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(Editors)

# Life Goals and Well-Being

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# Be Careful What You Wish For: Optimal Functioning and the Relative Attainment of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goals

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## Summary

We propose that a full understanding of the relationship between optimal functioning and personal goals depends on understanding how goals relate to basic psychological needs. Results from two samples of U.S. college students show that well-being outcomes are differentially associated with a focus on extrinsic aspirations (financial success, social recognition, and appearance) versus intrinsic aspirations (self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling). Across ratings of the importance, likelihood of attainment, and current attainment of goals, findings suggest that a relative focus on extrinsic goals is either negatively or neutrally related to well-being, whereas a focus on intrinsic goals is associated with greater well-being. Extrinsic goals are further shown to be associated with lower self-esteem and more television consumption (Sample 1) and greater drug use and a lower quality of relationships with friends and romantic partners (Sample 2).

Much of the contemporary architecture of social-personality research rests upon the concept of personal goals. That is, a person's proactive strivings to bring about desired outcomes are believed to be fundamental building blocks of behavior and thought, and to play a role in the development of one's self-concept and identity (Emmons, 1996; Pervin, 1989). People "take on" or "internalize" different life goals and personal projects in adapting to their social environments (Cantor, Norem, Langston, Zirkel, Fleeson, & Cook-Flanagan, 1991; Little, 1989), and these internalized goals become central characteristics of who one is (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

Because of the numerous ways goals are important to individuals' functioning, it is not surprising that characteristics of individuals' goals affect their well-being. From previous research one can derive at least four propositions concerning how characteristics of personal goals relate to well-being. First, people who have goals that they value or identify with are generally happier than people who do not have valued goals (Emmons, 1986). Second, feeling optimistic that one can attain one's goals is generally beneficial for well-being (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1996). Third, people who feel they are making sufficient progress towards their goals achieve well-being enhancement (Brunstein, 1993). Fourth, perceiving that one has successfully completed, fulfilled or attained one's goals contributes to happiness

(Emmons, 1991).

Because different life goals direct people to engage in different life styles associated with their pursuit, it is reasonable to wonder whether *all* types of goals are equally facilitative of well-being. It may even be that some goal pursuits yield negative effects on well-being, even when the goals involved are successfully achieved. Indeed, many theorists have insisted that "all goals are not created equal" (Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). For instance, Aristotelian thought suggests that true well-being or "eudaimonia" comes not from the mere satisfaction of desires, but rather from the satisfaction of "right desires" associated with self-growth and the realization of meaning (see Waterman, 1993; Ryff, 1989). Humanistic traditions endorse related views that a focus on "having" versus "being" goals detracts from true well-being (Fromm, 1976), and that behaving to gain others' approval causes lower well-being than acting from authentic motives (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1963). Similarly, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Ryan, 1993) has proposed that when goals fulfill basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy, people will experience personality growth and integration. In contrast, when goals are focused on obtaining rewards and praise, motivation tends to be externally regulated and uninformed by needs, leading to decrements in adjustment (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) applied these humanistic and organismic ideas to goals by distinguishing between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* pursuits. Extrinsic goals are those that focus on outcomes that are not primarily satisfying "in themselves," but rather are engaged in for the reflective or "public admiration" they typically engender. For instance, wealth, appearance, and fame goals all concern outcomes that presumably heighten one's status in the eyes of others (at least within consumeristic cultures). In contrast, intrinsic goals are those defined as more directly satisfying of inherent psychological needs such as relatedness, autonomy, or personal growth (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995; Ryan, 1995). For example, goals for community or affiliation directly concern relatedness needs, and thus generally provide inherent satisfactions.

On the basis of this theoretical distinction, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) then suggested that people who have internalized and placed their strongest values upon intrinsic goals, which closely relate to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, are highly likely to engage in behaviors and have experiences which yield well-being. In contrast, investment in extrinsic goals, even when achieved, may not contribute to growth or integration. This is presumably because such goals fail to directly satisfy basic needs and because they may distract one from investing in more congruent, intrinsically-oriented goals. Further, extrinsic pursuits may entail ongoing engagement in more pressured, controlling, and competitive settings that are frequently rather stressful and unpleasant, thus working against one's health and well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan, et al., 1996; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

Substantial research documents these claims. For example, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) have demonstrated in samples of United States adolescents, college students, and adults that placing a stronger emphasis on extrinsic goals (e.g., financial success, appearance, or social recognition) relative to intrinsic goals (e.g.,

affiliation, self-acceptance, and community feeling) is associated with lower well-being. Similar patterns of results have been obtained by asking subjects about both the relative importance and the relative likelihood of attainment of goals, such that a high focus on extrinsic goals is associated with lower well-being. Although these relationships between different types of goals and well-being were originally demonstrated in the United States, recent research in Russia (Ryan, Chirkov, Little, Sheldon, Timoshina, & Deci, 1999), Germany (Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, in press), and Singapore (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2000) has shown the cross-cultural generalizability of this finding. What's more, Sheldon and Kasser (1998) have reported longitudinal data showing that making progress at one's goals only benefits well-being when the goals are intrinsic, not when they are extrinsic.

Recall the summary of goal research with which we began this chapter, and the four basic findings that could be reached from this work: When people value, expect to attain, are making progress at, and have attained their goals, their well-being is high. Of these four conclusions, three (i.e., valuing, optimism, and progress) have been shown to be modified when considering the intrinsic versus extrinsic content of the goals being pursued. That is, the extent to which well-being is enhanced by placing a high value on goals, feeling competent at goals, and making progress at goals all depend on whether the goal is intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. The primary purpose of the research presented in this chapter is to demonstrate that this qualification holds for the fourth conclusion as well. Specifically, we present a recent study examining whether the *attainment* of intrinsic and extrinsic goals differentially relates to well-being.

Three possible predictions concerning how the attainment of extrinsic goals relates to optimal functioning could be made, each of which has some empirical support. First, the work of Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) suggests that especially valuing or expecting to attain extrinsic goals relative to intrinsic goals is negatively related to well-being. This would lead to the hypothesis that the relative attainment of extrinsic goals is negatively associated with well-being. Second, the very fact of making progress and attaining goals may be inherently satisfying (Omodei & Wearing, 1990), as it provides individuals with feelings of competence and efficacy (Bandura, 1989; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, attainment of any type of goal, including extrinsic ones, may benefit well-being by satisfying needs for competence. Third, Sheldon and Kasser (1998) found that whereas progress at intrinsic goals helped people increase their well-being, progress at extrinsic goals had neither beneficial nor detrimental effects on changes in well-being. Thus, it may be that the relative attainment of extrinsic goals is neither beneficial nor detrimental to optimal functioning. This fits with recent discussions by Schwartz (1994) and Richins (1994) who suggest that extrinsic satisfactions tend to yield more superficial and fleeting positive effects.

Because our past research as well as our current theory (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan et al., 1996) suggests that a high relative attainment of extrinsic goals will not enhance well-being, we hypothesize that the perceived attainment of intrinsic goals will be positively related to well-being, whereas extrinsic goal attainment will not contribute to, and in some cases may detract from, well-being outcomes.

A second purpose of this chapter is to broaden the types of measures used to assess "well-being" in our program of research. Although we hoped to replicate findings from previous studies by assessing people's self-actualization, vitality, depression, and anxiety, we also hoped to demonstrate that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction relates to several other aspects of what it means to function in an optimal, healthy manner.

For example, in one sample of participants collected for this chapter, we examine the relation of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals to self-esteem. Previously, we have suggested that one reason for focusing on extrinsic outcomes is because of a low inner sense of security or esteem (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995). Specifically, someone who felt either insecure or "contingently" loved (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Rogers, 1961) may be especially prone to viewing extrinsic goals such as wealth, fame, and appearance as a means of becoming esteemed or admired. Procuring externally visible outcomes that convey "outery" worth may reflect a compensatory attempt to obtain a sense of "inner" worth. In Sample 1, we therefore hypothesize that the more people are invested in and confident about extrinsic versus intrinsic goals, the lower their global self-esteem.

Another significant marker of psychological health is the quality of one's relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; McAdams & Bryant, 1987; Ryan, 1993; Ryff, 1989). We thus examine in Sample 2 whether individuals who differ in their intrinsic versus extrinsic goal emphasis also differ in the quality of their personal relationships. There are several reasons for suggesting that individuals who are more oriented towards intrinsic goals will have higher quality relationships. First, goals for affiliation and community, both of which load on the "higher order" factor of intrinsic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), are directly indicative of investments in relationships. It thus follows that people who rate such goals as important may actually put more effort and care into their relationships with others, resulting in better quality outcomes in this domain. Second, Kasser et al. (1995) showed that individuals oriented toward materialistic goals were more likely to have experienced childhood environments characterized by cold, controlling maternal care. It may be that extrinsically oriented individuals have, on average, experienced less nurturant caregiving, leading them to form "internal working models" (Bretherton, 1987) of others that are less optimal for developing higher quality relationships. Finally, extrinsically oriented people also have been shown to be more competitively (versus cooperatively) oriented (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000), and accordingly may experience less mutuality in their relationships. For all of these reasons, we suggest that those participants who place relatively more emphasis on extrinsic goals will evidence poorer relationships with friends and romantic partners than those who are more intrinsically focused.

Finally, we examined participants' engagement in two types of activities often used to distract attention from stress and difficulties in life (Baumeister, 1991): namely watching television (Sample 1) and using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (Sample 2). Sheldon and Kasser (1995) showed that individuals whose personal strivings were especially oriented toward extrinsic "possible futures" were particularly likely to engage in "distracting" behaviors such as these during a two-



week span. Conceptually, watching television and engaging in substantial drug use can be considered forms of "self-medication" that people may engage in to help them cope with an extrinsic life style which fails to satisfy their psychological needs, and the insecurities that led them to adopt such a life style. In this study, we will attempt to support this notion by examining whether extrinsically oriented individuals are likely to watch more television and use more drugs than are intrinsically oriented people.

In summary, this paper examines whether optimal functioning is differentially associated with intrinsic versus extrinsic goal importance, perceived likelihood, and perceived current attainment. We expect that people who are relatively oriented toward extrinsic versus intrinsic goals, as revealed by ratings of importance and goal likelihood, are likely to experience lower well-being and greater distress. We also examine associations between well-being and ratings of the perceived current attainment of goals, with the expectation that the perceived attainment of extrinsic goals will be negatively, or at best neutrally, related to well-being. Finally, we make similar predictions for the variables of self-esteem, television consumption, drug usage, and quality of interpersonal relationships.

## Methods

### Participants and Procedures

Two samples of United States college students filled out survey packets for extra credit in their lower-level psychology classes. Sample 1 participants included 120 students (61 male; 59 female) at a private university in the northeast. Of these, 92 were Caucasian and 28 were from four other ethnicities. Surveys were administered by trained assistants in small groups of approximately 25. Sample 2 participants were 261 students at a state university in the western U.S. Of participants responding to demographic information, 98 were male and 153 were female; 232 were Caucasian, with the rest being other races. Students in Sample 2 picked up a packet of questionnaires during class, completed the packet at their leisure, and returned it to a research assistant's office.

## Measures

### Aspiration Index (AI)

Both samples of students were presented with a set of potential goals they might have and asked to rate them on three dimensions: the importance that the goal be attained in the future, the likelihood (or chances) that it will be attained in the future, and the current level of attainment of the goal. Sample 1 rated, on a five-point scale, the same 32 goals used by Kasser and Ryan (1996); Sample 2 was presented with an expanded,

modified version of the Aspiration Index involving 46 goals rated on a nine-point scale.

Both surveys assessed the four types of intrinsic and three types of extrinsic aspirations measured by Kasser and Ryan (1996). The intrinsic aspirations included:

- *Self-acceptance* aspirations for growth, meaning, and competence in life;
- *Affiliation* aspirations for close relationships with lovers and friends;
- *Community feeling* aspirations to help better the world and the lives of others; and
- *Physical health* aspirations to feel physically well.

The three extrinsic aspirations included:

- *Financial success* aspirations to have a great deal of money and material possessions;
- *Social Recognition* aspirations to be famous, admired, and well-known; and
- *Appealing appearance* aspirations to present an attractive "look" or physical image to others.

Past research has demonstrated the test-retest reliability (Ryan, 1998) and internal reliability (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996) of these seven scales, and has shown via higher order factor analysis that intrinsic and extrinsic goals are distinct for both importance and likelihood ratings (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

Importance, likelihood, and current attainment scores were first computed for each subscale (e.g., importance of affiliation, attainment of financial success) by averaging the relevant items. We then created summary *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* scores for each dimension by averaging the relevant goal contents (i.e., self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical fitness for intrinsic and financial success, appearance, and social recognition for extrinsic goals). In order to assess the relative centrality (Rokeach, 1973) of different types of goals in subjects' goal systems, we computed *relative intrinsic/extrinsic aspiration scores* by subtracting subjects' summary extrinsic ratings from their summary intrinsic ratings, within a particular dimension. For example, to find the relative importance of intrinsic goals to a subject, we subtracted his or her extrinsic importance score from his/her intrinsic importance score. This results in a variable indexing the relative importance subjects place on intrinsic compared to extrinsic goals, with a high score reflecting a strong intrinsic orientation and a low score reflecting a strong extrinsic orientation.

### Well-Being Measures

Participants in both samples completed three measures of well-being: 1) the 15-item Self-Actualization Scale (Jones & Crandall, 1986); 2) the 7-item Subjective Vitality scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997); and 3) the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression scale (Radloff, 1977). To measure anxiety, Sample 1 participants completed the 20-item trait version of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory-Revised (Spielberger, Vagg, Barker, Donham, & Westberry, 1980), whereas Sample 2 participants completed the 6-item anxiety subscale of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974). In both samples, higher-order factor analyses of these scales suggested a single factor; thus, a summary *Well-being* variable was formed by standardizing the four scores and



subtracting anxiety and depression scores from self-actualization and vitality scores.

### Self-Esteem

was assessed in Sample 1 using the 10-item Global Self-esteem subscale of the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory (O'Brien & Epstein, 1988), which taps perceived general self-worth.

### Television Usage

was measured by asking Sample 1 participants how many hours they spent watching TV on an average day, on a 5-point scale.

### Drug Use

Participants in Sample 2 reported how often in the last year they had "gotten drunk," "smoked marijuana," and "done hard drugs" on 5-point scales (1=zero; 5=more than ten times). Subjects also reported how many cigarettes they had smoked on a typical day in the last year, in an open response format. After transforming responses to these four questions into z-scores, we conducted a factor analysis on them, which yielded one factor. We therefore averaged the four items to form a composite *Drug Use* variable.

### Relationship Quality

Sample 2 participants were asked a series of questions<sup>4</sup> about their "love relationships" and "close friendships." First, subjects reported the length of time in years of their longest love relationship and longest close friendship. Next, they were presented with a series of adjectives (e.g., trust, jealousy) based on Hazan and Shaver (1987) and asked how much they characterized "your most important love relationship" and "your friendships" separately. Adjectives were rated on a 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much) scale. Factor analyses of the adjectives suggested a two-factor solution for both friendships and romantic relations. One factor reflected positive characteristics (happiness, friendship, trust and acceptance), while the other reflected negative characteristics (emotional extremes, jealousy, and obsessive preoccupation). We averaged adjective ratings on each of these factors to form positive and negative characteristics for both friendships and romantic relationships. Next, we conducted two factor analyses (for friendship and romantic relationship scores separately) involving the z-scored positive and negative characteristics variables and the length of relationship variable. Both analyses yielded one factor solutions, so we then formed summary *friendship* and *romantic* relationship scores for analytic purposes by averaging the three relevant scores, after first reversing the negative characteristic score.

## Results

### Relations Between Goals and Outcomes

First, we examined correlations between the relative intrinsic/extrinsic aspiration scores and the various measures used to assess psychological health in the two samples. Table 1 reports correlations of aspiration ratings with the summary well-being, self-esteem, and television usage variables from Sample 1, and Table 2 reports correlations of aspiration ratings with the summary well-being, drug use, and relationship quality variables from Sample 2.

**Table 1.** Correlations of relative intrinsic/extrinsic aspiration scores with well-being, self-esteem, and amount of time spent watching television – Sample 1

Aspiration	Well-Being	Self-Esteem	Television
Importance	.36**	.20*	-.31**
Likelihood	.29**	.18	-.27**
Attainment	.49**	.38**	-.16

Note: \*= $p < .05$ ; \*\*= $p < .01$ . Relative aspiration scores for each dimension are computed by subtracting extrinsic ratings from intrinsic ratings.

As can be seen in Table 1, the more highly Sample 1 subjects rated the relative importance of intrinsic relative to extrinsic aspirations, the greater their well-being and self-esteem and the less television they watched. People who believed their likelihood of attaining intrinsic aspirations was high compared to extrinsic aspirations also reported higher well-being and less time spent watching television. Similarly, rating the current attainment of intrinsic aspirations relatively highly compared to extrinsic aspirations was associated with greater well-being and self-esteem.

**Table 2.** Correlations of relative intrinsic/extrinsic aspiration scores with well-being, drug use and quality of romantic relationships and friendships – Sample 2

Relative Aspirations	Well-Being	Drug Use	Romantic Relationships	Friendships
Importance	.19**	-.36**	.27**	.30**
Likelihood	.13*	-.13**	.20**	.20**
Attainment	.22**	-.03	.26**	.23**

Note: \*= $p < .05$ ; \*\*= $p < .01$ . Relative aspiration scores for each dimension are computed by subtracting extrinsic ratings from intrinsic ratings.

Turning now to Sample 2, we find that the pattern of correlations with well-being is quite similar to that from Sample 1, although the magnitude of these relations was somewhat weaker. Subjects who rated the importance of intrinsic aspiration highly reported greater well-being, less drug use, and better relationships with friends and lovers than did those oriented toward extrinsic aspirations. Ratings of likelihood of





attainment for the two types of goals also differed, with intrinsically oriented individuals experiencing greater well-being, better relationships, and less drug use than extrinsically oriented individuals. Finally, high relative attainment of intrinsic aspirations was associated with greater well-being and better relationships.

Because the computation of the relationship quality variables involved the length of subjects' relationships, it is possible that results involving these variables were due to differences in subjects' ages. That is, older subjects necessarily have more opportunity to have longer relationships, and since older individuals are sometimes more intrinsically oriented (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), significant correlations between relationship quality and aspirational content may in fact be due to subjects' age. We therefore reran the analyses presented in Table 2 as partial correlations, controlling for subjects' age. Results were essentially unchanged, suggesting that age does not explain the nature of these results.

### Attainment of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goals

As a second way of examining how the relative attainment of intrinsic and extrinsic goals is associated with well-being, we first converted the summary intrinsic and extrinsic attainment scores to z-scores. Recall that these scores in and of themselves do not represent the relative centrality of the different types of goals. Based on whether these attainment z-scores were above or below zero (i.e., a median split), we assigned subjects to one of four groups:

- those high in the perceived attainment of both intrinsic and extrinsic goals;
- those high in the perceived attainment of only intrinsic goals;
- those high in the perceived attainment of only extrinsic goals; and
- those low in the perceived attainment of both types of goals.

Thus, this analysis allowed us to examine whether individuals who scored high in the perceived attainment of both types of aspirations (or low in both types) differed from those scoring high on only one or the other types of aspirations. This question is not well-answered by previous analyses due to the computation of the relative intrinsic/extrinsic score, which does not capture the dynamics of individuals who rate both types of aspirations similarly.

ANOVAs were next conducted to determine whether any differences existed between the four groups. Significant results in Sample 1 were obtained for well-being ( $F(3, 106)=15.19, p<.001$ ) and self-esteem ( $F(3, 106)=9.98, p<.001$ ), but not for television ( $p=.55$ ). For Sample 2, the four groups were found to differ from each other on all four measures of optimal functioning: overall well-being ( $F(3, 236)=16.40, p<.001$ ); drug use ( $F(3, 242)=3.23, p<.05$ ); and quality of relationships with both romantic partners ( $F(3, 235)=6.03, p<.001$ ) and friends ( $F(3, 239)=3.21, p<.05$ ). It should be noted that none of these analyses revealed significant interactions with gender. Cell means and standard deviations for each of the four groups on the optimal functioning variables are presented in Table 3.

Next, planned *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between the four groups on the measures of functioning. First, we conceptually replicated the results

reported in Tables 1 and 2 by comparing Group 2 participants (who were high only in intrinsic goals) with Group 3 participants (who were high only in extrinsic goals). In Sample 1, Group 2 was significantly higher in both well-being ( $t(42)=4.18, p<.001$ ) and self-esteem ( $t(43)=3.14, p<.01$ ). In Sample 2, Group 2 participants evidenced higher well-being ( $t(55)=3.47, p<.01$ ) and a higher quality of relationships with friends ( $t(55)=3.00, p<.01$ ) and romantic partners ( $t(55)=3.86, p<.001$ ) than did Group 3 participants; they did not differ on drug use however ( $p=.45$ ).

Next, to determine whether people who have attained intrinsic goals would be better off if they also attained extrinsic goals, we compared Groups 1 and 2. The two groups were not significantly different on any measure in either sample (all  $p$ 's  $>.21$ ). In fact, some of the non-significant trends indicated that the addition of extrinsic attainment to intrinsic attainment actually worsened adjustment.

**Table 3.** Means and standard deviations of psychological health variables for the four groups differing in the relative attainment of intrinsic and extrinsic goals – Samples 1 & 2

	Group 1 High Intrinsic/ High Extrinsic		Group 2 High Intrinsic/ Low Extrinsic		Group 3 Low Intrinsic/ High Extrinsic		Group 4 Low Intrinsic/ Low Extrinsic	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Sample 1</b>								
Well-Being	.49	.66	.49	.65	-.29	.58	-.46	.79
Self-Esteem	39.63	7.28	38.55	7.13	32.52	5.75	31.41	8.12
Television	1.59	1.02	1.33	.80	1.80	1.16	1.62	.87
<b>Sample 2</b>								
Well-Being	.23	.68	.15	.59	-.49	.79	-.41	.79
Drug Use	-.17	.45	-.27	.43	-.19	.28	.08	1.32
Romantic Relations	.22	1.80	.65	1.67	-1.26	1.83	-.47	2.12
Friendship	-.06	1.84	.58	1.82	-1.02	2.05	.04	1.84

In order to determine if attaining only extrinsic goals was better for well-being than attaining no goals at all, we compared Groups 3 and 4. In Sample 1, results revealed that attaining extrinsic goals was not significantly associated with enhanced well-being or self-esteem, compared to attaining neither intrinsic or extrinsic goals ( $p$ 's  $>.37$ ). Comparison of individuals in Sample 2 who reported high attainment of only extrinsic goals versus those who reported low attainment of both types of goals yielded a mixed pattern of results. For well-being, there were no differences between the groups ( $p=.67$ ), replicating the results in Sample 1. However, less drug use was reported by people who had attained extrinsic goals, ( $t(94)=-1.99, p<.05$ ); and better relationships were reported by people who had attained no goals compared to those who had attained only extrinsic goals (for romantic partners ( $t(76)=-1.44, p=.15$ ); for friendships ( $t(79)=-2.15, p<.05$ ).

Clearer results emerged from the comparison of people who had only attained intrinsic goals (Group 2) with those who were relatively low in the attainment of both types of goals (Group 4). In Sample 1, Group 2 participants had higher well-being



( $t(57)=4.61, p<.001$ ) and self-esteem ( $t(57)=3.33, p<.01$ ) than did those in Group 4. In Sample 2, attaining intrinsic goals was associated with greater well-being ( $t(98)=3.76, p<.001$ ), lower drug use ( $t(114)=-3.23, p<.01$ ) and higher quality romantic relations ( $t(95)=2.72, p<.01$ ), compared to being low in the attainment of both types of goals.

In sum, results from these ANOVAs suggested that the attainment of intrinsic goals generally benefited one's functioning in life, while attaining extrinsic goals did little to aid individuals.

## General Discussion

The current chapter demonstrates that a fuller understanding of how personal goals relate to well-being necessitates consideration of the content of goals. Specifically we distinguish between intrinsic goals, which (on average) are congruent with the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, and extrinsic goals, which are typically irrelevant or counter to these needs because of their focus on higher status, image and other publicly visible attainments.

In two samples of U.S. college students, we found a consistent pattern that valuing, expecting to attain, and perceiving oneself to have attained intrinsic goals was positively associated with a variety of features of healthy functioning. In contrast, valuing, expecting to attain, and perceiving oneself to have attained extrinsic goals was not associated with such beneficial outcomes. For the value and likelihood of attainment dimensions, results replicated and extended past work: A high relative focus on extrinsic goals was associated with lower levels of well-being. For perceived current attainment, results were somewhat more complex. Correlations with relative intrinsic/extrinsic scores generally showed that high attainment of extrinsic goals was negatively or neutrally associated with functioning. Negative relations also emerged when individuals high in only the perceived attainment of extrinsic goals were compared with individuals high in only the perceived attainment of intrinsic goals. Other analyses showed that attaining extrinsic goals was sometimes neutrally related to optimal functioning, in that if intrinsic goals were reported as attained (or not attained) the addition of extrinsic goals was neither beneficial nor detrimental to well-being. In only one case, for drug use, did the attainment of extrinsic goals appear to benefit psychological functioning.

The bulk of these findings are thus inconsistent with a standard "goals" perspective which suggests that well-being results from valuing, feeling efficacious about, making progress in, or succeeding at goals that have been internalized into the self-concept. Such perspectives lack theoretical concepts by which to explain why attaining certain types of goals is more beneficial than attaining others, or why the relative attainment of certain types of goals actually relates negatively to well-being. However, by considering how goals relate to basic or fundamental psychological needs, such results can be made sensible. Our understanding of these findings is that because goals organize behavior and the experiences a person consequently has,

intrinsic and extrinsic goals lead people to have experiences that are differentially supportive of their psychological needs. An emphasis on intrinsic goals may lead to more enriching and existentially meaningful endeavors, whereas a focus on extrinsic goals may lead to more fleeting satisfactions and outcomes concerned with social-comparison, which in themselves do not meet basic psychological needs.

In additional findings we showed that extrinsically-oriented people use drugs, cigarettes and alcohol more frequently than those who are more intrinsically-oriented. One speculation is that drug and alcohol use reflects a means of self-medication that is more widely employed by extrinsically-oriented individuals, who must ongoingly cope with stress from their less satisfying goal pursuits, and/or the etiological factors, such as lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity, which potentially led them to their goal orientation. Results also suggested that TV consumption is especially related to endorsing extrinsic goals. We interpreted this finding in terms of TV as a stress reliever, used much like drugs and alcohol. However, an alternative interpretation is that those who watch TV actually develop more extrinsic values as a result of the modeling to which they are exposed within this media. For example, Cheung and Chan (1996) recently showed that materialistic values were higher, and moral sensibilities lower, among Hong Kong adolescents who were greater consumers of TV. In their path model they suggested that the causal influence was from TV to these outcomes. Similarly, Murphy and Miller (1997) found an association between television consumption and a self-concept focused on false needs and consumerism. Thus, it may be that television consumption leads individuals to become more extrinsically oriented, though our current results are causally ambiguous and do not test this supposition directly.

Finally, results indicated that extrinsically-oriented individuals have more difficult and less satisfying relationships. Generally speaking, they had shorter relationships colored by jealousy and emotional extremes and lacking in trust and acceptance. This was predicted on the basis of the finding that individuals oriented towards extrinsic goals have failed to receive the nurturing they need in order to develop a healthy sense of self-worth (Kasser, et al., 1995), and in terms of the lower value placed on relationships as a life goal. Further, extrinsic goals are associated with acting in a relatively narcissistic (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and competitive (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000) manner with others, which does not support the development of high quality relationships. This is a particularly poignant finding, especially when one considers that behind an extrinsically oriented individual's behavior may lie a desire to be loved and admired. That is, we suspect that extrinsic goals often represent a perceived means toward the end of feeling worthy and good, but one always mediated through an "other's" eyes.

There are a variety of weaknesses to the data reported in this chapter, most notably the correlational nature of the findings, which preclude causal conclusions. Additionally, the measures primarily rely on self-report; future research that provides more objective measures of the attainment of different types of goals is warranted. Concern about the self-report nature of the studies may be mitigated some by the fact that past research has found relationships with well-being by using interviewer ratings of functioning (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) and after controlling for the socially



desirable response tendency (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Our indices of television and drug usage were also somewhat crude, and could be further refined to better understand these experiences. Finally, although the fact that results were derived from U.S. college students may lead one to question the generalizability of the results, we remind the reader that similar patterns of results have been found with U.S. adults (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and with samples from other cultures (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2000; Ryan, et. al, 1999; Schmuck, et. al, 2000). Nonetheless, it is important to explore whether the relationships between aspirations and well-being are similar in individuals from other cultures and socio-economic circumstances.

## Conclusion

An analogy to nutrition may help elucidate and summarize the findings presented in this study. From our perspective, success at intrinsic aspirations provides experiences that satisfy basic psychological needs and thus facilitate growth and well-being. Success at extrinsic aspirations is either irrelevant to people's needs, or, when such goals are overly focused on, can lead to frustration of needs, and thus unhappiness and a lack of well-being. If we consider intrinsic goals to be like apples, and extrinsic goals to be like chocolate cake, we can see why well-being differs among the four groups presented in Table 3. People who ingest many apples and not much cake (high intrinsic, low extrinsic) are healthier than people who gorge on cake and never eat apples (low intrinsic, high extrinsic). Further, people who eat both apples and cake (high intrinsic, high extrinsic) are no healthier than those who only eat apples (high intrinsic, low extrinsic), as cake provides no nutritive value above apples. Similarly, the health of people who eat only chocolate cake (low intrinsic, high extrinsic) is no better than those who eat nothing at all (low intrinsic, low extrinsic), as neither group receives the nutrients it needs for health.

Our analogy stresses the idea that the nutrients of psychological growth and social integrity do not come from simply making progress at any goals (i.e., eating anything). Indeed, we suggest that part of psychology's mission must include investigation of not only how people can be more efficacious at goals, but more importantly what kind of goal pursuits promote the health and well-being of individuals, their communities, and the biosphere in which human lives and cultures are embedded.

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