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Rich Inner Life

Happiness, Meaning, and Psychological Richness



Principle

There are multiple ways to have a good life include more pleasure, more meaning, or more psychological richness.

Quote

“a psychologically rich life is one type of a good life and is actively favored even over a happy life or a meaningful life by a minority of individuals across a diverse set of cultures.”

So What - Application

If a rich inner life is one element of well-being, along with happiness and meaning, we could consider what we want for ourselves.

If we want a richer inner life, we could creating varied, novel experiences, say yes to new things, travel, and add other diverse experiences to our lives.

A psychologically rich life carries more intense positive and negative emotions, so we could learn to tolerate negative emotions without getting carried away by them.

The Research Story

Twenty-three researchers from all over the world studied psychological richness as a part of a good life.

Researchers often describe happiness in terms of happiness and pleasure or meaning and purpose. This research proposes psychological richness as a part of well-being. A psychologically rich life has more diversity and novelty, but it also has more negative emotions and risks. The researchers wanted to know that, given the potential negative side of a richer life, do some people still want it?

They asked 3,728 participants from 9 different countries to describe in their own words the ideal life they would like to lead. Then they rated how 15 different words described their ideal life: 5 happy words (stable, comfortable, simple, happy, pleasant), 5 psychologically rich words (eventful, dramatic, interesting, full of surprise, psychologically rich), and 5 meaningful words (meaningful, fulfilling, virtuous, sense of purpose, involves devotion). Then they asked which life they would lead if they could only choose one: a happy life, a meaningful life, or a psychologically rich life. They also completed questionnaires about their current levels of happiness and meaning.

So how did people describe their ideal lives? In 7 of the 9 countries, they described lives that were happy and meaningful more than psychologically rich. However, even though a psychologically rich life was last, it wasn't small. Ratings ranged from 3.7-5.62 out of 7. It didn't matter much whether people already had happy or meaningful lives.

When forced to choose, between 7-17% of people chose a psychologically rich life, depending on the country. A strong minority of people want a psychologically rich life and describe ideal lives that are relatively rich.

In a second study they asked 1611 American and 680 Korean participants what they regretted and if they could undo the event (which presumably would make their life better), would their lives have been happier, more meaningful, or psychologically richer. 28% of Americans and 35% of Koreans wished they were living a psychologically richer life.

Oishi, S., Choi, H., Koo, M., Galinha, I., Ishii, K., Komiyama, A., Luhmann, M., Scollon, C., Shin, J., Lee, H., Suh, E. M., Vittersø, J., Heintzelman, S. J., Kushlev, K., Westgate, E. C., Buttrick, N., Tucker, J., Ebersole, C. R., Axt, J., ... Besser, L. L. (2020). Happiness, Meaning, and Psychological Richness. *Affective Science*, 1(2), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-020-00011-z>

