

# Parenting goal pursuit is linked to emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness

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## Abstract

The aim of the current research was to identify the goals underlying parental care and how they are linked to parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness to their child's needs. We examined the link between parenting goals and outcomes through surveying parents cross-sectionally (Studies 1 to 3), in a 10-day daily experience study (Study 4), and by conducting an internal meta-analysis of all four studies ( $N_{\text{total}} = 1,906$ ). In Studies 1 and 2, parents were found to pursue four unique goals as captured by a new scale called the Parenting Goals Scale (PGS). The PGS measures the four goals of *child love and security*, *child development*, *parent image*, and *child acceptance*. In Study 3, each of the four goals was found to be meaningfully related to, while also being distinct from, other individual differences in parenting styles, other-focused orientations, self-focused orientations, and attachment styles. In a 10-day daily experience study (Study 4) as well as an internal meta-analysis across all four studies, each goal was found to be uniquely related to parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality with their child, and feelings of responsiveness to their child's needs. Daily and chronic pursuit of child love and security goals predicted greater emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. In contrast, daily and chronic pursuit of parent image goals predicted poorer emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, especially at the chronic level. Child development goals predicted poorer emotional well-being and relationship quality, especially at the chronic level. And finally, child acceptance goals predicted more

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positive emotions in daily life only. These associations largely held after controlling for parents' reports of children's mood and care difficulty. The current findings contribute to a growing body of research focused on understanding the joys and frustrations of parenting.

### **Keywords**

Goals, parenting, relationship quality, responsiveness, well-being

Perhaps no other life experiences are as emotionally potent or meaningful than those involving children (Senior, 2014). Empirical data (Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, & Lyubomirsky, 2013) and a nationwide U.S. poll (Wang, 2013) have indicated that parents derive great joy in caring for their children relative to engaging in other daily activities. At the same time, it is very apparent—to both parents and nonparents alike—that caring for children can be difficult, emotionally demanding, and exhausting (Nelson, Kushlev, & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Wang, 2013). For example, in a sample of working mothers who recalled their emotional experience for 16 activities from a previous day, caring for their children ranked as one of the least enjoyable activities in their day (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004).

Taken together, research has indicated that parenting can both uplift parents as well as detract from their sense of well-being. Much of this research has taken a comparative approach by contrasting parents' well-being when caring for their children relative to other tasks of daily living. However, researchers have stressed the importance of examining when, why, and how parenting is relatively more pleasurable versus painful (Nelson et al., 2014). In the current article, we propose that the outcomes parents strive to achieve during caregiving—or the *goals* that motivate their care (Hastings & Grusec, 1998)—can help us understand when caring for children is relatively more joyful than frustrating for parents. To test this proposition, we first sought to identify unique parenting goals. Second, we sought to determine how each goal relates to parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality with their child, and felt responsiveness to their child's needs.

### ***What motivates parental care? Identifying unique parenting goals***

People strive to achieve many interpersonal goals—or goals pursued in their close relationships—focused on attaining desired outcomes for the self, their partners, and their relationships (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & vanDellen, 2015). The interpersonal goals parents pursue may be varied in nature. For example, a father may cheer for his daughter from the sidelines of her soccer game with the goal of boosting her confidence, or alternatively, in an attempt to quell his own insecurities that her performance will reflect poorly on him. In another scenario, a mother may give her son advice on how to deal with bullies at school with the goal of empathizing with and validating his feelings or to help him constructively deal with the situation and grow from it.

The types of goals that parents pursue when caring for their children are likely to have implications for parents' feelings of well-being and responsiveness. For instance, a

father who cheers for his daughter at her soccer game in order to bolster her performance may experience greater well-being due to feeling intrinsic joy from supporting his child, or from the mutually positive environment he creates for himself as well as his daughter. However, that same father who cheers for his daughter with the goal of maintaining a positive image in front of other parents may experience lower well-being and feelings of responsiveness to his daughter's needs. This may be due to the fact that he is focused on external concerns, such as how others view him, rather than what is best for his relationship with his daughter or her personal development. In the current work, our primary goals were to identify the unique goals that parents pursue when caring for their children as well as how these goals are linked with parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality, and felt responsiveness to their children's needs.

### *Interpersonal goals in close relationships*

Our work draws on an interpersonal goals perspective that distinguishes between two classes of goals: other-oriented goals and self-oriented goals. These goals have been examined in adult close relationships, including friendships and romantic relationships. When people pursue *other-oriented goals*, they are motivated to care for and provide benefits to close others (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003). In contrast, when people pursue self-oriented goals, they are concerned about their own personal desires and outcomes (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003).

The pursuit of self- and other-oriented goals has been shown to differentially shape well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness of both partners in adult close relationships. For example, people who pursue other-oriented goals report feeling closer, more connected, more satisfied in their relationships, and have more mutually responsive relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Feeney & Collins, 2003). In contrast, those who pursue self-oriented goals, such as those predicated on self-benefit and obligation, report greater depression, lower satisfaction, more conflict, and less mutually responsive relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Feeney & Collins, 2003). These studies indicate that pursuit of other-oriented goals is linked with greater personal and relationship well-being, whereas the pursuit of self-oriented goals detracts from well-being.

Researchers have theorized that parents may also be motivated by self- and other-oriented goals with their children. However, while these goals have been extensively studied in adult close relationships, they have largely been neglected in research on parenting (Dix, 1992; Dix & Branca, 2003). Instead, the majority of research on parenting goals has focused on parents' child-rearing values or the values parents strive to instill in their children (Dix & Branca, 2003). One exception concerns an investigation of parenting goals during parent-child disagreement where goals were assessed via telephone interviews and hypothetical vignettes. Researchers theorized that parents pursue four different goals during disagreements that encompass child- and self-orientations (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). The child-oriented goals included empathic goals which emphasize concern for a child's feelings and well-being as well as socialization goals which emphasize teaching children skills and lessons. Self-oriented goals emphasize parents' desires to get their children to behave as they wish, and relationship goals

emphasize parents' attempts to foster harmonious bonds in the family. While this work sought to identify how parenting goals relate to parental behaviors during disagreement, it also indicated that parents who pursued self-oriented goals reported experiencing more negative emotions than parents who pursued empathic and relationship goals (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), suggesting that parental goal pursuit is linked to parents' emotional well-being.

Informed by these results, we build on the existing research on interpersonal goals to examine parenting goals in the caregiving context more generally given that relationship processes may unfold differently in positive versus negative contexts (Maisel & Gable, 2009). We sought to identify the goals parents pursue, focusing on the broad categories of child- and self-oriented goals, while acknowledging that unique goals may arise within these overarching goals. For instance, child-oriented goals may be compassionate in nature or focused on socialization. In addition, self-oriented goals may be focused on image concerns or attaining obedience or desired outcomes from a child.

### Overview of current studies

In our first three studies, we sought to create and validate a measure called the Parenting Goals Scale (PGS). We found it important to identify unique parenting goals in a self-report measure given that previous research has assessed goals by using outside observer ratings (Dix, Gershoff, Meunier, & Miller, 2004), hypothetical vignettes (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), and structured telephone interviews (Hastings & Grusec, 1998) which were largely focused on goals related to parenting younger children. Building on this work, we sought to create a self-report measure of parenting goals pursued with both sons and daughters who vary in age from newborn to 18 years old. To do so, we conducted a series of studies to identify scale items that assess unique parenting goals (Study 1), confirm the structure of the PGS (Study 2), and establish convergent and discriminant validity of the PGS from other individual difference measures (Study 3). After developing and validating the PGS, we then examined how within-person changes in parenting goals are linked to parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality with their child, and responsiveness to their child's needs in daily life (Study 4). Finally, we examined how differences at the between-person level in parenting goal pursuit are linked with parents' chronic emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness to their child's needs (internal meta-analysis of all four studies).

We present our research questions and hypotheses in two sections. In Section I, our first research question concerned identifying *what* unique goals parents pursue. We hypothesized that parenting goals would be child- and self-oriented in nature, and we tested in an exploratory fashion how many unique goals would arise within these broader categories. Our second research question in Section I concerned *how* parenting goals relate to other individual differences in parenting styles, other-focused orientations, self-focused orientations, and attachment styles. We hypothesized that each goal would be related to but distinct from each of these individual differences; that is, we expected parenting goals to be related in meaningful ways to other individual differences but not be so highly correlated that they are measuring the same construct.

In Section II, we sought to test our third question of *how* pursuit of different parenting goals is associated with parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality, and

responsiveness. We examined this question within parents' daily lives in a 10-day daily experience study (Study 4) and chronically at the individual difference level in an internal meta-analysis of all four studies ( $N = 1,906$ ). Drawing on theory and findings in interpersonal goals research, we hypothesized that parents who pursue child-oriented goals would experience greater emotional well-being, relationship quality with their children, and responsiveness to their children's needs when providing care in daily life and chronically at the individual level. In contrast, we hypothesized that parents who pursue self-oriented goals would experience lower well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness when providing care for their children both in daily life and chronically at the individual difference level.

## **Section I: What are the unique parenting goals and who pursues them?**

### **Study I: Identifying unique parenting goals**

To answer our first research question concerning what unique goals parents pursue when caring for their children, we developed the PGS based on items we generated from two pilot studies using three steps described in Appendix A which can be found on our Open Science Framework (OSF) page (<https://osf.io/v5fbn/>). First, we used a deductive, theory-driven approach by adapting items from existing theories and measures of the following goals: parenting goals in disagreements (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), compassion and self-image goals in friendships (Crocker & Canevello, 2008), and caregiving (Feeney & Collins, 2003) and sacrifice goals (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005) in romantic relationships. Second, we used an inductive, data-driven approach to identify parenting goals unique to the caregiving context by surveying parents in a free response format about the goals they pursued in a recalled caregiving experience. Third, given this exploratory stage, we pilot tested this initial pool of items to identify how many factors would arise to ensure that there were a sufficient number of items to allow us to reliably measure each parenting goal. These pilot studies yielded a set of 24 parenting goal items.

### **Method**

We recruited 543 parents from the U.S. with children 18 years old or younger (Ashton-James, Kushlev, & Dunn, 2013; Nelson et al., 2013) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Sample characteristics for all studies are shown in Table 1. Parents completed the survey online and were instructed to answer all questions about one particular child of their choice if they had more than one child. Parents first responded to an open-ended question regarding a recent experience in which they provided care for their child:

People care for their children in both good and bad times. Sometimes this care is easy and enjoyable to give whereas other times it's difficult and frustrating. Please describe one of the most recent times you gave care to your child. Describe what your child was going through and what you did for your child.

**Table 1.** Sample and variable descriptives for all studies.

	Study 1 N = 543	Study 2 N = 701	Study 3 N = 544	Study 4 N = 118
Parent gender	29.8% male, 63.7% female, and 6.4% other/unreported	65.1% female, 26.7% male, and 8.1% other/unreported	46.1% male, 49.8% female, and 4.0% other/unreported	17.8% male, 79.7% female, and 2.5% other/unreported
Parent ethnicity	54.0% European (American), 6.8% African (American), 7.0% Asian (American), 4.1% Latin/Mexican (American), 3.3% Native American, 6.8% other/mixed race, and 18.0% unreported	53.4% European (American), 8.0% African (American), 4.6% Asian (American), 4.4% Latin/Mexican (American), 2.9% Native American, 6.1% other/mixed race, and 20.7% unreported	61.4% European (American), 4.0% African (American), 3.3% Asian (American), 2.3% Native American, 13.6% other/mixed race, and 15.3% unreported	47% European (Canadian), 2% African (Canadian), 16% Asian (Canadian), 4% Latino (Canadian), 26% other/mixed race, and 5% unreported
Married/in a relationship (%)	92.0	89.3	97.7	95.5
Parent age (years)	M = 32.5 (SD = 8.8); 18–60 years	33.4 (SD = 8.3); 19–65 years	35.0 (SD = 7.9); 19–65 years	41.1 (SD = 4.7); 29–53 years
Child gender	54.9% male, 44.9% female, and 2% unreported	49.8% male, 49.8% female, and 4% unreported	56.3% male, 42.6% female, and 1.3% unreported	47.5% male, 50.8% female, and 1.6% unreported
Child age (years)	6.5 (SD = 4.9); newborn—18	6.7 (SD = 4.9); newborn—18	7.5 (SD = 5.6); newborn—18	7.8 (SD = 3.1); 3–12
PGS—Love and security	4.41 (SD = .76); $\alpha = .86$	4.46 (SD = .76); $\alpha = .86$	4.42 (SD = .75); $\alpha = .81$	3.83 (SD = .86); $\alpha = .87$
PGS—Child development	3.30 (SD = 1.17); $\alpha = .86$	3.32 (SD = 1.21); $\alpha = .88$	3.27 (SD = 1.13); $\alpha = .83$	2.84 (SD = .99); $\alpha = .84$
PGS—Parent image	1.59 (SD = .93); $\alpha = .86$	1.51 (SD = .86); $\alpha = .87$	1.51 (SD = .83); $\alpha = .83$	1.59 (SD = .82); $\alpha = .89$
PGS—Child acceptance	2.60 (SD = 1.14); $\alpha = .83$	2.55 (SD = 1.15); $\alpha = .83$	2.67 (SD = 1.10); $\alpha = .81$	2.33 (SD = .98); $\alpha = .82$
Positive emotions	5.56 (SD = 1.43); $\alpha = .89$	5.60 (SD = 1.41); $\alpha = .88$	5.26 (SD = 1.42); $\alpha = .84$	4.85 (SD = 1.10); $\alpha = .90$
Negative emotions	1.58 (SD = 1.02); $\alpha = .84$	1.53 (SD = .98); $\alpha = .84$	1.80 (SD = 1.05); $\alpha = .77$	1.62 (SD = .64); $\alpha = .85$
Relationship satisfaction	6.36 (SD = 1.10)	6.35 (SD = 1.08)	6.24 (SD = 1.06)	6.00 (SD = .75)
Closeness	5.33 (SD = 1.60)	5.40 (SD = 1.60)	5.77 (SD = 1.34)	4.82 (SD = 1.43)
Conflict	2.12 (SD = 1.64)	2.20 (SD = 1.63)	2.66 (SD = 1.66)	2.60 (SD = .90)
Responsiveness	6.39 (SD = 1.01)	6.40 (SD = .97)	6.21 (SD = 1.00)	6.02 (SD = .63)
Child mood	4.05 (SD = 1.82)	4.02 (SD = 1.85)	3.83 (SD = 1.84)	3.21 (SD = 1.06)
Care difficulty	2.68 (SD = 1.76)	2.65 (SD = 1.83)	2.69 (SD = 1.71)	2.64 (SD = 1.05)

Next, parents rated the importance of the 24 parenting goal items in this experience on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *extremely important*). Measures, data, syntax, and appendices for all studies can be found on our OSF page at <https://osf.io/v5fbn/>.

## Results

We conducted analyses using R v. 3.4.0 (R Core Team, 2017). A scree plot of the 24 items indicated that parents pursue four unique goals. Accordingly, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the 24 items, specifying four correlated factors using promax rotation (Costello & Osborne, 2005) given that we expected, based on past research (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003; Impett et al., 2005), that the parenting goals would be pursued in tandem with one another. We retained all items with factor loadings  $>.60$  besides two items that were not face valid in their factors. As shown in Table 2, the final scale included 17 items loading on four unique factors.

Regarding our first research question of what goals parents pursue, we found some support for our hypothesis that parents pursue child- and self-oriented goals. The first factor, *child love and security goals* (17.1% variance explained), emphasizes showing love, promoting a child's well-being, and ensuring that a child realizes their parent values them and is a reliable and dependable caregiver. The second factor, *child development goals* (16.3% variance explained), emphasizes providing a child with new and meaningful experiences, promoting positive personal development, and preventing a child from developing negative qualities or having negative experiences. The third factor, *parent image goals* (13.1% variance explained), emphasizes desires for others to positively evaluate the self as a parent and to avoid embarrassment by one's child. Lastly, the fourth factor, *child acceptance goals* (12.5% variance explained), emphasizes a parent's desire to prevent negative evaluations or reactions from their child as well as attempts to gain love and positive regard from their child.

The four parenting goals were significantly correlated, indicating that parents tend to be motivated by more than one goal in a given situation. Parents who pursued child love and security goals also pursued child development ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ) and child acceptance goals ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ) but were less likely to pursue parent image goals ( $r = -.11, p = .01$ ). Parents who pursued image goals also pursued child development ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ) and child acceptance goals ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ). And lastly, parents who pursued child development goals also pursued child acceptance goals ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ).

## Study 2: Confirming the unique parenting goals

To provide additional assurance that we identified four unique parenting goals, we sought to confirm the four-factor structure of PGS in Study 2.

## Method

We recruited 701 parents (full descriptives are shown in Table 1) using an identical procedure to Study 1. Parents described a *recent caregiving experience* and then rated their goals in this experience with the 17-item PGS.

**Table 2.** PGS items and descriptives (Study 1).

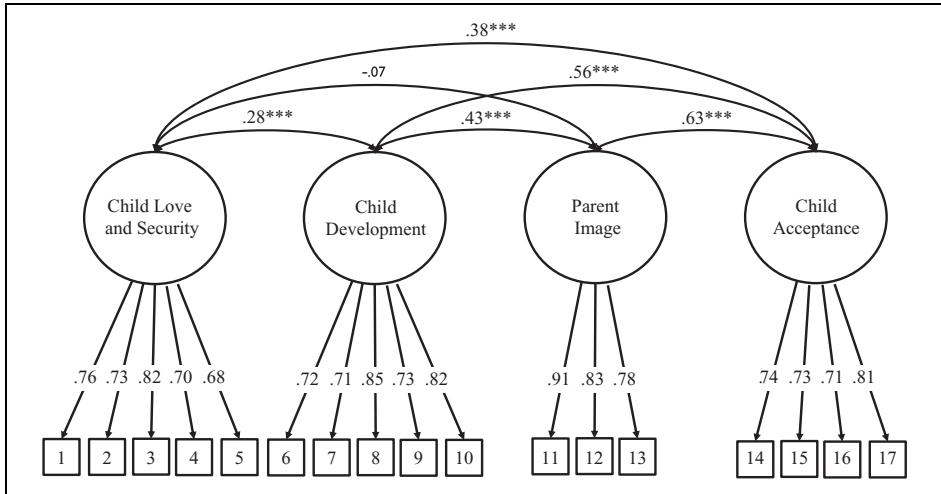
Items	Factor loadings				Item-total correlations	M	SD
	1	2	3	4			
<b>Child love and security</b>							
1. So my child knew that (s)he is important in my life	<b>.80</b>	.11	.06	-.05	.84	4.39	.96
2. To provide my child comfort when (s)he needed it	<b>.79</b>	-.17	.00	.02	.80	4.49	.95
3. So that my child felt loved	<b>.79</b>	.02	.04	-.01	.82	4.48	.89
4. So that my child knew that (s)he could depend and rely on me	<b>.76</b>	.03	.01	-.05	.79	4.40	.94
5. Because I wanted my child to be happy	<b>.65</b>	.06	-.06	.11	.79	4.32	1.00
<b>Child development</b>							
6. To ensure my child develops into a good person	.03	<b>.82</b>	-.08	-.06	.81	3.86	1.38
7. To allow my child to have meaningful life experiences	.07	<b>.80</b>	-.16	.05	.81	3.68	1.43
8. To prevent my child from wasting his/her potential	.01	<b>.71</b>	.18	-.03	.82	2.76	1.54
9. To prevent my child from having problems later in life	-.04	<b>.69</b>	-.05	.04	.77	3.58	1.42
10. To prevent my child from being a failure	-.07	<b>.64</b>	.17	.02	.78	2.64	1.54
<b>Parent image</b>							
11. To prevent the possibility of my child making me look bad	.02	-.03	<b>.89</b>	.03	.91	1.59	1.07
12. To avoid the possibility of getting embarrassed by my child	.04	-.01	<b>.86</b>	-.03	.89	1.60	1.06
13. Because it could help me look like a good parent in front of other people	.01	-.01	<b>.69</b>	.09	.85	1.57	1.03
<b>Child acceptance</b>							
14. So my child would think I'm a good parent	.06	-.03	-.05	<b>.76</b>	.82	2.82	1.42
15. To avoid my child becoming upset with me	-.06	-.11	.11	<b>.76</b>	.80	2.21	1.29
16. To gain my child's love	.05	.09	-.08	<b>.74</b>	.83	3.06	1.48
17. So that my child wouldn't resent me	-.06	.08	.08	<b>.69</b>	.82	2.27	1.36

Note. Bolded factor loadings indicate items retained in each subscale and unbolded items indicate cross-loadings with other factors. All item-total correlations were significant at  $p \leq .001$ . Items were answered on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = a little important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important).

## Results

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R. We specified a four-factor model and allowed all factors to correlate.





**Figure 1.** Parenting goals confirmatory model. Item numbers correspond with scale items as ordered in Table 2. Factor loadings represent standardized estimates and all were significant at  $p \leq .001$ .

Acceptable model fit was concluded when  $CFI \geq .90$  and  $RMSEA \leq .08$  (Kline, 2005). We report  $\chi^2$  statistics but deemphasize it in our model evaluations given its sensitivity to sample size variation (Kline, 2005). As shown in Figure 1, the confirmatory model for the PGS had acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(113) = 526.69, p < .001, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .08, 95\%$  confidence interval (CI) = [.07, .08]), and the correlations among the factors generally replicated those from Study 1 in direction and magnitude. A four-factor structure fit the data better than models that specified one, two, and three factors, which all had poor fit (all  $\chi^2$ s with  $ps < .001, CFIs \leq .81,$  and  $RMSEAs \geq .10$ ). These results indicate that parenting goals could not be simplified to encompass only one, two, or three goals.

Given that we expected that parenting goals would be encompassed by the two broad categories of child- and self-oriented goals, we tested a higher-order model in which child love and security and child development goals were specified as indicators of a higher order “child-oriented goal” and parent image and child acceptance goals were specified as indicators of a higher order “self-oriented goal.” We found that this higher order goal model had acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(114) = 613.53, p < .001, CFI = .91, RMSEA = .08, 95\%$  CI = [.08, .09]). However, the  $\chi^2, CFI,$  and  $95\%$  CI of the RMSEA values of the higher order model indicated worse fit than the more parsimonious four-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 86.84, p < .001$ ). This suggests that the better, more parsimonious model is the four-factor model without the higher order factors. Thus, regarding our first research question and hypothesis, we found some support that parents pursue child- and self-oriented goals at a conceptual level. However, the parenting goals identified could not simply be reduced to two overarching self- and child-oriented goals as four unique parenting goals emerged in our analyses.<sup>1</sup>

### Study 3: Identifying who pursues different parenting goals

In Study 3, we sought to answer our second question concerning *who* pursues unique parenting goals by assessing how each of the four goals relates to individual differences in parenting styles, other-focused orientations, self-focused orientations, and attachment styles. In doing so, we sought to demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of the PGS. We recruited 544 parents (full descriptives are shown in Table 1) who completed a similar procedure to Studies 1 and 2, with a couple of improvements: parents reported on their child with the most recent birthday if they had more than one child to avoid selection biases (Brummelman, Thomaes, Nelemans, Castro, & Bushman, 2015) and we recruited a balanced sample of mothers and fathers.

## Method

### Caregiving measures

Parents described a *recent caregiving experience* as in Studies 1 and 2 and rated their goals for this experience with the 17-item PGS.

### Individual difference measures

To better understand who pursues each of the different parenting goals, we measured parenting styles, other-focused orientations, self-focused orientations, and attachment styles. Parenting styles were examined given that the goals parents pursue may relate to different models of control parents adopt with their children (Baumrind, 1966). In addition, given that the parenting goals can tap self- and other-oriented concerns, we sought to determine whether the four parenting goals correspond with broader other- and self-focused orientations. Finally, given that early experiences with parental caregiving can shape people's propensities to be caring, responsive, and secure in their relationships more broadly (Bowlby, 1969), we assessed how attachment styles with people's own parents are related to the parenting goals they have with their children.

All individual difference measures were assessed on 7-point scales besides two measures noted below. We created averaged composite indices for all measures besides for one measure noted below.

**Parenting styles.** Three parenting styles were assessed on a 5-point scale (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). *Authoritative parenting* (15 items;  $\alpha = .88$ ;  $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) was a composite of the subscale dimensions of parental connection, regulation, and autonomy granting. *Authoritarian parenting* (12 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ;  $M = 1.71$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) was a composite of the subscale dimensions of physical coerciveness, verbal hostility, nonreasoning, and punitiveness. *Permissive parenting* (5 items;  $\alpha = .72$ ;  $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) was assessed with one focal subscale assessing the extent to which parents are indulgent and yielding to their children.

**Overinvolved parenting styles.** Four overinvolved parenting styles were assessed (Ashton-James et al., 2013). *Child-centrism* (7 items;  $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = .95$ )

measured the degree to which parents place their children and their children's needs at the center of their lives. *Helicopter parenting* (5 items;  $\alpha = .74$ ;  $M = 5.47$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) measured the extent to which parents monitor and intrude on a child's activities. *Tiger mom parenting* (5 items;  $\alpha = .61$ ;  $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) measured whether parents have high expectations and strictness. *Concerted cultivation* (5 items;  $\alpha = .58$ ;  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) measured the extent to which parents have high aspirations for their children and encourage involvement in extracurricular activities to the exclusion of play. *Little emperor parenting*, a final type of overinvolved parenting style, was not measured by error and thus not investigated in the current study.

*Other-focused orientations.* *Agreeableness* (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) captured a cooperative, kind, and trusting nature (9 items;  $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 5.13$ ,  $SD = .91$ ). *Empathic concern* (Davis, 1983) captured feelings of compassion, concern, and sympathy for others (8 items;  $\alpha = .90$ ;  $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ).

*Self-focused orientations.* Public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) captured a person's concerns about public self-assessment (7 items;  $\alpha = .67$ ;  $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ). Narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988) captured the extent to which people see the self as more important, unique, and superior to others (40 items;  $\alpha = .90$ ;  $M = 12.94$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ). To assess narcissism, participants chose between two statements for each item and their scores were summed across the 40 items.

*Attachment styles.* Participants rated their *attachment anxiety* (6 items) with their mother ( $\alpha = .93$ ;  $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) and father ( $\alpha = .92$ ;  $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ). They also rated their *attachment avoidance* (3 items) with their mother ( $\alpha = .85$ ;  $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) and father ( $\alpha = .86$ ;  $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011).

## Results

We conducted analyses in R (R Core Team, 2017). We estimated correlations between each parenting goal and individual difference measure in order to assess their bivariate, zero-order associations. In addition, we estimated the partial associations between each parenting goal, controlling for the other three parenting goals, and each individual difference measure. Results are shown in Table 3 and indicated that each goal was correlated in conceptually meaningful ways, while also being unique from, each individual difference measure. These results provide support for the convergent and discriminant validity of the PGS, indicating that each of the parenting goals is related to, but distinct from, other existing individual difference measures. More specifically, each goal shared less than 22% variance with each individual difference measure. We return to the implications of these findings in the discussion.

**Table 3.** Convergent and discriminant validity of the PGS (Study 3).

	Child love and security		Child development		Parent image		Child acceptance	
	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	<i>r</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i>	$\beta$
Parenting style								
Authoritative	.36***	.30***	.24***	.23***	-.16***	-.15**	.06	-.08
Authoritarian	-.15***	-.13**	.10*	-.03	.47***	.41***	.25***	.12*
Permissive	-.02	-.03	.04	-.12*	.34***	.27***	.28***	.21***
Overinvolved parenting styles								
Child centrism	.34***	.29***	.05	-.04	-.14***	-.14**	.13**	.10 <sup>†</sup>
Concerted cultivation	.12**	.08	.27***	.18***	.23***	.16**	.23***	.05
Tiger mom	.13**	.05	.23***	.18***	.10*	.02	.18***	.08
Helicopter	.28***	-.21***	.07	-.02	-.09*	-.12*	.14***	.14*
Other-focused orientation								
Agreeableness	.26***	.25***	.04	.04	-.21***	-.15**	-.04	-.09
Empathy	.30***	.26***	.02	.02	-.27***	-.23***	-.02	-.01
Self-focused orientation								
Public self-consciousness	-.07 <sup>†</sup>	-.08	.05	.01	.17***	.13*	.09*	.06
Narcissism	-.01	-.06	.16***	.10*	.20***	.11*	.18***	.11*
Attachment styles								
Anxiety with mother	-.07	-.06	-.05	-.02	-.04	-.04	-.07	-.02
Anxiety with father	-.02	-.05	-.005	.03	-.08 <sup>†</sup>	-.11*	-.03	.03
Avoidance with mother	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.08	.14**	.13*	.07	.06
Avoidance with father	-.03	-.04	.03	-.02	.14**	.12*	.07 <sup>†</sup>	.03

Note. *r* values represent zero-order bivariate correlations between each parenting goal and each individual difference measure.  $\beta$  values represent partial associations between each parenting goal—controlling for the other three goals—with each individual difference measure.

<sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

## Section II: How is caregiving goal pursuit linked to daily and chronic emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness?

### Study 4: Parenting goals in daily life

We sought to investigate how parenting goal pursuit is related to parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness to their child's needs in a naturalistic 10-day daily diary study. This design allowed us to capture multiple caregiving events that are highly representative of parents' daily experiences, thereby increasing reliability and minimizing retrospective biases (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). We hypothesized that daily pursuit of the conceptually child-oriented goals of child love and security and child development would be associated with greater emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness to a child's needs in daily life. In contrast, we hypothesized that daily pursuit of conceptually self-oriented goals of parent image and

child acceptance would be associated with decreases in emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness in daily life.

We also tested whether these associations held after accounting for parents' perceptions of care difficulty and a child's mood given that the challenging nature of care can compromise parental well-being (Cutrona & Troutman, 1986; Laukkanen, Ojansuu, Tolvanen, Alatupa, & Aunola, 2014). Finally, given that parents may enact different behaviors based on their goals (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), we assessed whether the links between parenting goals and parental well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness were consistent across different parental behaviors.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

We recruited 118 parents from the community who had previously brought their child to the university for a study of child development. The sample was balanced for parents reporting on sons versus daughters as well as across child age of 4-, 8-, and 12-years old. Parents first completed a background survey of demographic and individual difference measures (not used in the current study). Next, parents completed a short survey for 10 consecutive days ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 2.5$ , total = 726 diaries). Parents completed the surveys at a time of their own convenience each day. They were sent e-mail reminders if they had not completed the survey by 6 pm each day and were locked out of the survey at midnight (so they could only complete one diary per day). Compliance was acceptable: 52% completed seven diaries or more, 30% completed four to six diaries, and 18% completed three diaries or less. All parents were compensated CAD\$40 and entered in a raffle for a family pass to a community science center.

### *Daily measures*

Parents reported on a *daily caregiving experience* with the same item in previous studies, but adapted to daily life. Parents then rated their goal pursuit with the 17-item PGS: *child love and security* ( $\alpha = .84$ ;  $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ; intraclass correlation [ICC] = .61), *child development* ( $\alpha = .77$ ;  $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ; ICC = .67), *parent image* ( $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .85$ ; ICC = .75), and *child acceptance* ( $\alpha = .76$ ;  $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ; ICC = .79). As indicated by the ICCs, goal pursuit varied both between parents as well as within parents' daily lives, although the relatively high ICCs indicated that more variance was explained at the between-parent relative to the within-parent level.

After reporting on a caregiving experience, parents then responded to indicators assessing their emotional well-being and relationship quality with their child as well as their responsiveness to their child's needs, all on 7-point scales. They reported their *positive emotions* ("happy, pleased, joyful"; "affectionate, loving, caring"; "grateful, appreciative, thankful"; "cared about, loved, connected";  $\alpha = .90$ ;  $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ; ICC = .28) and *negative emotions* ("sad, depressed, down"; "resentful toward my child"; "lonely, isolated"; "angry, irritable, frustrated";  $\alpha = .79$ ;  $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = .98$ ; ICC = .24) during caregiving (Impett et al., 2012). In addition, they reported their *relationship*

*satisfaction* (“How satisfied did you feel with your relationship with your child in general today?”;  $M = 5.96$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ;  $ICC = .24$ ), *conflict* (“How much conflict did you have with your child in general today?”;  $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ;  $ICC = .20$ ), and *closeness* (the inclusion of other in self-measure; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992;  $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ;  $ICC = .64$ ) generally for the day. Finally, parents reported on *responsiveness* (“To what extent do you think you met your child’s needs in this situation?”;  $M = 6.19$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ;  $ICC = .14$ ), *care difficulty* (“How easy versus difficult was it to give care to your child in this situation?”;  $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ;  $ICC = .15$ ), and *child’s mood* (“What was your child’s mood while you gave care to him or her in this situation?”;  $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ;  $ICC = .12$ ).

Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), four *caregiving behaviors* were identified by the authors and one research assistant. Two independent raters then identified the primary behavior described in parents’ reported caregiving experiences, which they answered in open-ended responses each day: *routine and basic needs* ( $\kappa = .72$ ;  $ICC = .19$ ); *enrichment and recreational activities* ( $\kappa = .68$ ;  $ICC = .11$ ); *advice, comfort, encouragement* ( $\kappa = .58$ ;  $ICC = .15$ ); *control and discipline* ( $\kappa = .72$ ;  $ICC = .07$ ); and *other* ( $\kappa = .80$ ;  $ICC = .28$ ; 5% of responses). Once  $\kappa$  values were in an acceptable range, the first author resolved remaining discrepancies between the coders. All coding was completed prior to hypothesis testing. For interested readers, we report examples of the open-ended responses as well as how each caregiving behavior relates to the four parenting goals in Table 1A of Appendix B posted on our OSF page.

## Results

To answer our third research question concerning how parenting goals are related to parents’ emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness in daily life, we conducted multivariate multilevel modeling analyses in Mplus v. 7.0 (Múthen & Múthen, 2008–2012). These analyses accounted for the nested data structure with diaries nested within person. We specified random intercepts and report robust standard errors to guard against violations of normality. For our primary analysis, we tested a model with all four parenting goals (estimating both their within- and between-person components) as simultaneous predictors of all indicators of parents’ emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, whose errors were allowed to correlate. We tested partial effects given that the bivariate associations between each goal and outcome could be conflated with the effects of the other goals. In addition, we opted to conduct multivariate tests rather than univariate tests given that the latter tests may increase Type I errors. However, all bivariate associations are reported in Appendix B (Table 2A) on OSF for interested readers. We report and discuss within-person effects in the current study and return to between-person effects in the internal meta-analysis to come.

As shown in Table 4, we found some results consistent with our hypothesis that when parents were child-oriented in their goal pursuit they would experience higher emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. More specifically, on days when parents pursued child love and security goals more than their average across the 10-day study, the more positive their daily caregiving experiences were, with parents reporting more positive emotions, relationship satisfaction, closeness to their child, and

**Table 4.** Main effects of daily within-parent goal pursuit predicting well-being and responsiveness (Study 4).

	Child love and security	Child development	Parent image	Child acceptance
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>
Positive emotions	.79*** [.58, 1.00]	-.09 [-.25, .06]	-.49*** [-.73, -.24]	.53*** [.28, .79]
Negative emotions	-.27*** [-.41, -.13]	.11* [.01, .21]	.20 <sup>†</sup> [-.02, .42]	-.09 [-.23, .05]
Relationship satisfaction	.29*** [.11, .46]	.11 [-.02, .24]	-.22* [-.43, -.001]	.10 [-.07, .26]
Closeness	.27*** [.11, .43]	.003 [-.12, .12]	-.20 <sup>†</sup> [-.41, .01]	-.07 [-.27, .12]
Conflict	-.35*** [-.56, -.14]	-.003 [-.16, .16]	.36* [.04, .68]	-.04 [-.32, .24]
Responsiveness	.51*** [.32, .71]	.05 [-.11, .20]	-.13 [-.31, .05]	.03 [-.15, .20]

Note. All four parenting goals were entered as simultaneous predictors of all six criteria, whose errors were allowed to correlate. All values are unstandardized multilevel coefficients and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals.

<sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

responsiveness to their child's needs, as well as less negative emotions and conflict with their child. We also found some results that were generally consistent with our hypothesis that when parents were self-oriented in goal pursuit they would experience lower emotional well-being, relationship quality, and feel less responsiveness. More specifically, on days when parents pursued image goals more than their average across the study, the more negative their daily experiences were, with parents reporting more conflict and less positive emotions and relationship satisfaction; they also displayed marginally more negative emotions and less closeness, but no changes in responsiveness.

Not all of the daily results supported our hypotheses, however, as conceptually child-oriented goals were not always linked with positive caregiving experiences, nor were conceptually self-oriented goals linked with negative experiences. More specifically, results also indicated that on days when parents pursued child development goals more than their average across the study, they experienced more negative emotions when caring for their children in daily life, but no other differences in well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. Lastly, on days when parents pursued child acceptance goals more than their own average across the study, the more positive emotions they experienced but no other changes in well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness.

To determine whether perceived care difficulty and child mood were driving the key effects of interest, we retested our previous model while simultaneously controlling for these variables. We found that increased care difficulty and poorer child mood uniquely predicted lower well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness on all indicators ( $|.08| \leq bs \leq .34$ ,  $ps \leq .03$ ). However, the four goals continued to predict some differences in parents' outcomes after controlling for child mood and care difficulty. Child love and security goals still significantly predicted greater positive emotions ( $b = .53$  [.39, .67],  $p < .001$ ), closeness ( $b = .18$  [.02, .34],  $p = .03$ ), and responsiveness ( $b = .38$  [.21, .55],  $p < .001$ ); however, decreased negative emotions ( $b = -.09$  [-.20, .01],  $p = .09$ ), greater relationship satisfaction ( $b = .15$  [-.02, .31],  $p = .08$ ), and lower

conflict ( $b = -.15 [-.33, .02], p = .08$ ) dropped to marginal significance. In addition, parent image goals still significantly predicted less positive emotions ( $b = -.23 [-.41, -.06], p = .01$ ), although associations with negative emotions and indicators of relationship quality ( $|.09| \leq bs \leq |.18|, ps \geq .19$ ) dropped to nonsignificance. Child development goals continued to predict more negative emotions ( $b = .09 [.004, .18], p = .04$ ) and child acceptance goals continued to predict more positive emotions ( $b = .28 [.09, .47], p = .01$ ).

Finally, we tested whether pursuit of each of the four goals in daily life consistently predicted parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality, and felt responsiveness across the different caregiving behaviors in which they engaged. This was important to test given that caregiving behaviors were uniquely associated with the goals parents pursued (see Appendix B, Table 1A on OSF) as well as to their well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness ( $|.10| \leq bs \leq |.91|$ , all  $ps \leq .04$ ). We conducted analyses in which one contrast coded caregiving behavior (1 = *engaged* or -1 = *did not engage*) moderated each of the four parenting goals at the within-person level controlling for the equivalent between-person aggregated goal interactions, repeating this for each parenting behavior in separate models to predict each of the six indicators of parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. Results indicated that only 7 of 96 within-person level interactions were significant (slightly more than chance level significance: 5.2%), none of which were consistently linked to a particular goal or behavior in modifying parents' sense of well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. These results underscore the consistency of the link between parenting goals with parental outcomes across different caregiving behaviors.

## **A meta-analysis of between-parent differences in chronic caregiving goal pursuit**

Finally, we sought to determine whether chronic between-parent, individual differences in goal pursuit are linked with differences in parents' sense of well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. We again predicted that child-oriented goals would be linked to greater well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, while self-oriented goals would be linked to lower well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. For the most reliable tests of our hypotheses, we conducted an internal meta-analysis across our samples ( $k = 4, N_{\text{total}} = 1,906$ ) which included parents from the U.S. and Canada, used different study designs, and all measures of interest. Relative to Study 4, results were expected to be more robust in strength across the indicators of well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness given that chronic goal pursuit should elicit more long-lasting differences in parents' subjective experiences relative to daily goal pursuit. Given that we expect these associations to be highly stable, we also expected that they would not be attributable to the third variable contextual factors of care difficulty and child mood.

## **Caregiving measures**

In all four studies, parents rated their parenting goals using the PGS as related to a recalled caregiving experience. Parents also answered questions regarding how they felt



**Table 5.** Meta-analytic main effects of chronic between-parent goal pursuit predicting emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness.

	Child love and security	Child development	Parent image	Child acceptance
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Positive emotions	.47*** [.41, .54]	.04 [-.12, .20]	-.06 [-.13, .01]	.24 <sup>†</sup> [-.002, .49]
Negative emotions	-.22*** [-.27, -.18]	.08*** [.03, .12]	.31*** [.27, .35]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Relationship satisfaction	.42*** [.38, .45]	-.02 [-.07, .03]	-.16*** [-.20, -.11]	.05 [-.10, .19]
Closeness	.39*** [.21, .37]	-.06* [-.12, -.004]	-.06 [-.20, .07]	.11 [-.03, .25]
Conflict	-.28*** [-.36, -.20]	.19*** [.11, .27]	.17*** [.12, .21]	-.05 [-.30, .20]
Responsiveness	.35*** [.31, .39]	-.07 <sup>†</sup> [-.15, .01]	-.16*** [-.22, -.10]	.08 [-.09, .26]

Note. Results represent estimates and corresponding 95% confidence intervals derived from meta-analyses of standardized  $\beta$  coefficients from Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4. Given that Study 4 was a repeated measures design, effects were aggregated responses across all within-person reports across the 10-day period. Estimates are derived from partial effects of each parenting goal, controlling for the other three goals, in predicting each outcome.

<sup>†</sup> $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

when providing care, all on 7-point scales (consistent with items in Study 4). They rated the extent to which they experienced *positive* and *negative emotions* after giving care to their child as well as their *relationship satisfaction*, *closeness*, and *conflict* with their child during caregiving. In addition, parents reported their *responsiveness* to their child's needs, *care difficulty*, and perceived *child mood* during caregiving. Means, descriptives, and reliabilities of all study variables can be seen in Table 1. Bivariate correlations among all study variables can be seen in Appendix D (Tables 5A to 8A) on OSF.

## Results

We estimated meta-analytic effects using the metafor package (Viechtbauer, 2010) in R. We tested random effects models (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009) with partial effects (i.e., Betas; Peterson & Brown, 2005) of each goal controlling for the other three goals, predicting parental well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness given that the bivariate associations between each goal and outcome could be conflated with the effects of the other goals. Partial effects were estimated using multivariate multiple regression in R (car package; Fox & Weisberg, 2011), with standardized measures of the four goals simultaneously predicting all indicators of parental emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, which were also standardized. Meta-analytic results of these partial associations are shown in Table 5. For interested readers, we also present estimates from each of the four studies used in the meta-analysis in Appendix C (Table 4A) on OSF; additionally, we present the bivariate, rather than partial, meta-analytic associations between parenting goals and outcomes in Appendix B (Table 3A) on OSF.

In conducting these meta-analytic tests, we examined our final research question concerning how parenting goals are linked to parents' sense of emotional well-being,

relationship quality, and responsiveness at the between-parent level. As in Study 3, we found partial support for our hypotheses. As shown in Table 5, and consistent with our hypothesis that child-oriented goals would be linked with greater well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, parents who pursued child love and security goals at the chronic level tended to have more positive caregiving experiences. Meta-analytic results indicated that parents who pursued child love and security goals chronically reported more positive emotions, relationship satisfaction, closeness, and responsiveness to a child's needs, as well as lower negative emotions and conflict during caregiving. Consistent with our hypothesis that self-oriented goals would be linked with lower well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness, parents who pursued image goals chronically had more negative caregiving experiences. While these parents reported no differences in closeness, they experienced more negative emotions and conflict, in addition to lower relationship satisfaction and responsiveness to a child's needs.

We also found results that did not support our hypotheses. Specifically, similar to the within-person results shown in Study 4, parents who pursued child development goals at the chronic level had more negative caregiving experiences. While they experienced no differences in positive emotions or relationship satisfaction, they reported significantly more negative emotions and conflict in addition to less closeness and marginally less responsiveness—with these effects, besides conflict, being relatively small in magnitude. Lastly, parents who pursued child acceptance goals chronically did not differ in their overall sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness relative to parents who pursue these goals to a lesser degree.

Finally, we assessed the extent to which the challenging nature of care could account for the association between goal pursuit and parents' emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness. We retested our meta-analytic models across the four studies using the partial effects of each parenting goal while simultaneously controlling for the other goals as well as for parents' perceptions of care difficulty and child mood. In doing so, results indicated that 12 of the 13 effects remained significant at  $ps \leq .04$ . Furthermore, the magnitude of effects changed negligibly ( $\Delta\beta s \leq |.09$ ). Only one association dropped to marginal significance: the link between chronic child development goal pursuit and more negative emotions ( $\beta = .05 [-.0001, .09], p = .05$ ). Overall, these results indicated that chronic pursuit of parenting goals was robustly associated with parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality with their children, and responsiveness to their child's needs. In addition, the results of these between-person analyses were similar to the within-person results found in our daily diary study but were generally more robust across the parent outcomes.

## Discussion

In the current investigation, we identified the unique goals parents pursue when caring for their children, who is most likely to pursue different goals, and how each goal is related to parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness to their child's needs both chronically and in daily life. While we expected that parents would pursue child-oriented goals—which would be linked to greater well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness—as well as self-oriented goals—which

would be linked to lower well-being, relationship quality, and responsiveness—our results were more nuanced. In fact, parents pursued four unique parenting goals which operated in unique ways.

### **Child love and security goals and the joys of parenting**

One parenting goal we identified encompassed showing a child love and providing them with a sense of security that they can rely on their caregiver. We found, by examining the association between child love and security goals with broader individual differences, that parents who reported pursuing this goal endorsed parenting styles that were highly supportive of their children. They were highly involved in their children's lives without being overly harsh, punitive, or overbearing. These parenting styles are consistent with a broader warm and empathic orientation exhibited by parents who pursue child love and security goals.

The pursuit of child love and security goals was highly predictive of positive and rewarding caregiving experiences for parents both chronically as well as in their daily lives. In addition, daily pursuit of child love and security goals was consistently linked with positive caregiving experiences regardless of parents' daily caregiving behaviors and despite their child's mood or care difficulty both at the daily level and chronically. Collectively, these results indicate that when parents seek to show their child love and provide them with a sense of security, parents themselves also experience personal benefits, dovetailing with a growing body of work indicating that concern and care for others can be intrinsically rewarding (Ashton-James et al., 2013; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003; Impett et al., 2005; Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster, & Cheng, 2013; Le, Impett, Lemay, Muise, & Tskhay, 2017).

### **Child development goals and the trials and tribulations of parenting**

Another goal we identified concerned providing a child with new and meaningful experiences and ensuring their growth as a person. By examining the association between child development goals and other individual differences, we found that parents who reported pursuing these goals endorsed parenting styles that were marked by both supporting their child's autonomy while being low in permissiveness. Perhaps this combination enables parents to provide children with structure and direction, while also fostering their child's own self-directed growth and development. These parents were narcissistic to a degree, perhaps suggesting an overlap between a child's development and parents' own self-concepts.

We also found that in daily life, greater pursuit of child development goals was associated with more negative emotions regardless of how challenging parents found care to be and the different behaviors in which they engaged. In addition, chronic pursuit of child development goals was associated with more negative emotions, less closeness, more conflict with a child, and marginally less responsiveness. Thus, pursuit of child development goals was comparatively more negative (i.e., across more indicators) when

pursued chronically between parents versus within parents' own daily lives, a point to which we return.

Results linking child development goals with negative parenting outcomes ran contrary to our expectations that child-oriented goal pursuit would promote positive outcomes for parents. However, these results align with theory suggesting that pursuit of socialization goals may contribute to poorer parent-child outcomes, particularly when these goals pit parents' and children's goals against one another (Dix & Branca, 2003). For instance, a parent may seek to teach their child to share their favorite toy, but doing so may be misaligned with their child's desire to play with the toy exclusively; an incongruence between parent-child goals such as this may be one reason why parents, and possibly their children, experience negative outcomes when parents pursue child development goals. Future research may benefit from examining the conditions under which child development goals might enhance well-being for both parents and children. It is possible that parents and children may experience positive outcomes when their goals are aligned. For instance, a child may want to join a sports team or take dance lessons while their parent may simultaneously want to provide these opportunities. In these cases, when both parents' and children's goals align, both parents and children may experience greater well-being and relationship quality, in addition to parents feeling more successful at responding to their child's needs.

## **Parent image goals and the costs of parenting**

Another parenting goal we identified was the image goal of avoiding embarrassment by one's child and attempting to maintain a positive image as a parent in the eyes of others. By examining the association between image goal pursuit and broader individual differences, we found that parents who pursued these goals endorsed harsh parenting styles. These parents exhibited parenting styles marked by low structure, yet high expectations, cultivation, and observation. At the same time, they also viewed their children as less central to their lives. Parents who pursued image goals were also self-conscious at the broader level while also having low regard for others more generally. They also showed patterns of attachment avoidance, particularly with their own mothers and fathers, indicating their discomfort with closeness in their own relationships with their parents.

Pursuit of image goals corresponded with more negative caregiving experiences both chronically and in daily life. However, the link between parent image goals and an impoverished caregiving experience was bound by a few conditions. First, in daily life, while image goal pursuit was costly regardless of the caregiving behaviors in which parents engaged, it was less costly when care was particularly challenging. However, chronic pursuit of image goals was costly regardless of how challenging parents found care to be.

The costs associated with pursuing parent image goals are consistent with past research that has indicated the pitfalls of pursuing self-oriented goals in adult close relationships (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003); however, our work suggests that there are boundary conditions for the costs of self-oriented goal pursuit in parent-child relationships. First, while chronic image concerns were costly regardless of how challenging parents found care to be, this was attenuated in daily life. Indeed, image concerns could potentially be adaptive for parents who are momentarily unsure of how to

act in some situations with their children, turning to social norms or others for feedback. These within-person effects suggest that the occasional pursuit of image goals in daily life may not be costly when care is particularly challenging. It could be that children provide more reasons for parents to be self-conscious in daily life given that they have low self-regulatory abilities relative to partners in adult close relationships. Further, as parents navigate caring for children in uncertain or new situations, they may feel unsure about what is best to do. For these reasons, children give parents more reasons to pursue image goals which may be less detrimental, or perhaps even adaptive, in daily life compared to when they are pursued chronically.

### **Child acceptance goals and daily happiness for parents**

Finally, the goal of gaining acceptance from a child by eliciting their love and positive regard was identified. Examining the links between child acceptance goals and other individual differences indicated that parents who pursued these goals endorsed harsh, unstructured parenting—perhaps two routes for attaining child acceptance. These parents also tended to highly monitor their children via helicopter parenting. They were also narcissistic to a degree, perhaps indicating their need for others generally, and not only their children, to see them in a positive light.

Although research would suggest that the pursuit of child acceptance goals could be linked with both positive and negative outcomes (Feeney & Collins, 2003; Hastings & Grusec, 1998), we found that pursuit of these goals was associated with more positive emotions when pursued daily, but not chronically. These results suggest that pursuing child acceptance goals may yield momentary happiness, but neither better nor worse outcomes on the whole. The daily effect of experiencing greater positive emotions when pursuing child acceptance goals was robust against how challenging parents found caregiving to be and across the different behaviors in which parents engaged. It is possible that pursuing child acceptance goals prompts parents to feel happier insofar as they are successful at implementing these goals in daily life. For instance, a parent pursuing child acceptance goals may give in to a child's request for candy in an attempt to gain their child's affection. Perhaps when parents are successful in gaining their child's acceptance in such instances, they may experience momentary positive emotions as a result. Thus, an important avenue for future research is to examine parents' success at implementing goals such as child acceptance and whether successful versus unsuccessful goal attainment shapes parents' well-being in daily life.

### **Broadening the scope of interpersonal goals**

The current findings expand on parenting goals research which has focused primarily on child-rearing goals (Dix & Branca, 2003) and parent-child disagreement (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). The current results indicated that the goals parents pursue conceptually encompass child- and self-oriented goals as was expected from previous theory and research. However, while the parenting goals were conceptually child- and self-oriented in nature, we found that each of the four goals was unique. The current results converge with previous work in showing that when parents are child-oriented in love and

security goal pursuit, they experience benefits and are more responsive, whereas when they are self-oriented in image goal pursuit, they experience well-being costs and are less responsive.

Our results, however, also point to some distinctions from a self- and other-oriented model of interpersonal goals. In our studies, the pursuit of the child development goals was associated with more costs for parents and the pursuit of the child acceptance goals was associated with more positive emotions. Child development and child acceptance goals were, in turn, associated with parental well-being and responsiveness in unique and unexpected ways. Thus, it will be particularly important to further examine these goals in future research.

### **Implications for parenting research, parental well-being, and responsive parenting**

We found that the goals parents pursue are conceptually and empirically distinct from the three core authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles (Robinson et al., 1995). They were also distinct from relatively new measures of overinvolved parenting styles (Ashton-James et al., 2013). In identifying parenting goals as a unique psychological process, this research expands on theory concerning parenting styles in the larger context of parenting motivations and behaviors. Researchers have argued that parental goals are important antecedents to the styles parents adopt, which in turn shape parent behaviors (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). A fruitful area for future research would be to explore how parenting goals and styles interactively contribute to differential outcomes for both parents and their children.

Findings from the current studies also contribute to research seeking to understand the pains and pleasures of parenting (Nelson et al., 2014). The current findings indicate that the pursuit of different parenting goals, both chronically and in daily life, is uniquely linked with parents' sense of well-being when caring for their children. The daily associations between parenting goals and well-being are particularly important in that they indicate that parents' goals can shift across experiences, and it may be possible to change parents' goals, and perhaps their associated well-being, in ways that may be more or less adaptive for both parents and children. Additionally, given that pursuit of parenting goals was also related to parents' feelings of responsiveness to their child's needs, our findings underscore how a parent's goals may be linked not only to their own well-being but also the extent to which they may respond to their child's needs and foster their child's well-being and development.

### **Limitations and future directions**

One limitation of the current work is that correlational designs prevent us from drawing causal conclusions. Existing research (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Impett et al., 2005) suggests that goals causally influence well-being, and while this may also be true for parenting goals, it will be important to test the directionality of the current effects via experimental or longitudinal methods. Examining parenting goal pursuit over time would also be important for understanding momentary versus long-term outcomes for parents and children. For example, child development goals may lead

to more chronic negativity and conflict in the long-term if parents and children consistently encounter instances in which their goals conflict. Indeed, results from the current studies linked pursuit of child development goals to more negative outcomes for parents when pursued chronically, relative to in daily life. It is possible that occasional, rather than long-term, experiences of conflict prompted by parents' pursuit of child development goals might be adaptive, perhaps allowing parents to teach children to assert their needs, regulate their emotions, or accommodate the needs of others (Dix & Branca, 2003).

Since a primary goal of this research was to understand how parenting goal pursuit is linked to parents' own subjective experiences of caregiving, our studies were conducted from the perspective of parents themselves via self-report. However, another important future direction will be to examine parenting goal pursuit in the context of the family via surveying both parents and their children. Specifically future research should aim to understand if and how the unique parenting goals influence children's experiences of receiving care. In addition, and in the case of families with two parents, future research would benefit from investigating whether congruence, or similarity, between parents' goals impacts the quality of the familial relationships between parents and their children as a whole.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research identified what goals parents pursue, who pursues them, and how the pursuit of different goals is related to parents' sense of emotional well-being, relationship quality with their child, and responsiveness to their child's needs. The current work provided evidence that the pursuit of child love and security goals is linked with a more rewarding caregiving experience in which parents feel that they can more responsively attend to their child's needs. In contrast, the pursuit of image goals was linked with costs, with parents experiencing more conflict with their children and lower responsiveness to their child's needs. Finally, the current findings provide evidence for the relative difficulties linked to pursuit of child development goals and of the momentary happiness parents may feel when pursuing child acceptance. The results of the current studies expand the scope of research on interpersonal goals into the parent-child relationship, and in doing so, help us understand how pursuit of unique goals are linked to the joys and frustrations of parenting.

## Authors' note

Data in the current article appear in Le and Impett (2015, 2016); however, besides basic descriptive information—including means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between some study variables—all results in the current article are distinct.

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## Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online at <https://osf.io/v5fbn/>.

## Note

1. We tested the possibility that the four parenting goals could be simplified to two goals in which there was one approach and one avoidance goal. Results assessing a two-factor approach and avoidance model yielded poor model fit ( $\chi^2(118) = 2870.56, p < .001, CFI = .56, RMSEA = .18, 95\% CI = [.18, .19]$ ), indicating that parenting goals could not be simplified to approach and avoidance goals.

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