

Goals and Well Being in New Zealand

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Past research has shown that extrinsic goal pursuit predicts lower psychological well being and maladaptive behaviours, whereas intrinsic goal pursuit predicts greater well being and less distress. The present correlational study was conducted to examine the goal-well being relationship in a sample of university students in New Zealand. The study also filled a gap in the goal-well being literature by taking a dimensional approach to goals and including assessments of hedonic and eudaimonic well being. The results showed that only intrinsic goals were associated with well being, whether operationalized hedonically or eudaimonically, and that the relation could be accounted for by subjective satisfaction with goal progress. Intercorrelations among goal aspects also revealed a marked difference between extrinsic and intrinsic goals. The findings support the notion that not all life goals are beneficial and point the way for further research, ultimately leading to interventions to improve well being.

Past research has shown that what people pursue as a life goal is related to how happy or satisfied they feel about their lives. In particular, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996, 2001) have found that those who focus more on *extrinsic* goals such as financial success and social recognition, relative to *intrinsic* goals such as affiliation, self-acceptance, and community feeling, report less vitality and self-actualisation, and more depression and anxiety. Other researchers have reported similar findings such that stronger orientation towards intrinsic goals, such as personal growth and relatedness, relative to extrinsic goals, such as wealth and fame, is associated with greater well being, assessed by self-esteem, self-actualisation, lack of depression, and life satisfaction (Ryan, et al., 1999). Although some cross-cultural differences need to be acknowledged (e.g., Brdar, Rijavec, & Miljković, 2008; Ryan, et al., 1999), in the Western cultural context, the link

between materialistic goal pursuit and lower well being appears to be robust.

The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic goals reflects differences in the source of reward or satisfaction. Extrinsic goals refer to goals that are aimed at external rewards and praise, and include goals such as financial success, fame, and physical attractiveness. They are often means to some ends, rather than ends in themselves, and are dependent on others' positive evaluations and external circumstances (e.g., being promoted at work; becoming wealthy by inheritance). Extrinsic goals can be more easily quantified, and thus progress toward them is more easily assessed, rendering them targets for comparison and critical judgment (Vansteenkiste, Matos, Lens, & Soenens, 2007). Intrinsic goals, on the other hand, refer to goals that are concerned with fulfilling one's innate psychological needs, such as personal growth and self-actualisation, and include goals such as developing oneself as a better person,

having meaningful relationships with others, and being of service to one's community. They are pursued regardless of external reward, because they are inherently satisfying (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Unlike extrinsic goals, intrinsic goals are not easily quantifiable and thus defy objective evaluation, leaving the progress evaluation to no one but the person pursuing them. That is, extrinsic and intrinsic goals involve behaviours that are externally controlled and self-determined, respectively (McHoskey, 1999).

Past research findings that link extrinsic goals to detrimental well being raise a concern as many societies show an inclination towards material accumulation and consumption, which is a considerable part of extrinsic goals, as a sign of success and subsequent happiness. For example, in the UCLA/American Council on Education Annual Survey of almost a quarter of a million freshman college students in 1990s, 75% of the students agreed with the sentiment that an important reason for going to college is to earn more money. Among 19 listed objectives such as "helping others" and "developing a life philosophy", "being very well-off financially" was ranked at the top (Roberts & Jones, 2001). In a survey of university students in 12 different nations (i.e., U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Sweden, France, New Zealand, Israel, Ukraine, Romania, Turkey, Thailand, and India), New Zealand was found to be the third highest in materialism after Romania and the U.S.A. (Ger & Belk, 1996). Indeed, a more recent study (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson,

2008) reported that New Zealanders' well being was "unexpectedly low" relative to many western countries, according to the International Wellbeing Index (IWI; Cummings et al., 2003). Sibley, Harre, Hoverd and Houkamau (2011) discovered that well being in New Zealand has fallen, especially for Maori, following the global financial crisis, an event with acute implications for extrinsic goals.

Although many researchers now recognize the importance of goals generally, and the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals in particular, for well being, few have formally treated goals and well being as the complex, multi-faceted constructs they are. The IWI, for example, asks for self-reported "satisfaction" in a variety of intrinsic (e.g., "feeling part of your community") and extrinsic ("your standard of living") goal domains, but participants' answers may depend on the dimension of goal pursuit on which they focus. One might, for example, be satisfied with one's current standard of living, but not with the effort expended toward achieving it, or with the process by which it was attained.

As well, the concept of well being can be defined and assessed in multiple ways. Broadly speaking, however, the different aspects of well being can be classified in terms of two types, "hedonic" and "eudaimonic". Hedonic well being emphasises pleasure attainment and pain avoidance and defines well being in terms of an affective response, that is, whether a person feels good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant (Veenhoven, 1984). In contrast, eudaimonic well being focuses on meaning and self-actualisation via fulfillment of one's ability and capacity (Schultz, 1977). These two conceptions convey distinct meanings of being well and their relations with goal pursuit will likely differ.

In sum, the goal of the present study was to investigate the goal-well being relationship, in a New Zealand context, taking a dimensional approach to life goals and by assessing both hedonic and eudaimonic well being. We expected that intrinsic goal pursuit would be more strongly related to eudaimonic well being than extrinsic goal pursuit. We had no a priori predictions about

hedonic well being, which may be more responsive to the feedback provided by the satisfaction of extrinsic goals, or about the particular dimensions of intrinsic and extrinsic goals that predict well being.

Method

Participants

Participants were 97 students (86 female) enrolled in first and second year psychology papers at the University of Otago. They could satisfy a portion of course assessment by completing a worksheet based on the study. They ranged in age from 17 to 47 years ($M = 20.44$; $SD = 4.57$). Seventy-eight (80%) self-identified as European (including European and Kiwi/New Zealander), one as European-Maori (1%), 14 (14%) as Asian, and four (4%) as another ethnicity.

Materials

Participants were asked to fill out a set of questionnaires on paper, which included various indices to assess their life goals and well being. The questionnaire set included the following measures.

Life goals were assessed on a modified version of the Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). It consisted of seven "aspirations", three extrinsic (wealth, fame, and image), three intrinsic (meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions), and one neutral aspiration (good health). Each aspiration had five items, which stated specific goals that were examples of the aspiration. Participants rated the goals on five dimensions: importance ("How important is this goal to you?"); effort ("How hard are you trying to achieve this goal?"); attainment ("To what extent have you attained this goal?"); satisfaction ("Are you satisfied with your progress toward this goal?"); and difficulty ("How hard do you think it is to achieve this goal?") for each item, using a 7-point scale anchored at 1 ("not at all"), 4 ("moderately"), and 7 ("very"). The scores of extrinsic and intrinsic goals were derived by averaging the three relevant aspirations for each type of goal. Cronbach's alpha for extrinsic goals ranged from .82 to .89 and for intrinsic goals ranged from .80 to .85.

Hedonic well being was assessed with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), a well-validated measure consisting of 10 positive and 10 negative emotional state-terms (e.g., proud, guilty). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they "generally" felt each mood state, using a 1 ("very slightly or not at all") to 5 ("extremely") scale. Scores were averaged across the positive items and, separately, across the negative items, as measures of positive and negative hedonic well being, respectively (Cronbach's alpha = .82 and .83, respectively), and the difference taken such that higher scores reflect a more positive global hedonic state.

Eudaimonic well being was assessed with three scales:

(1) Satisfaction with Life (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985). This 5-item instrument measures life satisfaction in terms of global cognitive judgments. Example items include "In most ways, my life is close to ideal" and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life". Participants recorded their answers on a 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree") scale. Scores were calculated by averaging across all the items (Cronbach's alpha = .85).

(2) Psychological Wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The 84-item PWB scale is designed to assess eudaimonic well being in six domains: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants were asked to rate how true each statement was of them on a 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree") Items were averaged within and across each domain to yield six eudaimonic well being scores, and a composite overall eudaimonic well being score (Cronbach's alpha = .88), such that a higher number reflects greater well being.

(3) Subjective Vitality (individual difference version; Ryan & Frederick, 1997). This scale consists of 7 items (e.g., "I feel alive and vital"; "I look forward to each new day") and uses a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 ("not at all true"), 4 ("somewhat true"), and 7 ("very true"). Scores were averaged across the seven items

(Cronbach's alpha = .88), with higher scores indicating greater vitality.

Two measures of ill being were also included:

(1) Depression was measured with the CES-D scale (Radloff, 1977), a 20-item self-report measure intended for the general population. Participants are asked to reflect back over the past week regarding 20 depressive symptoms (e.g., "I felt that everything I did was an effort"; "I felt that people dislike me"). Participants indicated their agreement with each item by selecting one of four possible responses (0 = "Rarely or none of the time", 1 = "Some or a little of the time", 2 = "Occasionally or a moderate amount of time", 3 = "Most or all of the time"). Scores range from 0 to 60 (Cronbach's alpha = .90).

(2) Anxiety was measured on the six-item state version of the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Marteau & Bekker, 1992) Participants answered how much they felt each of several states (e.g., "calm", "relaxed") on a 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much") scale. The mean score was obtained by averaging across all items (Cronbach's alpha = .71).

Procedure

Participants were run in groups of between two and 12, tested at the same time in a large experimental room. After providing informed consent, participants were given the questionnaires to complete individually. The questionnaires were always administered in the same order: the PANAS, the Aspiration Index, the CES-D Depression Scale, the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, and the Psychological Wellbeing, Vitality, and Satisfaction with Life scales. After completing all questionnaires, participants were fully debriefed.

Results

Sample sizes did not permit valid comparisons between genders; therefore all analyses were collapsed across this variable.

The three measures of eudaimonic well being were correlated and, following Schmuck (2001), standardized scores were averaged into an overall eudaimonic well being index (alpha=.65). Descriptive statistics

for all goal and well-being measures appear in Table 1. Paired *t*-tests using a Bonferroni-adjusted *p* value of .02 revealed that intrinsic goals were judged as more important, more effortful, more successfully attained, and more satisfying, than extrinsic goals ($t(96)=9.43, 18.35, 17.16, \text{ and } 2.48$). The two types of goals were rated equally difficult.

Zero-order correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic goal dimensions, and different aspects of well being, appear in Table 2, using a Bonferroni-adjusted *p* value of .001. As seen in the table, effort expended, perceived attainment, and satisfaction with progress toward intrinsic goals were all associated with both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. No extrinsic goal dimensions predicted well being, and neither goal type correlated with either measure of ill being.

To examine the unique contribution of goal dimensions associated with well being, multiple regressions were conducted using the goal dimensions that showed significant zero-order correlations, to predict simultaneously eudaimonic and hedonic well being in separate analyses. In both cases, satisfaction emerged as the only unique predictor (see Table 3).

Finally, as an exploratory analysis, we calculated the intercorrelations

among goal dimensions within intrinsic and extrinsic goals, which revealed interesting differences between goal types. As can be seen in Table 4, although the perceived importance of goals predicted effort toward them, effort toward *intrinsic* goals was associated with participants' satisfaction with their progress, whereas effort toward *extrinsic* goals was associated with the perceived difficulty of those goals. Attainment of goals was positively associated with goal satisfaction for both types of goals, although the magnitude of this relationship was significantly greater for intrinsic goals compared to extrinsic goals.

Discussion

The findings in the present study provide new data on well being in New Zealand and, more importantly, new insight into the goal-well being relationship. Stereotypes about young people's self-interest notwithstanding, our university sample judged intrinsic goals as more important than extrinsic goals and, despite finding them more difficult to pursue, reported greater success and satisfaction with attaining these goals. Furthermore, intrinsic goals strongly predicted both eudaimonic and, somewhat unexpectedly, hedonic well being; extrinsic goals predicted neither. Thus, consistent with international

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PANAS score		
Life Satisfaction	4.78	1.15
Psych. wellbeing	5.05	0.55
Vitality	4.83	1.10
Depression	13.49	9.29
Anxiety	1.71	0.44
Intrinsic goals		
Importance	*5.12	.69
Effort	*4.77	.79
Attainment	*4.23	.82
Satisfaction	*4.35	.84
Difficulty	4.71	.94
Extrinsic goals		
Importance	*4.35	.82
Effort	*2.90	.95
Attainment	*2.78	.81
Satisfaction	*4.08	.97
Difficulty	4.76	.94

Note: Asterixed means differ across goals at $p < .02$

Table 2.

	Hedonic Well Being (PANAS)	Eudaimonic Well Being	Depression	Anxiety
Intrinsic goals				
Importance	.02	.08	.10	.04
Effort	.35	.41	-.09	-.10
Attainment	.42	.53	-.19	-.10
Satisfaction	.48	.55	-.24	-.12
Difficulty	-.15	-.19	.17	.02
Extrinsic goals				
Importance	-.06	-.06	.23	.13
Effort	-.13	-.05	.21	.18
Attainment	.12	.26	-.01	.12
Satisfaction	.24	.28	-.24	-.11
Difficulty	-.19	-.24	.26	.07

Note: Correlations in bold are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well Being on Intrinsic Goal dimensions

Predictor	Hedonic Well Being ^a				Eudaimonic Well Being ^b			
	B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t
Effort	1.35	1.22	.13	1.11	.13	.12	.12	1.05
Attainment	-.612	1.86	-.06	-.33	.15	.19	.15	.82
Satisfaction	4.39	1.62	.46	2.70**	.36	.16	.36	2.22*

Note: ^aAdjusted $R^2 = .22$; ^bAdjusted $R^2 = .30$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4. Intercorrelations Among Goal Dimensions

Variables	Extrinsic Goals				Intrinsic Goals				
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Extrinsic Goals	1. Importance								
	2. Effort	.77				.55			
	3. Attainment	.41	.54			.26	.66		
	4. Satisfaction	-.10	*-.06	*.34		.23	*.55	*.85	
	5. Difficulty	.37	*.40	.07	-.19	.13	*.13	-.10	-.04

Note: Correlations in bold are significant at $p < .001$. Correlations with asterixes differ significantly across goal type at $p < .001$, using a Fisher r-to-z transformation.

data, intrinsic goals relate strongly and positively to well being and, interestingly, our young sample seem aware of their value.

Our analyses also permitted a more fine-grained analysis of goal structure than has been achieved in past research. In particular, the effort required to pursue intrinsic goals, the degree to which they have been attained, and the satisfaction with goal progress, were

each associated with well being and, of these, only satisfaction was a unique predictor. In other words, satisfaction with progress toward intrinsic goals is sufficient to explain more than 20% of the variance in reported well being, whether operationalized in eudaimonic or hedonic terms. This result is important and non-obvious: it is not the case, for example, that valuing intrinsic goals, or believing those goals

have been achieved, per se, predicts happiness; it is *subjective* satisfaction with one's progress toward those goals. One implication is that interventions designed to improve well being might do better to focus on satisfaction with what has been achieved, rather than how more can be achieved.

Such conclusions, of course, are speculative without further research

on the causal direction of the effects, and previous research supports multiple pathways. For example, it has been found that teenagers with less nurturant mothers as well as those from less advantageous socioeconomic backgrounds show a greater emphasis on extrinsic goals such as financial success (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995), rendering support for well being as a cause of life goal preferences. On the other hand, it has also been reported that adolescents who focused on wealth as their life goal show a greater tendency to develop psychological illnesses some years later in their life (Cohen & Cohen, 1996), rendering support for life goals as a cause and well being as an outcome.

There are, however, theoretical reasons to believe that the choice of goals influences well being, rather than (or in addition to) the other way around. For example, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) suggests that intrinsic goals such as meaningful relationships with others and personal growth may help satisfy basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. That is, intrinsic goal pursuit may make individuals feel that they are independent and competent agents free of expectations and external pressure, and that they are closely connected to others through their effort toward their intrinsic goals. Thus, in the process of pursuing intrinsic goals, people may feel good because the process itself provides them with positive experiences. In contrast, extrinsic goals such as money, fame, and image may thwart the fulfillment of these basic psychological needs. Additionally, as a practical matter, intrinsic goals may be easier to satisfy because they are less tangible, defying easy objective evaluation, judgment from others, and social comparison. As a result, people who pursue intrinsic goals may not be threatened by such evaluations and feel more readily satisfied with their progress compared to people who pursue extrinsic goals.

Although we had no expectations about the relation among goal dimensions, exploratory intercorrelations revealed that effort toward extrinsic and intrinsic goals have contrasting relations with affect. For example, effort toward

intrinsic goals was associated with positive feelings (i.e., greater goal satisfaction), whereas effort toward extrinsic goals was associated with negative feelings (i.e., perceived goal difficulty). Although attainment of both extrinsic and intrinsic goals was associated with greater goal satisfaction, the relationship was significantly stronger for intrinsic goals than extrinsic goals. Also, people who reported greater effort toward extrinsic goals perceived their goals as harder to attain, but this relation was absent for intrinsic goals. These associations are potentially indicative of some aversive implications of extrinsic goal pursuit.

In summary, the present study, which examined the relationship between life goals and well being in a New Zealand sample, adds support for the relation between intrinsic goals and greater well being, and identifies subjective satisfaction among a number of possible goal dimensions as a critical variable in this relation. It should be reiterated, however, that the majority of the participants in the present study were women of European descent, and generalisation to a wider population in New Zealand may not be warranted. Further research will be needed to confirm a unique, causal role of intrinsic goal satisfaction in well being, a finding that can ultimately provide the basis for psychological intervention. However, even if limited to the university population, the results are important: At an age at which people are trying to establish themselves both psychologically and financially, extrinsic goals may be prioritized for practical reason, taking attention away from other goals more closely related to happiness.

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