these attempts, 328 people were unavailable or not at home when called, and 261 people could not be reached because they were deceased or their number had been changed or disconnected. A total of 428 people were contacted by phone: 202 (47%) agreed and 226 declined to participate. Of the 202 people who initially agreed to participate, 150 actually returned their questionnaires and responded to the follow-up phone calls. Thus, the overall response rate was a 35%.

The data were collected in three stages. The first stage involved a 10-20 minute telephone interview in which the participants were asked to list their ten most important personal strivings; interviewers used a standardized script to elicit the strivings.[2] This process was similar to an approach previously designed by Emmons (1986, 1999) with two modifications. Specifically, we assessed ten strivings whereas Emmons obtained fifteen strivings, and we used telephone interviews rather than questionnaires to gather the list of strivings. We lowered the number of strivings because, when piloting the procedures, participants had difficulty identifying fifteen strivings during an initial phone contact. The phone interviews were tape recorded for later content analysis. The second stage involved a packet of questionnaires that was mailed to the participants, completed, and returned to the researchers by mail. This packet contained questions about demographics, general religiousness, and indices of mental and physical health. In addition, each packet contained questions about the characteristics of each striving that the participant had identified during the phone interviews, including items on sanctification and other attributes of strivings that have previously been studied. In the third stage, which took place over the three weeks following return of the questionnaire, participants responded to a series of five 10-15 minute phone interviews about their activities during the past 48 hours in connection with the two strivings that the participants had rated as most sanctified and the two

strivings rated as least sanctified. The phone interviewers were not informed of which strivings

the participants had rated as more and less sanctified. Participants were paid $25 after they

returned their completed questionnaire. They received an additional $25 after they completed the

five follow-up phone interviews. All of the telephone interviewers were undergraduate or

graduate students in psychology and were trained to follow standardized scripts and protocols.

Audiotapes of the phone interviews with participants were randomly evaluated by the research

team to ensure adherence to the protocols and the absence of leading questions or comments. In

all cases, interviewer skills were judged to be adequate.

Measures

Sanctification of Strivings

The sanctification of each striving was assessed separately with two self-report measures

adapted from Mahoney et al. (1999).[3]

Manifestation of God in Strivings. Participants completed a 5-item Manifestation of God

Scale for each striving to assess the degree to which it was perceived to be an expression or

manifestation of God. Participants used a 5-point Likert scale with the anchor points of "strongly

disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the

following five questions: God played a role in the development of this striving; God is present in

this striving; This striving is a reflection of God's will; I experience God through this striving;

This striving reflects what I think God wants for me. This theistically oriented scale was

designed to assess the degree to which participants viewed a divine Being as playing a role in the

striving. To avoid confounding outcomes with this sanctification variable, the items were neutral

about direction of influence of God on the striving (i.e., none of the items asked if God helped or

hindered a striving). An Individual Manifestation of God score for each striving was obtained by

summing the five items. A Total Manifestation of God score was obtained by summing the ten

individual scores. The alpha coefficient of the Total Manifestation of God index across the ten striving scores was .96.

Sacred Qualities of Strivings. Participants completed a 5-item Sacred Qualities Scale for each striving to assess the degree it was perceived as having qualities typically associated with transcendent phenomenon. Participants used a 5-point Likert scale with the anchor points of "does not describe at all" (1) to "very closely describes" (5) to indicate the degree to which the following five words applied to the striving: "sacred," "holy," "heavenly," "blessed," and "spiritual." The items on this non-theistically oriented scale made no direct mention of a divine "Being" (e.g., God, Higher Power). An Individual Sacred Qualities Score for each striving was obtained by summing the five items. A Total Sacred Qualities score was created by summing the ten individual Sacred Qualities Scores. The alpha coefficient of the Total Sacred Qualities index across the ten striving scores was .93.

Objective Classification of Types of Strivings

To assess the overt content of the strivings reported by participants during the initial open-ended telephone interviews, a pair of raters coded each striving according to a categorical classification system we devised for this study. Whereas prior research on strivings has focused largely on college students from university settings or elderly samples (Emmons, 1999), this study involved strivings reported by young and middle-age adults (ages 25-55) from the community. We therefore created a classification system with eighteen categories to capture the nature and diversity of strivings associated with the developmental tasks faced by this age group. To assess the reliability with which the two coders categorized strivings into the 18 groups, 32 cases were randomly selected for both coders to rate independently. Out of 320 strivings reported by these 32 participants, the two coders agreed on their content codes for 275 strivings (i.e., simple percent agreement rate of 86%). To facilitate data analyses, these eighteen content

categories were collapsed into a smaller set of eight categories: work and money, physical health, family, self-development, existential, religion/spiritual, helping others/community, and miscellaneous/other. See Table 1 for the frequency and examples of strivings in each category.

Level of Investment and Desirable Attributes of Strivings

Two methods were used to assess level of investment and other attributes of the strivings. One method involved participants completing a 10-item, self-report Striving Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ) for each striving.[4] The second method of assessing investment in strivings involved a series of five phone calls to assess the behavioral investment exhibited by each participant during the previous 48 hours.

The SAQ was adapted from Emmons' work (1986, 1999) and included participants' evaluations of aspects of strivings that have been previously linked to favorable outcomes. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale with appropriately worded anchors (e.g., for the item on importance, the anchors were 1 = "not at all important" and 5 = "extremely important"). Total scores for each item were obtained by summing the ratings across all ten strivings and separate data analyses were conducted for each score (i.e., identical items on the SAQ were collapsed across the 10 strivings). Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, alpha coefficients, and intercorrelations of the total SAQ scores. The items on the SAQ represented four general constructs, described below in more detail.

Subjective Importance. Four SAQ items assessed the degree to which participants perceived a striving being of high priority and importance: "how important is this striving to you", "how committed are you to this striving", "how long do you expect to have this striving", and "to what extent does this striving dominate your life to the exclusion of other things."

Perceived Social Support. Two items on the SAQ assessed the degree of social support participants received in their pursuit of a striving: "how much support do you receive from

family and friends in this striving" and "to what extent to you experience a sense of support from God in this striving."

Perceived confidence. Three items on the SAQ reflected the level of the participant's confidence associated with a striving: "how likely are you to succeed in this striving," "to what extent do obstacles (e.g., limited time, money, opportunity, disapproval from others, etc.) interfere with this striving" and "to what extent do you question or doubt whether you should have this striving."

Internal locus of control. One item on the SAQ captured the degree to which a striving was held due to pressure from others or because of one's own desire. Specifically, this item asked "to what extent do you have this striving only because other people want you to have it." Unlike the scaling of other SAQ items that had anchors only at the ends of the continuum (e.g., 1 = not at all to 5 = a great deal), this item had three anchors: 1 = only for others, 2 = partly for myself and partly for others, and 3 = only for myself.

Behavioral Investment in Strivings Items. During the five follow-up phone calls, participants were asked to report on the frequency of behaviors and amount of time invested in four of their strivings. The four strivings were selected based on the participant's ratings on the Sacred Quality and Manifestation of God scales. Specifically, the two strivings with the highest sanctification scores and the two strivings with the lowest scores were identified. For each of these four strivings, participants responded to six items which measured the degree to which the participants invested energy into each striving over the past 48 hours. First, participants estimated the amount of time they had invested each strivings based on three items: time spent reading, or studying, time spent doing things by themselves, and time doing things with others or talking with others in connection with the striving. Second, participants answered one question about how much money they had invested in each striving. Third, participants reported their

satisfaction with the amount of time and energy spent on each striving. Fourth, as an overall summary measure of investment, they were asked to count all the times they had done things or thought about things related to the striving. To facilitate data analyses, scores on each variable for each striving were summed across the five days for analyses. Then, the scores on the same question for the two most sanctified strivings were collapsed together as were pairs of the same item for the two least sanctified strivings.

Benefits of Strivings

Two measurement methods were used to assess benefits associated with strivings: coders' ratings of initial phone interviews and participant's responses to questionnaires.

Objective Coding of Benefits for Self and Other People. A team of three coders rated each striving on two dimensions related to benefits for self or other. One dimension consisted of the degree to which each striving had constructive, positive and altruistic consequences for other people. Raters used a five point scale, with anchors of 1 equal to neutral/not constructive for others to 5 equal to very constructive for others. Interrater agreement was assessed by computing a Cronbach alpha coefficient on the three raters' ratings of the 1,500 strivings identified by participants (i.e., 10 striving x 150 participants). The resulting interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was .96 for this rating. Another dimension assessed the degree to which the striving had constructive and positive implications for the participants themselves. Raters used a five point scale, with anchors of 1 equal to neutral/not constructive for self to 5 equal to very constructive for self. Interrater agreement was satisfactory, with an ICC of .89. For data analysis purposes, the three raters' scores on each dimension (other or self) for each striving were averaged. Total scores were created by summing across the ten strivings. The means were 23.6 ($SD = 6.2$) for the variable of "constructiveness for others" and 40.2 ($SD = 3.7$) for "constructiveness for self."

Benefits Derived Directly from Strivings. With the exception of the two SAQ items

created for this study that asked participants about the degree of happiness and the they meaning derived from each striving, the self-report questionnaires used in this study are widely used measures with well-established psychometric properties.[5]

To directly assess participants' perceptions of the benefits they derived from pursuit of a striving, two benefit items were embedded in the SAQ: 1) "to what extent does this striving give meaning to your life" and, 2) "how much joy or happiness do you experience in the pursuit of this striving." Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale with appropriately worded anchors. Total scores for each item were obtained by summing the ratings across all ten strivings. The means were 40.3 ($SD = 5.2$) for the total meaning score, and 37.8 ($SD = 6.2$) for the total joy/happiness total score.

General Meaning. General meaning was assessed using the eight-item Purpose scale from Reker's (1992) Life Attitude Profile-Revised (LAP-R). This scale assesses the degree to which the individual has life goals and a sense of direction in living, and does not include items that are explicitly religious in content (e.g., no mention of Divine beings or transcendent qualities).

Global Life Satisfaction. Global life satisfaction was assessed by the four-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffen, 1985).

Depressive symtomatology. Depressive symptomatology was assessed with the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale (CES-D; Orme, Reis, & Herz, 1986).

Alcohol use. Alcohol use was assessed by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Saunders, Aasland, Amundsen, & Grant, 1993; Saunders, Aasland, Babor, de la Fuente, & Grant, 1993).

Physical health. Physical health was assessed by 17 items from the Physical Health Questionnaire (McIntosh, Keywell, Reifman, & Ellsworth, 1994).

Control Variables

Social Desirability. The Marlow-Crowne Scale was used to assess social desirability (Crowne & Marlow, 1960).

Demographic Questions. Demographic questions (e.g., gender, race, socio-economic status) were taken from the General Social Survey (NORC, 1998).

<div align="center">*Results*</div>

Preliminary data analyses

Preliminary data analyses were conducted to detect links between the two sanctification measures and indices of general religiousness, demographics, and social desirability. The Total Manifestation of God of Strivings and Total Sacred Adjective of Strivings scores were both robustly linked at $p < .0001$ to the composite general religiousness variable (r's of .73 and .61, respectively) as well as to the four variables that made up this index (respective r's of .53 and .45 for frequency of prayer, .72 and .59 for frequency of church attendance, .50 and .34 for self-rated religiousness, and .58 and .53 for self-rated spirituality). These findings offer evidence of convergent validity of the two sanctification measures. The only demographic variable that was related to the measures was race, with non-white participants endorsing higher levels of sanctification of strivings ($r = .27, p \leq .001$ and .21, $p \leq .01$). Neither sanctification index was associated with the tendency to respond to questions in a socially desirable manner, which provides divergent validity for both measures.

Descriptive Findings on the Sanctification of Personal Strivings Overall & by Type

The mean rating of the Manifestation of God score for each striving was 17.0 ($SD = 5.9$; range 5-25). The mean Total Manifestation of God score across all 10 strivings was 170.1 ($SD = 59.5$; range 50-250) and these scores were skewed upward (i.e., median=183.5). This indicates that most participants' responses to the questions fell midway between "neutral" and "strongly

agree." The mean rating of the Sacred Quality score of <u>each</u> striving was 12.6 (*SD* = 5.1; range 5-25). The mean Total Sacred Quality score across all 10 strivings was 126.6 (*SD* = 51.3; range 50-250; median=115). This indicates that the most participants' ratings corresponded to the anchor point of "somewhat describes" when asked whether a sacred quality described a striving. The Total Sacred Quality and Total Manifestation of God scores were correlated at *r* equal to .76 (*p* < .0001).

The above results indicate that the participants generally perceived their strivings as being moderately sacred. However, we anticipated that some types of strivings might be perceived as more sacred than others. To gain insight into this question, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA where each striving was treated as a separate observation and the two sanctification measures were employed as repeated measures. The content of each striving was used as an independent variable with eight levels (religious/spiritual, existential, family, help others, self, health, work/money and other). A significant main effect for the sanctification of strivings occurred ($\underline{F}$ (1, 1492) = 663.3, *p* < .0001), with no significant interactions between type of sanctification rating and content area ($\underline{F}$ (7, 1492) = 95.5, *p* = .52). To illuminate the significant effect for sanctification ratings, Table 3 displays the means of Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities for each of the eight content categories. Follow-up pairwise Tukey comparisons of the degree of sanctification associated with different content areas were conducted. Means with the same subscript attached were not significantly different at *p* < .05 and the pattern of results was the same for both Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities scores. Overall, the results indicate that strivings that are perceived to be self-focused and/or materially-oriented were rated by participants as less sacred than those that involved religious or spiritual concerns, existential issues, family members, and helping other people in the community. Strivings that were overtly spiritual or religious in focus uniformly yielded higher ratings than

other strivings.

Links between the Sanctification of Strivings with Investment and Striving Attributes

The second major goal of this study was to determine whether the sanctification of strivings relates to level of investment and desirable characteristics of the strivings themselves. Table 4 displays the correlations between sanctification indices and participants' self-reports of various attributes of their personal strivings. Consistent with expectations, higher levels of sanctification on both measures were tied to attributions of: greater importance of strivings; greater commitment to strivings; stronger belief that the striving dominates the individual's life to the exclusion of other things; more perceived support from family, friends and God to pursue strivings; and higher expectations of success. Higher Manifestation of God in strivings was also related to greater internal locus of control, whereas greater Sacred Qualities in strivings was tied to length of time participants planned to pursue their strivings. To ensure that these findings were not merely attributable to the overlap between sanctification and marker variables of general religiousness, we calculated partial correlations of the sanctification measures after controlling for the composite general religiousness index of prayer, church attendance, and self-rated religiousness and spirituality. With the exception of social support from other people, the bivariate links between sanctification of strivings and desirable attributes remained significant after taking into account general religiousness.

Another set of analyses addressed whether participants invested more time, energy and resources into the two strivings they rated as most sanctified as compared to the two strivings they rated as least sanctified. As can been seen from Table 5, the results generally support the notion that people tend to place a higher priority on strivings that are sanctified. Specifically, participants spent more time thinking, reading, or studying, and doing things or talking with others about their most sanctified strivings. Participants also reported that they derived

significantly greater satisfaction from the time and energy they put into their most sanctified strivings in comparison to their least sanctified strivings. These results are important because they augment and reinforce participants' subjective reports that more sanctified strivings are associated with higher levels of commitment and importance.

Links between the Sanctification of Strivings and Benefits

The third major goal of this study was to determine whether the sanctification of life strivings is related to interpersonal or intrapsychic benefits. As can be seen Table 4, greater sanctification of strivings for both indices was associated with self-reports of more meaning derived from the pursuit of strivings and more joy or happiness experienced from strivings, even after taking into account levels of general religiousness. Participants' views of strivings as being connected to God covaried positively with strivings being judged by coders as more constructive for others and the participants. However, these links did not remain significant after taking global markers of religiousness into account. Greater sacred qualities were also related to higher coder ratings of interpersonal and intrapersonal constructiveness; the latter link persisted after taking general religiousness into account. Finally, both forms of sanctification were associated with self-reports of a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life. Contrary to expectations, greater sanctification of strivings was not consistently related to better psychological or physical health. The only exception was that lower alcohol use was associated with greater degree of belief that God was expressed through or experienced in strivings. One significant association emerged in a direction opposite to what was expected. Namely, the more participants' perceived their strivings as having sacred qualities, the more likely they were to report having health-related symptoms. Neither of these correlations remained significant after controlling for general religiousness.

Discussion

The major aim of this study was to investigate the implications of the sanctification of the

personal strivings. This study's sample of 25 to 56-year old adults, who were randomly drawn from the community, rated their top ten personal strivings as moderately sacred. That is, the majority of participants viewed their most salient strivings as involving God or as possessing sacred qualities to some degree. This finding is consistent with other research which indicates the relevance of spirituality to concrete aspects of life such as marriage (Mahoney et al., 1999), parenting (Swank et al., 2000), the environment (Tarakeshwar, 2000 et al., Marks & Dollahite, 2001), and to daily life more generally (Underwood, 1999).

Although people generally sanctify their personal strivings, the results of this study also make clear that not all strivings are equally likely to be viewed as sacred. Not surprisingly, participants rated strivings that explicitly involved religious and spiritual issues as more highly sanctified than other strivings. In addition, strivings focused on altruistic activities, family life, and existential concerns were more highly sanctified than all other strivings, except for overtly religious endeavors. In contrast, strivings focused on self-development and work or financial affairs were sanctified to a lesser degree than family life and other strivings. Health-related strivings were also perceived as less sacred than other strivings. Overall, it appears that adults are generally less likely to imbue self-focused or materially-oriented strivings with spiritual meaning or significance. Instead, personal strivings that take an individual beyond oneself are more likely to be perceived to involve God's presence, will, or actions as well as to be characterized in sacred, transcendent terms. These results also highlight the fact that pro-social strivings that are not necessarily expressly religious (e.g., working on marriage, helping others who are less fortunate) can be imbued with spiritual significance.

Consistent with the proposition that people may be more motivated to preserve and protect aspects of life they sanctify, greater sanctification of personal strivings was linked to greater investment of psychological and pragmatic resources in the pursuit of life goals. First,

adults' subjective reports of their level of psychological investment in their personal strivings

covaried with how much they perceived their strivings to intersect with the spiritual realm.

Specifically, higher levels of sanctification were tied to participants' subjective attributions of

greater importance to strivings, greater commitment to strivings, and greater belief that their top

ten strivings dominated their life to the exclusion of other things. This pattern of results emerged

for the belief that God was manifested in personal strivings as well as the belief that personal

strivings possessed transcendent qualities (i.e., sacred, holy, heavenly, blessed, and spiritual). A

stronger belief that strivings were characterized by sacred qualities was also tied to a longer

length of time that participants planned to possess their strivings. The greater personal

attachment people appear to have to sanctified strivings is underscored by the fact that the above

associations remained salient after taking into account a composite index of the frequency of

church attendance, prayer, and self-rated religiousness and spirituality. Thus, although more

generally religious individuals are more likely to sanctify their personal strivings, the link

between greater investment and sanctification of personal strivings operates beyond the impact

of global religious involvement and devotion.

The relevance of sanctification for investment in goals was further substantiated by the

results from a series of five phone interviews about the amount of time and energy that

participants recalled putting into their two most highly sanctified and two least sanctified

strivings in the previous two days. In comparison to their least sanctified strivings, participants

said they spent more time thinking, reading, or studying, and doing things or talking with others

about their most sanctified strivings. Participants also reported that they derived significantly

greater satisfaction from the time and energy they put into their most sanctified strivings in

comparison to their least sanctified strivings. The results from these behaviorally-anchored

interviews add convergent evidence to global, subjective self-reports that greater sanctification of

strivings is tied to greater effort and investment of resources in the pursuit of personal life goals.

In addition to level of investment, sanctification was also associated with the desirable characteristic of social support for personal strivings. Specifically, participants' perception of greater support from family, friends, and God in the pursuit of their personal strivings covaried with greater sanctification of their strivings. Such social support is likely to facilitate persistence in trying to accomplish goals. Such links may occur because sanctification of strivings may develop within a religiously-oriented social context in which people acquire and share similar goals with significant members of their social life. Indeed, when general religiousness is controlled, the link between the sanctification of strivings and social support from family and friends diminishes. Interestingly, however, the association between sanctification and support from God strongly persists after taking into account global markers of religiousness. Thus, while social integration into religious groups may facilitate the extent to which people receive support from other people for sanctified strivings, people may still be able to derive a sense of support from God for sanctified goals outside the context of a religious community.

A sense of self confidence is another resource that was tied to sanctification. Stronger convictions that God is manifest in personal strivings or that strivings are imbued with sacred qualities were tied to greater confidence in achieving strivings. In addition, those who reported a stronger belief that God was manifested in their strivings were more likely to say they selected their strivings because of their own desires, rather than because other people wanted them to pursue the strivings (i.e., greater intrinsic motivation). In short, religious faith in personal strivings appears to translate into greater ownership and sense of self-efficacy in life goals. Contrary to expectations, the degree to which individuals believe that daily endeavors fulfill transcendent purposes was unrelated to how much people question and doubt the wisdom of their goals, or how many obstacles they encounter along the way that could interfere with strivings.

Thus, the perception that life goals reflect sanctified destinations does not necessarily alleviate difficulties in their pursuit. Overall, the above findings suggest that sanctification has important implications for the ways people approach the goals they strive for in life and their commitments to those strivings.

The third main goal of this study was to examine the theory that the sanctification of personal strivings is related to psychological benefits. Consistent with expectations, the more that participants believed their personal strivings reflect the spiritual realm, the more they reported deriving joy, happiness, and a sense of meaning in pursuit of their strivings. Greater sanctification was also connected to the degree to which strivings were judged by external coders as constructive for the participants and for other people. However, contrary to expectations, greater sanctification of strivings did not have positive implications for physical health and mental health, with the exception of decreased alcohol use. This latter link disappeared, however, after taking into account general levels of religiousness. This set of findings is inconsistent with research conducted by Emmons (1999) who found that individuals with a higher proportion of spiritual strivings had better physical and mental health than those with a lower proportion of spiritual strivings. This may be due, in part, to the contrasting types of samples. Whereas Emmons' research was conducted primarily with college students, this project involved a community sample of adults ages 25 to 55. Clearly, additional research is needed to explore the sanctification of strivings across diverse cultures and communities. It is also possible that sanctification sometimes operates as a coping variable. That is, stressful events could elicit greater psychological distress as well as new ways of viewing goals and priorities, including the perception that some strivings are sacred. Consistent with this interpretation, we found that greater sanctification was tied to more health symptoms. However, longitudinal studies are needed to tease out the causal connections between stress, sanctification and personal distress.

Overall, the general pattern of the findings in this study suggests that spirituality and religion may help people persist in pursuing meaningful goals, but this does not necessarily free people from possible costs that may arise in the pursuit of sacred strivings. In other words, this study raises a potentially important distinction between the underlying ultimate objectives emphasized by Western science and psychology (i.e., attain individual and personal well-being) and other ultimate objectives valued by world religions (i.e., commitment and fulfillment via sacrifice). Although the sanctification is tied to greater commitment, joy, and meaning in connection with goals, the added investment is not linked to greater life satisfaction, lower depression, and better physical health. While this contrasting pattern of results was not anticipated, the findings reflect a core message found in many world religions. Namely, many world religions encourage people to move beyond goals that are only personally gratifying and to pursue goals which may involve sacrifice and considerable effort. In other words, individuals may happily persist in and find fulfillment in strivings they believe have transcendent purposes, even if this sometimes exposes them to stressful situations that can trigger sadness, compromise physical health, and foster life circumstances that are personally difficult. Such exposure may offset the self-enhancing or protective benefits that occur at other times when people strive for goals they believe are connected to God and the sacred realm. Paradoxically, religion's answer to the question of what makes life goals meaningful, valuable and purposeful does not necessarily guarantee personal life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

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Footnotes

1 This research was funded by the John E. Fetzer Institute (Grant Number: 977).

2 To gather the 10 strivings, our interviewers were trained to use the following script: "Our research team is interested in learning about the things that you strive for in your life. Personal strivings are objectives that you are typically trying to accomplish or attain. Objectives also refer to things that you are trying to hold onto or accept. Personal strivings are not one-time concerns, but rather recurring or ongoing goals. Strivings may be something that you typically or characteristically are trying to do or not to do in your every day behavior. They may also be ways you are trying to be or not to be in your every day life. Strivings can be general things like: trying to help others in need of help, trying to make more money, or trying not to be so stressed. Or strivings can be more specific things like: spending time with family members each week, saving money to buy myself something special, or not smoking. Take some time now to think about the things you most strive for in your life and tell me about your ten most important personal strivings. After you name each one I'm going to ask you to pause a moment so I can repeat back what you said. This way I'll be sure to correctly write down what you tell me. Then when we are finished I may come back and ask you more specific questions about each personal striving. Are you ready to start? What is one thing that you personally strive for in your life?"

3 Each participant provided ratings about their perceptions of a particular striving before moving to the next striving. This included ratings on sanctification and questions about other qualities of each striving.

4 Contact for author for copy of the SAQ scale.

5 Due to space constraints, please contact first author for more details on the reliability and validity of the LAP-R, SWLS, CES-D, AUDIT, and Physical Health Questionnaire.

Table 1.

Range & diversity of strivings – using all 18 content codes, divided into 8 general categories

Eight General Categories	Eighteen Sub-Categories	%	Examples
Family		24.3%	
	Marriage	4.5%	Work hard at my marriage
	Romantic relations	0.7%	To stop & have fun with my significant other
	Parenting	8.1%	To be more involved with my kids
	Family unspecified	5.0%	Increase happiness for everyone in my family
	Extended family	6.0%	Maintain a good relationship with husband's family
Self-development		21.3%	
	Educ/Skill Development	4.4%	To keep on learning & pursuing my degree
	Self-improvement	16.9%	To be more joyful; to be more patient
Work & Money		17.2%	
	Financial	7.9%	Work harder so I can make more money
	Career-achievement	7.9%	To be successful at work; earn a medal at work
	Career-relationships	1.5%	Train people at work to understand programming
Physical health	Physical health	9.5%	To get needed exercise, ride the bike
Existential	Existential	5.7%	To continue to have inner peace
Religion/spiritual	Religion/spiritual	5.7%	To work to have a closer walk with God
Help others/community	Help others/community	5.7%	To help other people & remember the less fortunate
Misc./Other		13.5%	
	Travel/leisure	4.7%	To plan travel and not be worried about expenses
	Home	4.9%	Re-doing my kitchen
	Pets	0.9%	Pick up stray cats and have them fixed
	Friends/neighbors	3.0%	Stay in contact with friends regardless of distance

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, alpha coefficients, and intercorrelations of the SAQ scores.

	M (SD)	I	C	L	D	S-O	S-G	S	O	Q	In	M	J
Striving attributes (self-report)													
Importance (I)	43.7 (4.0)	(.71)											
Commitment (C)	41.0 (4.6)	.76****	(.72)										
Expected longevity (L)	42.5 (7.4)	.35****	.28****	(.80)									
Dominants life (D)	24.7 (7.3)	.19*	.11	.00	(.86)								
Social support-others (S-O)	34.5 (7.6)	.28****	.43****	.19*	-.12	(.84)							
Social support-God (S-G)	33.5 (11.9)	.45****	.42****	.11	.20*	.27****	(.96)						
Likelihood of success (S)	39.0 (5.0)	.49****	.68****	.24**	.09	.48****	.38****	(.76)					
Obstacles (O)	28.4 (7.6)	-.09	-.19*	-.21**	.29****	-.27****	-.07	-.27***	(.79)				
Question or doubt (Q)	16.9 (7.0)	-.13	-.23**	-.13	.21*	-.13	-.10	-.34****	.19*	(.83)			
Internal Locus of Control (In)	39.4 (6.1)	.24**	.30***	.16	-.12	.05	.20	.17*	-.17*	-.14	(.82)		
Striving benefits (self-report)													
Meaning (M)	40.3 (5.2)	.78****	.65****	.36****	.29***	.28***	.51****	.51****	-.14	-.02	.16	(.72)	
Joy (J)	37.8 (6.2)	.54****	.57****	.32****	.08	.50****	.45****	.70****	-.22**	-.19*	.03	.60****	(.78)

$p < .05$

Table 3.

Sanctification of 8 categories of all strivings: Means on Manifestation of God & Sacred Qualities

	Reli/ Spirit	Help Others	Exist	Family	Self	Health	Work/ Money	Misc./ /Other
Manifestation of God								
M	23.2 [a]	19.9 [b]	18.7 [b, c]	18.6 [b]	16.9 [c, d]	14.9 [d, e]	15.2 [e]	13.9 [e]
SD	3.8	5.8	6.2	6.9	7.0	6.7	6.9	6.9
Sacred Qualities								
M	19.6 [a]	15.4 [b]	14.2 [b, c]	14.2 [b]	12.3 [c, d]	10.6 [d, e]	10.5 [e]	10.3 [e]
SD	5.6	6.8	6.4	6.4	6.7	6.1	6.0	5.8

Note. Means with the same subscript attached are not significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 4.

Correlations of sanctification of strivings with criterion measures: Bivariate & partial correlations controlling global religiousness

| | Sanctification of Striving Scores | | | |
| | Bivariate r's | | Partial r's | |
	Total Manifestation of God	Total Sacred Quality	Total Manifestation of God	Total Sacred Quality
Striving attributes (self-report)				
Importance	.42****	.46**	.27**	.34****
Commitment	.37****	.36****	.20*	.21**
Expected longevity	.15	.19*	.14	.18*
Dominants life	.22**	.29****	.06	.18*
Social support-others	.19*	.21*	.09	.14
Social support-God	.92****	.74****	.82****	.54****
Likelihood of success	.32****	.32****	.17*	.19*
Obstacles	.02	-.05	.02	-.07
Question or doubt	-.14	-.04	-.23**	-.07
Internal locus of control	.19*	.12	.21**	.11
Striving benefits (self-report)				
Pursuit gives meaning to life (M)	.51****	.53****	.35****	.39****
Pursuit gives joy or happiness (J)	.39****	.39****	.31***	30****
Psychosocial benefits				
Constructive for self (coder ratings)	.21****	.29****	.13	.24**
Constructive for others (coder ratings)	.22***	.17*	.09	.04
General meaning in life (self-report)	.26**	.18*	.10	.03
Physical health (self-report)	.09	.18*	.11	.21*
Life satisfaction (self-report)	.04	-.04	.03	-.08
Depressive symptoms (self-report)	.00	.02	.03	.06
Alcohol use (self report)	-.17*	-.15	05	.03

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$

Table 5.

Most and least sanctified strivings: Differences in investment of resources based on daily phone calls.

	Highest Two Sanctified Strivings		Lowest Two Sanctified Strivings		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	paired t-test
Sanctification Ratings					
Manifestation of God	40.4	12.1	26.6	12.5	*p* < .0001
Sacred Quality	33.7	12.3	18.9	9.5	*p* < .0001
Investment Variables					
Thinking, reading or studying-min. over 10 days	1191	921	890	761	*p* < .0001
Doing things alone-min. over 10 days	800	644	813	639	n.s.
Doing things or talking w/ others-min over 10 days	972	844	682	687	< .0001
Investment of money - total for 10 days	124	137	105	129	n.s.
Freq. of doing things or thinking-no. times in 10 days (global self-rating)	156	442	82	124	*p* < .0001
Satisfaction with amount of time/energy spent	47.2	10.9	44.8	11.4	*p* < .05

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001, **** *p* < .0001

Note. This analyses uses the combined scores for highest 2 and lowest 2 strivings. The dependent variables consisted of the sums of the variables across five phone calls that asked participants about the past 48 hours.