

Goals and Social Relationships: Windows Into the Motivation and Well-Being of “Street Kids”¹

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Research investigating homeless youth or, as they prefer, “street kids,” has primarily described their dysfunction. In order to more thoroughly document their psychological reality and account for variability in their functioning, this study explored the close relationships and personal projects of 50 street kids. Self-determination theory provides a theoretical framework for hypotheses concerning the relationships that social networks and goals have with motivation and subjective well-being. The size of participants’ social networks was positively related to internalization and positive well-being. Goal pursuit was also positively related to internalization and positive well-being. These findings—along with descriptive information documenting street kids’ motivation, well-being, and family contact—afford us a view beyond their dysfunction, and elucidate factors associated with their optimal functioning.

Homeless youth or, as they prefer to be called, “street kids,” live a difficult existence. An apparently bedraggled group, they can be seen roaming the streets of large and small cities, squeegeeing and begging for change. Their apparent desperation demands help and attention. However, in order to begin to help these youths, insight must be gained into their complex and potentially troubled reality.

Most research on street kids has been descriptive in nature and has focused on their dysfunction. This research often details their alcohol and drug abuse (e.g., Bailey, Camlin, & Ennett, 1998; Baron, 1999), their delinquency (e.g., Baron, 2003), their involvement in risky behavior (e.g., Kipke, Unger, O’Connor, Palmer, & LeFrance, 1997; Votta & Manion, 2004) and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in their population (e.g., Johnson, Aschkenasy, Herbers, & Gillenwater, 1996; Luna, 1991; Rotheram-Borus, Koopman, & Ehrhardt, 1991). These studies document the

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participation of homeless youth in high levels of risk-taking behavior and point to the negative consequences of such action.

Given this litany of anti-normative behavior and negative health outcomes, street kids might be assumed to be listless, amotivated, and psychologically distressed (see Taylor, Lydon, Bougie, & Johannsen, 2004), or indeed to be engaging in such behaviors purposely to gain social acceptance or feelings of autonomy (see Jessor, 1992). However, to document their dysfunction is not sufficient, and such research does not, in fact, provide insight into street kids' true psychological experience. Although the information obtained in this descriptive research is informative and useful in terms of illuminating street kids' needs, it sheds little light on what motivates street kids and what they are thinking and feeling in their day-to-day existence.

It is essential to understand more fully the factors in their lives that help them cope, and those that potentially cause them harm. The present research focuses on two such factors about which there is considerable consensus concerning their importance for effective human functioning. The social relationships and the goals of street kids are explored and are related to their motivation and subjective well-being in order to gain important insight into the psychological reality of these disadvantaged youngsters.

Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and its central concept of internalization provide a theoretical framework to explore these relationships. We use self-determination theory to develop hypotheses about the role that social networks and goal pursuits play for the motivation and subjective well-being of street kids.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) makes an important distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* is the most autonomous and self-determined form of motivation. It involves motivation stemming purely from the self and is characterized by volitional engagement in activities because of feelings of enjoyment for that activity itself. Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed that intrinsic motivation is the most desirable and psychologically healthy form of motivation, as it has been associated with positive outcomes, such as increased psychological well-being.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to an engagement in behaviors because of their instrumental value or importance. There is usually a payoff to engaging in these behaviors, such as feelings of pride and accomplishment, external rewards, or the avoidance of feelings of guilt or shame. Extrinsic motivation is important, as most of the behaviors in which one engages in day-to-day life are the result of extrinsic motives emanating from the social standards set by the variety of groups to which one belongs.

The question is how individuals acquire the motivation to carry out behaviors that are important, but that may not be inherently enjoyable. According to SDT, there are differing degrees to which the value and regulation of the behavior has been internalized by the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci proposed a continuum based on the extent to which one has internalized and has come to endorse important social standards personally.

First, *amotivation* is a self-regulatory style characterized by a complete lack of intentionality. It occurs when an individual has failed to internalize any societal standards. He or she goes through the motions without truly valuing the activity. Action stemming from amotivation is purposeless and follows from no predictable contingency.

Next on the continuum lie the different forms of extrinsic motivation, ranging from the least internalized form to the most internalized form. The extrinsically motivated behavior that is the least autonomous or internalized is labeled *externally regulated behavior*. This is behavior that is carried out only to satisfy some form of immediate external pressure or reward contingency. One feels pressured into acting, resulting in feelings of coercion or alienation.

A second, more internalized form of extrinsic motivation is introjected regulation. *Introjection* involves permanently adopting a regulation, although not fully accepting it as one's own. Here, the resulting action is carried out because of feelings of shame, guilt, or a desire for approval.

Finally, the motivation that occurs when an individual has come to value a particular behavioral goal and to see that goal as personally important is referred to as *identified motivation*. Here, a goal has become important to one's identity, and its achievement has become personally meaningful.³

SDT posits that intrinsic motivation and the relatively internalized, or self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation are the most psychologically healthy and are associated with psychological well-being (e.g., Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). In the realms of education (e.g., Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), healthcare (e.g., Williams, Rodin, Ryan, Grolnick, & Deci, 1998), religion (e.g., Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), and physical exercise (e.g., Chatzisarantis, Biddle, & Meek, 1997), greater internalization has been associated with positive outcomes. The advantages of internalization are numerous, making it an important concept to investigate in street kids.

³More recent work on SDT has proposed a particular type of identification called *integrated motivation*. This more self-determined form of motivation occurs when identified regulations are completely assimilated to the self and become congruent with one's other values and needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, to date, its high correlation with adjacent regulations has made it difficult to distinguish empirically.

For the purposes of the current study, we have operationalized *internalization* as the degree of both identified and introjected motivation reported by the participant. These two forms of motivation are neither purely intrinsic nor purely extrinsic, thus sufficiently representing an internalization of social standards.

Street Kids: Their Motivational Profile

Taylor et al. (2004) examined internalization in a sample of street kids by conducting an analysis of their motivational profile. These researchers hypothesized that street kids in general have failed to become invested in the process of internalizing mainstream cultural standards. Because of their self-imposed disconnection from the mainstream and their embracing of an anti-normative identity, the researchers suspected that they would not be motivated by societal standards. Indeed, these researchers found that compared to mainstream youth, the street kids reported significantly less identified motivation, introjection, and external regulation. Instead, they demonstrated relatively high levels of amotivation, compared to other youths. Similarly, their physical and psychological well-being was significantly below that of mainstream youths. The researchers concluded that compared to mainstream youth, street kids have not sufficiently internalized the standards or values that motivate them to pursue clear goals.

However, in analyzing street kids' motivational profiles, Taylor et al. (2004) found much variability in the motivation and well-being scores of their sample. Their research raised some important issues. For example, street kids were indistinguishable from mainstream youth when it came to their levels of intrinsic motivation; however, they fared much worse when it came to internalized forms of extrinsic motivation. Furthermore, some street kids appeared to be doing remarkably better than others. Those with solid social relationships seemed especially well off, but these social relationships were not examined in depth.

The present research attempts to take this research one step further and understand the factors in street kids' lives that might explain this variability. Through an examination of their peer relationships and their goals, factors that have an established relationship with internalization and well-being, we hope to shed further light on street kids' psychological reality.

Close Peer Relationships

Social support has consistently been found to be positively associated with self-determined motivation (e.g., Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan,

1991; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). Becoming invested in the process of internalizing cultural norms, and coming to see these cultural norms as meaningful for the self, necessitates an important reference group to whom one feels attached or related (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A network of close relationships is essential, as it can serve as such a reference group.

There is also much evidence of the fundamental importance of warm, trusting, and supportive interpersonal relationships for well-being (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 2000). Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Ryan and Deci (2000) have gone so far as to suggest that relatedness is a basic human need that is essential for well-being.

A network of good quality relationships provides social support in that it buffers the stresses of day-to-day life (Hartup, 1996). However, simply having acquaintances is not as important as having good quality relations with another (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Nezlek (2000) reviewed a number of studies and found that quantity of interactions does not predict well-being, but that quality of relatedness does. Individuals who have a social network of more intimate or higher quality relationships tend to demonstrate greater well-being.

The social networks of street kids are often assumed to be made up of deviant and short-term peer relationships. Indeed, the prevailing theme in the past literature is that the social networks of street kids are homogeneous in nature, street-oriented, and composed largely of transient peer relationships with little family contact (Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005). Street kids have been found to lack stable friendships involving trust and admiration (Taylor et al., 2004), and to have relationships that encourage deviant behavior (e.g., Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

However, not all research has supported the notion that street kids lack close peer relations. Ennett, Bailey, and Federman (1999), using a more detailed structured interview technique, found that street kids described the few relationships that they did have as strong and supportive, involving frequent interactions, lacking in conflict, and involving individuals they had known for a long time. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2004) found that those few street kids who did have a trusted friend were more intrinsically motivated and felt less irritable and anxious than did those who had no trusted friend.

It is the possession of good quality relationships that is of utmost importance to well-being. Having a network of close relationships provides the individual with a reference group for internalizing the standards important for motivation, and also fosters health and happiness. Therefore, it is important to ask street kids if they do, in fact, have friendships that they perceive as close or *best friendships*. We can then assess if a network of a few close peer relationships relates to internalized motivation and to subjective well-being,

as it would in a mainstream sample. We suspect that street kids' social networks will directly relate to subjective well-being (through social support) and indirectly (through internalization).

Goals

The pursuit of important goals has also been linked with self-determined motivation and well-being. Internalization itself represents the process of coming to value a particular goal personally (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Those who have successfully internalized cultural standards come to value them such that actions in accordance with these standards become personally meaningful. Thus, those who have internalized motives will also have meaningful life goals. Furthermore, autonomous motivation has been related to successful goal pursuit. Sheldon and Elliot (1998) found that the autonomy of personal goals predicted goal attainment.

Active, goal-oriented behavior has been found to be associated with positive well-being; whereas, passive, purposeless, and helpless behaviors have been associated with psychological distress (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In their analysis of participants' personal projects, McGregor and Little (1998) found that feeling competent and confident with respect to valued goals was associated with greater happiness. Sheldon and Kasser (1998) found that goal progress predicted an increase in psychological well-being. Furthermore, Brunstein (1993) found that goal commitment and goal attainability interacted to account for changes in subjective well-being. In sum, internalized forms of motivation are positively associated with goal pursuit; and three components of goal pursuit—commitment, expectation of success, and progress—are important for subjective well-being.

It has been previously assumed that street kids have no clear goals and that they suffer from aimlessness and constant underachievement. From their examination of the motivational profile of street kids, Taylor et al. (2004) concluded that street kids are amotivated and thus lack the ability to reach definable and coherent goals. However, these researchers did not investigate whether or not the street kids actually had goals, nor did they investigate the content of their goals and the factors associated with their pursuit. Doing so would perhaps shed light on the true nature of street kids' aspirations and how the pursuit of these aspirations relates to self-determined motivation and well-being.

In order to analyze very specific aspects of street kids' goals, we used a personal project analysis (Little, 1983). *Personal projects* are self-generated accounts of what an individual is thinking about and hoping to achieve. By examining street kids' personal projects, it is possible to discover if street kids

actually have meaningful goals, what their goals truly are, their commitment to their goals, their goal progress, and their expectation of success. Street kids are a group that is thought to have failed to internalize cultural standards, and thus to be unable to pursue clear goals seriously. For this reason, it is important to determine if the established relationship between goal pursuit and self-determined motivation and well-being will hold for street kids. Having a project to which one is committed and feels capable of achieving—no matter what the project actually is—may, in fact, be positively linked with motivation and well-being in street kids.

Descriptive Information

Because of the interesting and rare nature of our sample, and our desire to gain a deeper understanding of street kids' reality, we explored some additional qualitative components of street kids' lives. We are curious about the common perception of street kids propagated by the mainstream public and by past research; namely, that they are unhappy, aimless deviants who are alienated from family (e.g., Baron, 2003; Johnson et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2004). Although we have no specific hypotheses concerning this descriptive information, we suspect that when asked directly, street kids would indicate that there is much more variability in their functioning than is commonly assumed. We present information describing their overall motivation and well-being scores, and their reported contact with family, including frequency and type, in order to explore further the nature of their existence.

Methodological Challenges

It is a major challenge to explore the psychological reality of a group that is as apparently troubled as street kids and who, to a great extent, define themselves in a manner that is explicitly anti-normative (Taylor et al., 2004). Specifically, two methodological issues need to be addressed. First, collecting valid data from such a difficult-to-access group posed a significant challenge. Many street kids are involved in anti-normative behavior; therefore, it is difficult to find a time when they are not tired, agitated, or engaged in some form of substance use (Taylor et al., 2004). Furthermore, unless they are willing to make a real effort to share their psychological reality, there can be little confidence in their responses. Thus, the challenge was to establish a sense of trust between the street kids and the researchers. Some of the researchers in the current project regularly spend all night in a van that tours the city, offering food to street kids. The street kids know these researchers

well and, as a result, seemed to make an honest effort when answering the questionnaire.

Second, the design of the questionnaire posed a challenge. Normally, young people, especially in a school setting, adapt easily to questionnaire-type instruments, as they are accustomed to maintaining long periods of concentration, having to read a great deal, and using standard rating scales. Complying with the norms of such questionnaires and revealing truthful answers to questions is a straightforward activity. Unlike students who are used to concentrating for long periods of time, street kids may not have this desire or experience. A questionnaire was needed that did not challenge their attention span and that was straightforward and easily understandable. Some portions of the current questionnaire were built on previous experience with street kids and were designed so as to be very simple, concrete, and straightforward (see Taylor et al., 2004).

Hypotheses

The present study used two indicators of adaptive functioning as dependent variables: self-determined motivation and subjective well-being. We examined two aspects of street kids' lives—peer relationships and personal projects—through participants' self-reports, and related these to their motivation and well-being. Using SDT as a theoretical platform, we made predictions concerning some of the variability in street kids' functioning. We propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. There will be a positive relationship between the number of self-reported close relationships in street kids' social networks and internalization (identified and introjected motivation) and subjective well-being. When a network of close relationships is present in a street kid's life, this network will serve as a reference group that will foster internalization and will provide social support that will foster well-being.

Hypothesis 2. Once street kids have articulated a personal project, the pursuit of that project—specifically, length of time thinking about the project, expectation of success, and goal progress—will all be positively related to internalized motivation and subjective well-being. When street kids are given the opportunity to specify an important goal, our findings will be consistent with self-determination theory, in that goal pursuit will be related to internalization and well-being.

Method

Participants

Participants were 50 homeless youths (29 men, 20 women, 1 did not indicate gender) who frequent a drop-in center in Montreal. The participants' mean age was 20.4 years ($SD = 2.4$), ranging from 15 to 26 years. Participants were well known to the researchers as prototypical street kids, as the researchers had previously met many of these youths in the middle of the night while distributing food to street kids across the city. From this experience, we were confident that these youths actually lived on the streets or occasionally in abandoned buildings. Those who, from time to time, indicated that they had finally found a room to share with others, inevitably found themselves back on the streets very soon after. Furthermore, it was evident from our experience that most of these youths had been on the streets, not only for a matter of weeks, but for months or longer.

Homeless youth often shy away from social services and from government-funded drop-in centers because of their wish to distance themselves from mainstream society (Taylor et al., 2004). However, the drop-in center from which the current sample was taken is recognized by the street kids as one that is not funded by the government. Its philosophy is to offer homeless youth a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental safe haven, making it an appealing environment for street kids.

Questionnaire and Procedure

Participants were approached individually at the drop-in center and asked to complete the questionnaire. An assistant was always available to help participants individually while they were answering the questions. In this way, we could be confident that the street kids had a good understanding of each of the items, but that the answers to the items came purely from the participants themselves. The questionnaire is comprised of the following sections: friendships and romantic relationships; personal projects; motivation; subjective well-being; and family contact.

Friendship and romantic relationships. Participants were first asked about the presence or absence of a same-sex best friend in their lives. They answered *Yes* or *No* to the question "Do you have someone who you would call a best same-sex friend?" They were then asked to write down the friend's first name. Afterward, they were asked about the presence or absence of an opposite-sex best friend in their lives, and they answered the same questions. Finally, they were asked whether or not they had a romantic partner and to write down his

or her name. It was noted when a best friend and a romantic partner were actually the same person.

Personal projects. In order to assess participants' goals, a personal project analysis (Little, 1983) was conducted. Specifically, participants were told the following:

Everybody has got something on their mind that they want to do, that they're planning to do, or that they are trying to do right now. Sometimes our goal is to change something we don't really like about our life or ourselves, something that we would be proud of if we changed. Other times our goal is to do something because we really like it, something that would make us feel great about ourselves if we did it. Now think about what's on your mind these days. . . . Is it something that you want to change about your life or yourself? Is it something that you want to do because you like it? Write down what is the one thing that is on your mind these days, the one thing you want to change or do. Let's call this your "personal project."

Participants were then prompted to answer questions about their personal projects. They were asked how long they had been thinking about their projects. Responses were rated on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*a few days*) to 10 (*a very long time*). Participants were asked if they thought they would complete their projects by responding on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*definitely no*) to 10 (*definitely yes*). Finally, they were asked how much they had done so far to complete their projects by responding on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*nothing yet*) to 10 (*quite a lot*).

Subjective well-being and motivation. Well-being and motivation were assessed using scales similar to those used by Taylor et al. (2004) in their assessment of a sample of urban street kids. Both scales were short and straightforward, and were previously well understood by street kids, thus making them ideal for use with the present sample.

Well-being was assessed using the question "In the last week, how much did you feel . . .?". This introduction was followed by nine adjectives: *depressed, irritable, tired, anxious, worried, fearful, confident, hopeful, and happy*. Participants rated each of the adjectives on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*).

Our assessment of well-being is a relatively restricted one, as its focus is on positive and negative affect only. Any single measure of well-being is limited to a certain component or components thought to make up well-being in its entirety. For use with street kids, we chose what was thought to be the

briefest, most straightforward, and most often used component in order to assess subjective well-being.

Motivation was assessed with the same five-item scale used by Taylor et al. (2004). These researchers adapted the motivation scale used by Sheldon and Kasser (1998) for use with street kids. The first item ("In general, I do things because I have fun doing them.") assesses intrinsic motivation. The second item ("In general, I do things because I choose to do them so I can reach my goals.") assesses identified motivation. The third item ("In general, I do things because I would feel guilty if I did not do them.") assesses introjected motivation. The fourth item ("In general, I do things because I don't want to let other people down.") assesses externally regulated motivation. Finally, the fifth item ("In general, I do things, but I don't know why I do them.") assesses amotivation. Participants responded to each item on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*definitely no*) to 10 (*definitely yes*).

Family contact. Participants were asked some additional questions pertaining to their contact with family and with a most important adult that they had while growing up. The questions concerned frequency and type of contact. Participants were asked to indicate if they had *daily*, *weekly*, *monthly*, or *yearly* contact; and if this contact was *face to face*, *by phone*, or *another type of contact*.

Results and Discussion

Well-Being Items

In order to determine the factors underlying the array of well-being items, a principal components factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed. Following the analysis, two factors emerged. The first factor accounted for 46.8% of the total variance. Items measuring depression, irritability, tiredness, anxiety, worry, and fearfulness loaded onto the first factor. The second factor accounted for 15.7% of the total variance. Items measuring confidence, hopefulness, and happiness loaded onto the second factor. The first factor represents negative well-being, while the second factor represents positive well-being.

From the factor analysis, it is evident that the well-being items fell into two subscales. The first, labeled *negative subjective well-being*, was reliable ($\alpha = .83$). The second, labeled *positive subjective well-being*, was also reliable ($\alpha = .84$). This is consistent with research showing that positive and negative affect are two distinct dimensions (e.g., Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). These two subscales, along with items assessing each of Ryan and Deci's (2000) five forms of motivation, were used as dependent variables in the analyses designed to test the hypotheses.

Descriptive Information

Street kids reported significantly greater positive well-being ($M = 6.58$, $SD = 2.66$) than negative well-being ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 2.72$), $t(49) = 2.23$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). Of all the well-being items, participants gave the highest ratings to the questions assessing happiness, followed by confidence, hopefulness, and then tiredness.

The street kids appeared to be self-determined, as would a normally motivated individual, as they gave their highest ratings to intrinsic motivation and their lowest ratings to amotivation. On an 11-point scale (ranging from 0 to 10), mean scores were as follows: amotivation, 3.69 ($SD = 3.57$); external regulation, 4.61 ($SD = 3.60$); introjection, 5.04 ($SD = 3.37$); identified motivation, 7.06 ($SD = 2.72$); and intrinsic motivation, 8.23 ($SD = 2.16$; see Table 1).

The pattern of relationships among the motivation items was also examined. These correlations reveal a trend that is consistent with the quasi-simplex pattern typically found in self-determination research. As expected, intrinsic motivation was marginally positively related to identified motivation ($r = .27$, $p = .06$), the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation;

Table 1

Motivation and Well-Being

Motivation and well-being indexes	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intrinsic		
“In general, I do things because I have fun doing them.”	8.23	2.16
Extrinsic		
Identified: “In general, I do things because I choose to do them so I can reach my goals.”	7.06	2.72
Introjected: “In general, I do things because I would feel guilty if I did not do them.”	5.04	3.37
Externally regulated: “In general, I do things because I don’t want to let other people down.”	4.61	3.60
Amotivation		
“In general, I do things, but I don’t know why I do them.”	3.69	3.57
Subjective well-being		
Positive	6.58	2.66
Negative	5.11	2.72

but it had a negative, nonsignificant relationship with the more externally regulated forms (introjection, $r = -.16$, *ns*; external regulation, $r = -.13$, *ns*), and a negative, marginally significant relationship with amotivation ($r = -.27$, $p = .06$). Furthermore, there was a marginally significant, positive relationship between identified and introjected motivation ($r = .27$, $p = .06$).

When examining their reported contact with family, street kids' responses were somewhat surprising. Many of them indicated still having contact with their families or with the most important adult that they had while growing up. There were 74.0% in the sample who still had contact with family, with more contact by women (80.0%) than men (69.0%). In addition, 77.6% of the sample still had contact with the most important adult to them while growing up. The majority of contact with the most important adult was frequent. That is, 63.2% of participants who still had contact with their most important adult indicated either daily or weekly contact. Furthermore, this contact most often consisted of phone or face-to-face contact: 94.7% of participants who still had contact with their most important adult indicated phone or face-to-face contact.

Striking here is that the street kids do not appear to be as blatantly bad off as one might expect. When comparing their motivation and well-being scores to those reported by non-homeless youth group members used as a control group in Taylor et al. (2004), it is evident that there are only slight differences between the scores of the current sample of street kids and the scores of the youth group members. For example, for amotivation, identified motivation, and intrinsic motivation, the current sample of street kids reported means of 3.69, 7.06, and 8.23, respectively. The youth group members reported similar, although not identical, means of 4.00, 8.50, and 8.20 for amotivation, identified motivation, and intrinsic motivation, respectively. See Taylor et al. (2004) for all motivation and well-being scores of youth group members. Street kids' subjective well-being scores were not exceedingly poor, nor did they demonstrate extremely high levels of amotivation, even compared to youth group members, or low levels of self-determined motivation. Furthermore, they maintained a surprising amount of contact with family.

Indeed, there is more to street kids than their apparent dysfunction. For this reason, it is important to explore other important aspects of their lives and whether factors known to be associated with self-determined motivation and well-being in mainstream samples will be similarly related to adaptive functioning in street kids. We now turn to an analysis of the factors hypothesized to explain some of the variability in street kids' motivation and well-being.

Social Network Size

Not all street kids indicated having all types of close relationships in their social networks (i.e., best same-sex friend, best opposite-sex friend, and

romantic partner). It was found that 70.0% of the street kids reported having a same-sex best friend, and 66.0% reported having an opposite-sex best friend. Approximately half of the street kids (52.0%) had a romantic partner. We examined the number of close peer relationships in a participant's social network and if this was related to motivation and subjective well-being. Again, it was noted when a best friend and a romantic partner were actually the same person, and this was taken into account in the analysis.

A simple measure of social network size was calculated by examining the number of close relationships the participants reported having. Participants who indicated having no close friends or a romantic partner were assigned a rating of 0. Those who indicated having one (either a close friend or a romantic partner) were assigned a 1; those who indicated having two (either close friends or a close friend and a romantic partner) were assigned a 2; and those who reported having a same-sex best friend, an opposite-sex best friend, and a romantic partner were assigned a rating of 3.

This measure of social network size is limited to assessing the number of the participants' different relationship types. That is, it takes into account different types of relationships, but does not account for the participant having more than one of each relationship type (e.g., three same-sex best friends). We chose this measure for its simplicity, as well as to ensure that participants were not reporting all of their friends/acquaintances, but only those relationships that were considered to be very close.

Social Network Size: Relationship With Motivation and Well-Being

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, social network size was positively and significantly related to identified motivation ($r = .43, p < .01$; see Table 2) and to introjected motivation ($r = .28, p < .05$). Those with a higher number of close peer relations had higher levels of internalized motivation. External regulation was not significantly correlated with social network size nor was amotivation or intrinsic motivation.

Again, consistent with Hypothesis 1, social network size was positively and significantly correlated with positive subjective well-being ($r = .35, p < .05$; see Table 2). However, the relationship between social network size and negative subjective well-being was nonsignificant.

Consistent with SDT, when asked only about best friendships and romantic relationships, participants indicated having close relationships. The number of close relationships was significantly related to two relatively internalized forms of motivation, as well as to positive subjective well-being.

Because the street kids had such a surprising amount of contact with a family member or a most important adult, we wondered if this type of social

Table 2

Correlations Between Social Network Size, Motivation, and Well-Being

	Social network size
Motivation and well-being indexes	
Intrinsic	
"In general, I do things because I have fun doing them."	.07
Extrinsic	
Identified: "In general, I do things because I choose to do them so I can reach my goals."	.43**
Introjected: "In general, I do things because I would feel guilty if I did not do them."	.28*
Externally regulated: "In general, I do things because I don't want to let other people down."	.18
Amotivation	
"In general, I do things, but I don't know why I do them."	-.06
Subjective well-being	
Positive	.35*
Negative	-.03

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

connection might also be associated with motivation and well-being. However, we found that contact with family or a most important adult was not significantly related to any of the dependent variables. Similarly, the type of contact with family and with the most important adult (face to face, phone, or other) had no significant relationship with motivation and well-being.

Personal Projects

All of the participants except one indicated that they had a personal project that they had been thinking about, and all of these participants were able to answer the questions pertaining to their personal projects. Although they indicated that they had a project and answered questions about it, 4 participants did not specify exactly what their project was.

Personal projects ranged from getting a job and getting off the streets to becoming good at basketball to finding a family member. McGregor and Little (1998) coded personal projects recorded by their participants as *agentic* (characterized by mastery, power, and self-enhancement), *communal* (characterized by intimacy, solidarity, and connection with others), and *hedonistic* (characterized by having fun or experiencing pleasure). Using the same coding scheme with the current sample of street kids, we found that 64.4% ($n = 29$) of participants reported having projects that were agentic in theme (e.g., get off streets, return to school, get a job), 17.8% ($n = 8$) of participants reported having personal projects that were communal in theme (e.g., find my mother, get a girlfriend, get married), and 17.8% ($n = 8$) of participants reported having projects that were hedonistic in theme (e.g., go on a bike trip, travel around the world, grow marijuana).

Street kids' goal pursuit was examined using an analysis of their responses to questions assessing how long they had been thinking about their personal project, if they thought they would complete it, and how much they had done so far to complete it. The relationship between these items, motivation, and subjective well-being was investigated in order to determine if participants' goal pursuit was related to their adaptive psychological functioning.

Personal Project Pursuit: Relationship With Motivation and Well-Being

Length of time thinking about the personal project was significantly correlated with identified motivation ($r = .30, p < .05$; see Table 3), and marginally significantly correlated with introjected motivation ($r = .25, p < .10$). Reported progress on the project was also marginally significantly related to identified motivation ($r = .24, p = .10$) and to introjected motivation ($r = .24, p = .10$). Expectations of completion were marginally negatively related to external regulation ($r = -.24, p = .10$), but not to any other form of motivation.

Length of time thinking about the project was positively related to positive subjective well-being ($r = .31, p < .05$; see Table 3), but not with negative well-being. Expectations of completion and progress toward completion of the project were not significantly related to subjective well-being.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the relatively internalized forms of motivation were related to goal pursuit. Length of time thinking about the project, as well as progress made on the project is perhaps indicative of the degree to which participants have successfully internalized the project. Furthermore, expectation of completion was marginally negatively related to external regulation. A weak, negative relationship here indicates that external regulation actually is associated with more negative, pessimistic expectations

Table 3

Correlations Between Goal Pursuit, Motivation, and Well-Being

Motivation and well-being indexes	Personal project pursuit		
	Thinking about project	Expectation of success	Reported progress
Intrinsic			
“In general, I do things because I have fun doing them.”	.16	-.06	.09
Extrinsic			
Identified: “In general, I do things because I choose to do them so I can reach my goals.”	.30*	.12	.24†
Introjected: “In general, I do things because I would feel guilty if I did not do them.”	.25†	-.18	.24†
Externally regulated: “In general, I do things because I don’t want to let other people down.”	.17	-.24†	.01
Amotivation			
“In general, I do things, but I don’t know why I do them.”	.05	-.12	-.05
Subjective well-being			
Positive	.31*	-.01	.19
Negative	.16	-.13	.04

† $p \leq .10$. * $p < .05$.

of success. In terms of subjective well-being, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported, as positive subjective well-being was associated with length of time thinking about the project, an indicator that having a project on one’s mind is related to positive well-being.

Additional Analyses

Because relatedness is seen as a primary need, according to a number of theories (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Singer,

2000), we suspected that a street kid's social network was perhaps of crucial importance. We were curious about its relationship with participants' personal projects, as we suspected that having a network of close relationships might be related to an individual's ability to be committed to and to complete a personal project.

Indeed, social network size was found to be significantly positively correlated with length of time thinking about a personal project ($r = .31, p < .05$), and with progress made toward completion of the project ($r = .32, p < .05$). Nevertheless, with mediational analysis, the direct effect of social network size on well-being remained significant, even when controlling for length of time thinking about the personal project ($\beta = .29, p = .05$).

General Discussion

Street Kids: Beyond Their Dysfunction

Above all, the present study points to the fact that street kids do not all personify the perception of them as the unhappy and aimless deviant. It was evident that not all of the youth who participated in this study reported very low levels of motivation and well-being. Inspection of other aspects of their lives, including their contact with family and even their relationships and personal projects, revealed information that contradicted the common perception of street kids. In folk theory and in past research, the loss of contact with family is thought to define homeless youth (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005). However, a majority of the street kids in our sample still had contact with family and with a most important adult that they had while growing up.

Similarly, street kids have often been assumed to lack close peer relations (e.g., Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). However, when asked specifically about best friendships and romantic relationships, many of the street kids in past samples (e.g., Ennett et al., 1999) and in the current research indicated having close peer relations. Furthermore, for a group thought to have no clear goals (Taylor et al., 2004), the street kids were almost all able to articulate an important personal project.

Although past research has often painted them as alienated and unhappy, we see that some of the expected relationships evident in mainstream samples also hold for street kids. Indeed, self-determination theory, a theory developed with mainstream individuals, was used successfully to explain some of the variability in the street youth's adaptive functioning.

Close Relationships

Self-determination research with mainstream samples has shown that a network of close peer relationships can serve as a reference group that models valued behaviors important for internalized motivation; motivation that is necessary for the pursuit of important goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such a network of good quality relationships also provides social support, buffering the stresses of day-to-day life (Hartup, 1996). Although street kids are distanced from the mainstream, the benefits of a social network still apply.

More than any other factor explored in the present study, social network size has the most important relationship with adaptive functioning in street kids. Our analysis shows that the size of participants' social networks of close peer relationships was not only positively related to positive subjective well-being and internalized motivation, but also to personal project progress and to length of time thinking about the project. Both of these were also related to internalization and positive subjective well-being.

We suspect that social network size is key here. Based on SDT, we propose that having a network of close peer relationships may foster internalized motives, as well as thinking about and progress toward completion of a personal project. Personal project pursuit then, in turn, may further increase internalized motivation and subjective well-being. This suggests that social networks may have a direct, health-promoting effect on subjective well-being, and an indirect effect by promoting personal projects that enhance subjective well-being.

From the data that we currently have, we cannot establish causation. An alternative explanation for the aforementioned findings is that young people with greater well-being and internalized motivation are more successful at making close friends and at pursuing goals. Ideally, one would study this longitudinally, but such a design would be difficult for a study of street kids. A second strategy is to gain a more in-depth understanding of street kids, the quality of their peer relationships, the length of these relationships, and the extent to which they actually achieve their goals. This might deepen our understanding of the links between close relationships, internalization, and well-being among street kids.

Another factor that merits further consideration is family. Although the majority of street kids indicated still having contact with a family member or a most important adult while growing up, this contact was surprisingly unrelated to motivation and subjective well-being. We did not anticipate participants reporting such a high level of family contact, and thus did not have items assessing more detailed information about the quality of such contact. Street kids' relationships with their families are undoubtedly complex. We have no data exploring if these youths were forced out of their

homes by their families, if they fled because of adverse childhood environments, or if they simply sought to embrace an anti-normative identity. Future research needs to investigate more thoroughly street kids' family contact in order to uncover potentially important and complex relationships between family, motivation, and well-being.

Personal Projects

When given the opportunity to specify their important goals and to respond to questions about them, we found that street kids were quite capable of doing so. Consistent with SDT, participants with more internalized motives were more serious about their goal pursuit. The length of time thinking about a personal project was positively related to identified and introjected motivation, and actual progress on the project was marginally significantly related to identified motivation and to introjected motivation. In addition, length of time thinking about the project was associated with more positive subjective well-being.

Capitalizing on personal project analysis, we were able to analyze the goals of a group of young people thought to lack the ability to have definable and coherent goals. Interestingly, the expected relationship between goal pursuit and adaptive functioning held. Again, we cannot establish causation. It may be that pursuing a goal leads to increased motivation and well-being, or that motivation and well-being lead one to pursue a goal, or even that another factor accounts for this relationship. However, from the current study it is clear: If we look beyond street kids' apparent dysfunction, we find that, much like a mainstream sample, the pursuit of important goals, motivation, and well-being are positively related.

Methodological Considerations

The nature of the participants in the present study necessitated a small sample size and measures that were simple and brief. Street kids are a difficult population with whom to conduct research, as it is not easy to find a time or place where these youths are well-rested and able to concentrate (Taylor et al., 2004). Thus, engaging the cooperation and trust of 50 street kids is an important feat in itself. Furthermore, we had to ensure that the measures were simple, so as to provide the street kids with an understandable way of reporting their reality. Admittedly, more complex measures may have given us a clearer picture of street kids' existence. However, we did not want to sacrifice the accessibility of our items. Specifically, our items assessing

intrinsic motivation, amotivation, and negative well-being require further consideration.

Our item assessing intrinsic motivation ("I do things because I have fun doing them.") may have been influenced by a societal association between fun social events and risky behavior. Taylor et al. (2004) noted that much of street kids' day-to-day behaviors (e.g., unorganized activity; alcohol and drug use; sexual promiscuity) could be easily interpreted by street kids as being very enjoyable. Taylor et al. suggested that the usual link between intrinsic motivation and well-being may not hold for street kids, as doing things for the enjoyment of doing them may include engaging in activities that are, in fact, psychologically unhealthy. Indeed, this may be a broader point pertaining to the use of nonspecific measures of intrinsic motivation in research conducted in all young populations.

Given that risk-taking behavior is often seen as normative, even among mainstream youth, future research would be enhanced by a more specific measure of intrinsic motivation. Vallerand, Blais, Brière, and Pelletier (1989) suggested three categories of intrinsic motivation: intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation to accomplish things, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. Such categories might be appropriate for use with street kids, and even with mainstream samples of youth, in order to pinpoint more precise relationships between self-determined motivation and factors associated with adaptive functioning. For example, the current sample of street kids might strongly endorse an item assessing intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, but might be less likely to endorse either intrinsic motivation to know or to accomplish things—both of which might be more strongly associated with goals and close relationships.

Similar to Vallerand et al. (1989), Pelletier, Dion, Tuson, and Green-Demers (1999) distinguished between four classes of amotivation: strategy beliefs, ability beliefs, effort beliefs, and helplessness beliefs. Again, our nonspecific measure of amotivation ("In general, I do things, but I don't know why I do them.") would be improved if it were to assess more specifically these different forms of amotivation. In this way, we could potentially uncover a more exact and accurate relationship between close relationships, goals, and amotivation among street kids.

Our measure of negative subjective well-being also requires further attention. Subjective well-being is characterized by the presence of positive mood and the absence of negative mood (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is only the first aspect of subjective well-being (i.e., presence of positive mood) for which we found significant relationships. Perhaps social desirability was a factor and street kids felt more comfortable endorsing a wide range of values for items such as happiness, hopefulness, and confidence than they did for negative items. However, the range of responses and the standard deviations for

positive and negative well-being scores were similar ($SDs = 2.66$ and 2.72 , respectively).

Another possibility is that positive and negative subjective well-being related to two different classes of variables. Watson et al. (1988) reported that positive affect is related to social activity and satisfaction and to the frequency of pleasant events; whereas, negative affect is related to self-reported stress and poor coping, health complaints, and frequency of unpleasant events. The present study did not focus directly on the litany of problems experienced by street kids, but rather asked them about their social networks and personal projects (future pleasant events), both relatively positive life components previously associated with positive affect. Moreover, the social context of living on the street may be the most significant factor accounting for the negative side of well-being. Thus, it is logical that we only found significant relationships for positive subjective well-being.

Given the unique nature of our sample and our use of measures developed specifically for this sample, it would be interesting to examine further how motivation, goals, well-being, and social networks are simultaneously related among non-homeless youth using methodology similar to ours. Self-determination research provides us with general theoretical and empirical evidence for the associations between these variables in mainstream samples. However, in order to ascertain if the specific relationships we found are unique to street kids, it is now important to apply our measures to a non-homeless sample. The strategy here would be to test non-homeless youth with an identical instrument so their responses can serve as a benchmark with which we could better understand the profile of homeless youth. This would also increase the feasibility of longitudinal designs that may allow us to tease apart the pattern of correlations we obtained.

Suggested Application of Research Findings

In order to design a functional program of support for street kids, it is important to go beyond their dysfunction and to understand the factors in their lives that help them cope and that cause them harm. A focus on fixing their potential dysfunction may not be nearly as effective as actually understanding their psychological reality. In the present study, we used a social psychological model to learn more about a particular subset of people of which little is known. Our findings can be used to identify what is, in fact, working for street kids and to successfully illuminate a clearer path to their optimal functioning.

Above all, we know that street kids' close peer relations are of critical importance. Our analyses show that the size of their social networks of close

peer relationships was not only directly related to positive well-being and self-determined motivation, but also indirectly related to positive well-being through goal pursuit. The assumption that street kids' close relationships only contribute to their deviance and maladaptive functioning has not been validated. When attempting to understand the complex psychological reality of street kids, we now know that the existence and maintenance of close peer relationships serves a crucial function.

Similarly, the pursuit of goals appears to be of great importance for street kids. Indeed, simply thinking about a personal project was related to positive well-being and internalized motivation. Thus, even for individuals who appear listless, amotivated, and incapable of having important goals (Taylor et al., 2004) the development of goals and goal pursuit is still valuable.

Individuals and organizations who work with street kids can use knowledge of these important relationships to help facilitate street kids' adaptive functioning. Although we cannot establish causation, we have identified aspects of street kids' lives that have a positive relationship with motivation and well-being. Encouraging the development and maintenance of close peer relationships and the articulation and pursuit of personal projects among street kids may have a positive and promising effect on their adaptive functioning.

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