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A Psychologically Rich Life: Beyond Happiness and Meaning

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Psychological science has typically conceptualized a good life in terms of either hedonic or eudaimonic well-being. We propose that psychological richness is another, neglected aspect of what people consider a good life. Unlike happy or meaningful lives, psychologically rich lives are best characterized by a variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences. We present empirical evidence that happiness, meaning, and psychological richness are related but distinct and desirable aspects of a good life, with unique causes and correlates. In doing so, we show that a nontrivial number of people around the world report they would choose a psychologically rich life at the expense of a happy or meaningful life, and that approximately a third say that undoing their life's biggest regret would have made their lives psychologically richer. Furthermore, we propose that the predictors of a psychologically rich life are different from those of a happy life or a meaningful life, and report evidence suggesting that people leading psychologically rich lives tend to be more curious, think more holistically, and lean more politically liberal. Together, this work moves us beyond the dichotomy of hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being, and lays the foundation for the study of psychological richness as another dimension of a good life.

Keywords: happiness, meaning in life, psychological richness

Aristotle opens the Nicomachean Ethics by considering various candidates for the good life: a life of pleasure, a life of honor, a life of wealth or health or eminence. Or, as Aristotle himself argues persuasively, a life led in accordance with virtue and excellence (i.e., *areté*, Thomson, 1955). Of these, only two have survived the test of time: the pleasurable life (despite Aristotle's admonitions) and the eudaimonic life (i.e., Aristotle's preferred contender). In the millennia since Greek philosophers debated the question, Aristotle's conception of "the good life" has proliferated into many fine-tuned theories of well-being (see Vittersø, 2016, for a comprehensive review). However, the strong dichotomy between these two prevailing models—hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being—continues to dominate psychological research on the good life. Yet this dichotomy limits psychology by overlooking many lives that do not fit neatly within it. In this article, we move beyond the eudaimonic–hedonic divide to suggest a third contender for a good life: a psychologically rich life—or a life characterized by a variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences. Together with happiness and meaning, we suggest that psychological richness constitutes an element of a life well lived.

We define a *good life* as a life well lived from the perspective of the person living it, as opposed to a purely objectivist perspective (i.e., whether most people would recognize it as such; see Sumner, 1996, for a philosophically grounded discussion on subjective versus objective theories of a good life). Psychologists have advanced many broad theories of subjective well-being (see Diener, Oishi, et al., 2018, for review), ranging from dispositional and genetic (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) to motivational and need-fulfillment accounts (Emmons, 1986; Higgins, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). These existing theories address many fundamental questions, from how to explain stable individual differences in well-being, and the temporal processes (e.g., adaptation) underlying them, to the types of life events and conditions facilitating it (Luhmann et al., 2012; Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). Many models focus on social cognition, from the role of attention and appraisal in shaping well-being (Kurtz, 2008; O'Brien & Ellsworth, 2012) to the judgments people draw about their own and others' happiness (Gilbert, 2006; Kahneman, 1999; Robinson & Clore, 2002). Other theories have focused specifically on the benefits of positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2001) and increasing happiness (Dunn et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). However, none of these theories address the central question of what it means to live a good life, or the type of ideal life people imagine for themselves. In other words, because they do not ask what kind of life people *want* to live, we do not know if current concepts of happiness and meaning comprehensively cover the possibilities.

To preview, we argue that a psychologically rich life is one such life that people desire, which is unaccounted for by current conceptualizations of well-being. A psychologically rich life, we will show, is related to (but distinct from) a happy or a meaningful life, with distinct causes and consequences (see Besser & Oishi, 2020, for a philosophical overview). To be clear, we do *not* claim that

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psychological richness is wholly independent of happiness or meaning; as empirical evidence shows, the three often correlate positively with one another. Rather, we argue that it is beneficial to treat them as three interrelated but distinct aspects of a good life. Nor do we claim that a psychologically rich life is better or preferable to a happy or a meaningful life. Rather, our aim is simply to open up the conceptual space; as part of this, we do not claim there can be *only* three dimensions to a good life. Our goal here is only to introduce a possible third dimension; there could in fact be many more such, a possibility we discuss in detail later.

This approach argues that psychological richness, happiness, and meaning constitute three elements of a subjectively well-lived life (see Table 1). As such, our model provides a more comprehensive account than the extant dichotomous model governing much of well-being research: namely, the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. We review this work below, before drawing on classic work in literature and philosophy to make the case for why it is insufficient to account for the full range of human experience. Finally, we introduce empirical evidence for *psychological richness* as a dimension of the good life distinct from happiness and meaning.

The Existing Dichotomy of a Good Life: Hedonic Versus Eudaimonic Well-Being

Previous work has conceptualized well-being in terms of either hedonic (e.g., Diener, Lucas, et al., 2018; Kahneman, 1999) or eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993). Hedonic well-being focuses on feelings of positive affect and life satisfaction. Eudaimonic well-being focuses on a sense of optimal functioning and realizing potential (Vittersø, 2016). Although this dichotomy has moved the empirical study of well-being forward over the past three decades (see Besser-Jones, 2014; Haybron, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tiberius, 2008 for review), it has also diverted research attention away from other forms of well-being. Below, we review these two prevailing conceptualizations—the happy life and the meaningful life—and introduce a third currently missing possibility: the psychologically rich life.

A Happy Life

We define a happy life as one characterized by high life satisfaction and a high positive-to-negative affect ratio (i.e., frequent positive affect paired with relatively infrequent negative affect, such as anger or sadness). Several decades of research shows that a happy life (i.e., hedonic well-being) is characterized by pleasantness, comfort, safety, security, and stability (Diener, Lucas, et al., 2018; see Table 1).

People leading happy lives tend to be blessed with material and relational wealth. For instance, income is modestly but consistently associated with greater happiness and life satisfaction (e.g., Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Killingsworth, 2021). People with higher socioeconomic status (SES) report greater life satisfaction (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012), as do those with greater job security (Helbling & Kanji, 2018). In particular, having cash on hand (or in savings), rather than money in stocks and investments, predicts perceived financial security, which in turn predicts higher life satisfaction (Ruberton et al., 2016). Finally, marital satisfaction consistently predicts happiness (e.g., Carr et al., 2014), as does regular interaction with friends and neighbors (e.g., Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). In short, a happy life is attained via stable economic and interpersonal conditions.

However, even when objective conditions are not conducive to happiness, people are sometimes able to reconstrue them to be so (Taylor & Brown, 1988). For instance, optimism protectively buffers against cancer, bereavement, and even war (Carver et al., 2010). Pursuing gain, as opposed to trying to prevent loss, is associated with happiness (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Higgins et al., 2014), as is gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Whereas unhappy people desire the unattainable, happy people come to terms with less-than-perfect options (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999). Happy people are not bothered when others do better than them, whereas unhappy people are (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). As William James (1950) famously stated, "To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified" (p. 311). Indeed, the smaller the gap between aspirations and realities, the higher people's satisfaction (Campbell et al., 1976). Accordingly, satisficing, as opposed to maximizing, is associated with happiness (Schwartz et al., 2002). Prolonging pleasurable experiences (via savoring) offers another such strategy (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Kurtz, 2008).

In short, a happy life is characterized by stable interpersonal, financial, and political environments (Diener, Oishi, et al., 2018), and is facilitated by certain mindsets, including optimism, gratitude, savoring, satisficing, and approach orientations. Not surprisingly, most people want a happy life; Voltaire reportedly claimed that happiness is the only thing worth living for (Tatarkiewicz, 1976).

Table 1
Three Dimensions of the Good Life

Component	A happy life	A meaningful life	A psychologically rich life
Key features	Comfort	Significance	Variety
	Joy	Purpose	Interest
	Security	Coherence	Perspective change
Facilitators	Money	Moral principles	Curiosity
	Time	Consistency	Time
	Relationships	Relationships	Energy
	Positive mindset	Religiosity	Spontaneity
Outcomes	Personal satisfaction	Societal contribution	Wisdom
Measurement			
	Life satisfaction	Meaning in life	Psychologically rich life
	Positive affect	Subjective meaning	Psychologically rich experience

Empirical studies agree; 69% of respondents across 42 countries rated happiness as "extremely important" (7 on a 7-point scale), even more so than health and money (Diener, 2000).

However, a happy life does not fully capture what it means to live a good life. Happy people tend to be prosocial and make numerous contributions to society via, for instance, donating and volunteering (Dunn et al., 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Yet, happiness is sometimes associated with system justification, resistance to change, and insensitivity to inequality and social injustice (Butz et al., 2017; Napier & Jost, 2008; see, however, Kushlev et al., 2020). In this sense, a happy life *can* be a complacent life (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998). We contrast this, below, with a meaningful life.

A Meaningful Life

We define a meaningful life as the subjective self-appraisal that one's life and experiences have meaning. There is a great deal of conceptual diversity in the literature on how to define such meaning (see Martela & Steger, 2016; Steger, 2009). We highlight three elements common to many existing definitions: (1) significance, or the subjective sense that one's life matters (George & Park, 2014), (2) coherence, the extent to which life roles and experiences fit together into a coherent whole (Baumeister, 1991; Heine et al., 2006), and (3) purpose, the perception that one's life has direction and contributes to something greater than the self (Reker et al., 1987). As such, individuals leading meaningful lives tend to be actively engaged and committed to societally important causes (Wolf, 1997). Indeed, Aristotle defined the eudaimonic person as "one who is active in accordance with complete virtue ... not for some unspecified period but *throughout a complete life*" (Book I, 1100b27–1101a20; italics added). Good deeds must be repeated to build lasting contributions; for instance, routines are positively associated with meaning in life (Heintzelman & King, 2019), perhaps because they assist in doing so.

We should note that meaning in life, on its own, does not fully reflect all elements of eudaimonic well-being. For instance, some theorists emphasize self-realization, rather than meaning, as its defining characteristic (Vittersø, 2016). Others, such as Waterman (1993), focus on personal expressiveness, which is closely related to authenticity (Schlegel et al., 2009). Likewise, self-determination theorists consider intrinsic motivation (and accompanying satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs) to be critical (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al., 2008). Finally, Ryff (1989) conceptualizes eudaimonia as the confluence of all the above: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose, and personal growth.

Despite this conceptual diversity, measures of eudaimonic well-being all correlate highly with each other. For instance, autonomy, competence, and relatedness all correlate strongly with meaning in life (rs = .55–.71 in Martela et al., 2018). Likewise, purpose in life correlates strongly with Ryff's overall psychological well-being (r = .75, Garcia-Alandete, 2015), as does Waterman et al.'s (2010) eudaimonic well-being (r = .63). In short, people who engage in activities that foster authenticity and satisfy intrinsic motivations (such as autonomy and competence), who practice self-acceptance, and who pursue positive relationships and personal growth also tend to lead meaningful lives.

Beyond the Dichotomy: Examples From Literature and Philosophy

Although a happy life and a meaningful life represent ideals for many people (Kashdan et al., 2008; King & Napa, 1998), they overlook at least one important dimension of a good life and, in doing so, struggle to account for the full range of human experiences. In Nietzsche (1978) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the title character casts happiness and meaning as banal, observing that others "would laud and lure me into a small virtue; they would persuade my foot to the ticktock of a small happiness. I walk among this people ... they have become smaller, and they are becoming smaller and smaller; but this is due to their doctrine of happiness and virtue" (pp. 168–169). Instead of "small" happiness and meaning, Zarathustra advocated the life of the wanderer: "Peak and abyss ... are now joined together. You are going your way to greatness .... your ultimate danger has become your ultimate refuge" (p. 152).

Taking Zarathustra's advice to heart, we explore this third ideal, and an alternative to happiness and meaning: the psychologically rich life. A psychologically rich life is best characterized by a variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences. A significant reason neither a happy life nor a meaningful life captures the full range of human motivation is that both happy and meaningful lives *can* be monotonous and repetitive. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard (2004) proposes the "aesthetic" life as an antithesis to the "ethical" life. The ethical life, he warns, can be monotonous, dreadful, and boring, and lauds the value of the arbitrary as an antidote: "One should therefore always keep an eye open for the accidental, always be *expeditus* if anything should offer" (p. 240). According to Kierkegaard, a married person with a secure, well-respected job and children may have a happy and (in many respects) meaningful life, but not necessarily a life rich in diverse perspective-changing experiences. Although most people choose such a conventional, secure, social, and well-respected life, others like James Joyce's (2003) alter ego Stephen Dedalus choose the esthetic wanderer's life instead—unconventional, unstable, and uncompromising.

Consider another example: The character Goldmund in Hermann *Narcissus and Goldmund*. Both Narcissus and Goldmund are students in a monastic cloister; Narcissus stays in the cloister and devotes himself to a life of orderly contemplation and virtue, leading an Aristotelian eudaimonic (or "ethical") life. In contrast, Goldmund flees to live as a vagabond. Toward the end of the novel, Narcissus reflects upon his own life compared to Goldmund's:

> "Seen from the point of view of the cloister, his own [Narcissus'] life was better, righter, steadier, more orderly, more exemplary ... It was much purer, much better than the life of an artist, vagrant, and seducer of women. But, seen from above, with God's eyes—was this exemplary life of order and discipline ... any better than Goldmund's life?" (p. 297).

Narcissus wonders whether the dramatic life Goldmund led was not also a good life. We think many would say it was (and report evidence to this effect later). Goldmund's life is a psychologically rich one, despite its lack of material goods or comforts.

How do we account for such lives within empirical psychology? We argue the current dichotomy between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being overlooks a third possibility: the psychologically rich life. To remedy this oversight, we introduce the concept

of *psychological richness* and hypothesize that the features, causes, and consequences of a happy life, a meaningful life, and a psychologically rich life systematically differ, as laid out in Table 1.

First, we theorize that a psychologically rich life is characterized by variety, interestingness, and perspective change; in contrast, a happy life is characterized by comfort, joy, and stability, and a meaningful life by purpose, significance, and coherence. Thus, we predict that different resources will differentially facilitate happiness, meaning, and psychological richness. For instance, we hypothesize that curiosity, spontaneity, and energy will facilitate a psychologically rich life; strong moral principles and religiosity will facilitate a meaningful life; and stable relationships, time, money, and positive mindsets will facilitate a happy life. Finally, we predict that these three aspects of a good life ultimately contribute to different life outcomes—whereas happiness leads to personal satisfaction, and meaning to societal contribution, psychological richness leads to wisdom.

To be clear, although some people's lives may be higher on one dimension than others, happiness, meaning, and richness represent three components or *dimensions* of the good life, rather than independent *types* of life, strictly speaking. Presumably, some lucky people may lead a life high in all three dimensions (e.g., a happy, meaningful, and psychologically rich life), while others may be high in just two dimensions (e.g., a life that is meaningful and happy, but not psychologically rich), and others high in only one dimension (or none). We elaborate on each of these predictions below before reporting empirical support for our claims in the second half of the article.

The Causes and Facilitators of a Psychologically Rich Life

We predict that certain situational and individual characteristics are more likely to yield psychologically rich experiences, which in turn make up a psychologically rich life.

Situational Characteristics

Novelty, complexity, and changes in perspective should give rise to psychologically rich experiences, which in turn form the building blocks of a psychologically rich life. As such, certain situations may be more likely to facilitate psychological richness than others. We generated a preliminary list of such features via qualitative data outlining the contours of a psychologically rich experience. In two focus groups (12 undergraduates and 10 graduate student/postdoctoral researchers, respectively), members described a happy experience, a personally meaningful experience, and a psychologically rich experience. These groups converged on a description of psychologically rich experiences as those involving novelty, variety/complexity, and a change in perspective.

For instance, a 19-year-old undergraduate from a wealthy suburb of Washington D.C. described attending a professional wrestling event as a particularly rich experience. Her first time at such an event, she did not know much about professional wrestling; she went in with stereotypic expectations of fake violence and cheesy drama. To her surprise, she discovered professional wrestlers to be inspiring role models for children because, unbeknownst to her, the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) is heavily devoted to children's charities. She laughed, cheered, felt outraged and pained, and ultimately found herself deeply moved by the experience. She returned home with a changed perspective.

Unexpectedness (e.g., WWE's charitable work), novelty (e.g., first time at a wrestling event), complexity (e.g., not simple choreographed violence/drama), and a change in perspective (e.g., "Now I see why so many kids adore WWE wrestlers") made this experience much richer than a typical outing. In particular, this last feature—a personal change in perspective—appears integral to the experience of richness. Emotion theorists have argued that cognitive restructuring intensifies emotional experiences (Clore, 2011); the greater the cognitive distance between one's original and revised mental representations, the more intense the emotion. This kind of cognitive restructuring—abandoning old mental representations in response to new experiences—is very like the perspective change required of psychologically rich experiences. This is particularly clear when we compare another student's experience which, although novel and complex, was *not* rich. This second focus group member noticed a male student in her apartment complex's lounge studying shirtless. He was not conventionally handsome, and she began to wonder why he was shirtless in a public space, as the lounge was not particularly warm. Although this experience was novel, certainly surprising, and somewhat complex (i.e., his behavior was unusual and mystifying), it did not change her perspective in any way. Likewise, she did not experience diverse emotions; and thus, we theorize that her experience was not a psychologically rich one.

In short, a subjective sense of surprise, novelty, complexity, and perspective change seem critical to the experience of psychological richness. This is consistent with work on another construct quite similar to richness: interest. Berlyne (1949) concluded in his historical survey that interest was integral to the "everyday discussion of human behaviour" (p. 184), and later (1960) theorized that novelty, complexity, conflict, and uncertainty were key determinants of both interest and curiosity. Conflict occurs when a stimulus evokes multiple incompatible responses. For instance, new coworkers provoke psychological conflict, because they evoke both approach *and* avoidant responses (e.g., "Should I talk to them, or avoid them?"). Finally, Berlyne (1971, 1974) distinguished between judgments of interest and pleasure, illustrating that complexity increases pleasure, but only up to a point; in contrast, interest continues to increase in response to even very high levels of complexity. Such interest is thought to support basic behavioral and cognitive processes necessary for survival (e.g., Izard, 1991; Tomkins, 1962/2008). Tomkins (1962/2008) theorized that interest–excitement is a core feature of the human motivation that "enables individual sustained attention to complex objects" (p. 186). That is, he argues that perception, thinking, and behavior all require sustained interest, without which human beings would not thrive, and that such interest is activated by change and novelty (Izard, 1991).

More recently, Silvia and colleagues have applied appraisal theories to understanding interest (e.g., Silvia, 2005, 2008; Turner & Silvia, 2006; see also Harackiewicz et al., 2016; Litman, 2004; Sansone et al., 1992). Interest, according to Silvia, occurs when a person feels they have the capacity to make sense of novel and/or complex stimuli. For instance, paintings, poems, and polygons high in novelty and complexity (e.g., abstract art) are rated as more interesting (but less enjoyable) than simpler or familiar

stimuli, but only if people have the capacity to understand them. Thus, things that are enjoyable are not necessarily interesting, and things that are interesting are not necessarily enjoyable. Likewise, we suggest that happy experiences are not necessarily interesting or psychologically rich, and conversely that psychologically rich experiences are not necessarily pleasant.

In short, prior work on how novelty and complexity foster interest lays the foundation for our current concept of psychological richness. One major difference is that previous work has focused primarily on interesting *stimuli* or short-term affective states (i.e., feeling *interested*). We are interested in not just momentary elicitors of psychological richness, or even short-term subjectively rich experiences, but rather the long-term outcomes of *many* such accumulated rich experiences. Thus, we argue that a psychologically rich *life* consists of interesting *experiences* in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective.

Person Characteristics

Psychological richness is a function of the person, as well as the situation; for instance, curious people open to experience who should be more likely to lead complex and psychologically rich lives. Thus, we predict that openness to experience, characterized by "vivid fantasy, artistic sensitivity, depth of feeling, behavioral flexibility, intellectual curiosity, and unconventional attitudes" (McCrae, 1996, p. 323) should foster psychological richness. Curiosity in particular, we predict, should lead people to explore a broad range of interests (Kashdan et al., 2018), which may in turn trigger perspective shifts of the sort theorized to produce psychological richness. Notably, people who experience intense emotions also tend to lead more complex lives (Larsen & Diener, 1987). For instance, their social networks tend to be broader, shallower, and more complex. That is, instead of hanging out with the same friends or pursuing goals in a single life domain, affectively intense people hang out with wider groups of individuals and pursue diverse goals—and view these diverse life events and goals as personally important (Schimmack & Diener, 1997).

To be clear, we do not suggest that simply experiencing intense emotions and events is itself sufficient for a psychologically rich life. Rather, such events create a need for accommodation—how people subsequently make sense of and integrate these events is critical. For instance, people may explain similar life stories in many different ways (Bauer et al., 2008; McAdams, 2001; McLean et al., 2007). We suggest narrative complexity and accommodative processing are two important themes in such stories. Narrative complexity is the degree to which a story contains multiple roles and perspectives, motivations, complex emotional experiences, and contradictory aspects of the self. Higher scores indicate "successful or harmonious integration of differentiated perspectives, motivations, states, or self-aspects" (McAdams et al., 2004, p. 768), and are associated with openness to experience ($r = .52, p < .001$) and extraversion ($r = .24, p < .01$). Thus, we expect that people leading psychologically rich lives will tend to have complex life narratives. Accommodative processing, like cognitive restructuring, is the process by which people revise their "ordinary frame of reference to make sense of and integrate" extraordinary events (Perlin & Li, 2020, p. 2), and is thought, ultimately, to result in psychological maturity and wisdom (e.g., Helson & Roberts, 1994; King et al., 2000).

In sum, we hypothesize that openness to experience, curiosity, and affect intensity serve as fuel for the psychologically rich life. Because curiosity and openness encourage individuals to pursue and appreciate novel, complex, and potentially perspective-changing experiences, they constitute dispositional factors that facilitate the psychologically rich life.

The Consequences of a Psychologically Rich Life

Just as psychologically rich lives have unique facilitating causes, so too do they have distinct consequences. We hypothesize that although a lifetime of happiness gives rise to personal satisfaction, and a lifetime of a meaningful life to societal contribution, a lifetime of psychologically rich experiences should give rise to wisdom. Wisdom is a complex concept. Indeed, as Sternberg (1990) stated: "To understand wisdom fully and correctly probably requires more wisdom than any of us have" (p. 3).

One popular psychological definition of wisdom is factual and procedural knowledge about the fundamental pragmatics of life, which involve insight into life matters, and good judgment and advice about difficult problems (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Grossmann, 2017). Critically, wisdom goes beyond conventional knowledge, and is accompanied by awareness that one's insight is neither definitive nor universal. Wisdom is thus characterized by breadth and depth of knowledge along with humble and relativist mindsets. Such knowledge and mindsets are often "hard won from engagement with life, and therefore ... not exclusively cognitive but involv[e] a broader experience" (McKee & Barber, 1999, p.151). Individuals who have led a psychologically rich life presumably have done so via broad life experiences, in which they have encountered (and entertained) a variety of perspectives, and recognized life's complexity. Accordingly, a psychologically rich life should be associated with holistic thinking styles (Choi et al., 2007) and attributional complexity (Fletcher et al., 1986), which should in turn should give rise to wisdom. Thus, on their deathbed, a person who has led a happy life might say, "I had fun!" A person who has led a meaningful life might say, "I made a difference!" And a person who has led a psychologically rich life might say, "What a journey!"

Novel Predictions

In addition to introducing psychological richness, and arguing for its inclusion as an aspect of a good life, our model generates several novel predictions, which we outline in detail below.

Prediction #1: Psychological richness is distinct from happiness and meaning. We present empirical evidence that a happy life, a meaningful life, and a psychologically rich life are distinct (but related) constructs.

Prediction #2: Psychologically rich lives stem from distinct causes. We predict that psychologically rich lives stem from a variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences, and are facilitated by curiosity, time, and energy. We present evidence that the experiences and personality traits that characterize people with psychologically rich lives are distinct from those that characterize meaningful or happy lives.

Prediction #3: Psychologically rich lives predict distinct outcomes. We theorize that psychological richness predicts exploration and wisdom. For example, psychological richness should predict the degree to which college students take challenging courses and endorse progressive political attitudes. We present preliminary evidence for the unique

predictive value of psychologically rich lives, relative to meaningful or happy lives.

Prediction #4: The psychologically rich life is a good life. We present evidence that people desire psychological richness and consider it an aspect of a good life.

Empirical Evidence for the Three Dimensions of a Good Life

In the first half of the article, we reviewed examples from literature, psychology, and philosophy suggesting the existence of a third dimension of a good life: psychological richness. As a first step toward a programmatic investigation, we next present empirical evidence for the key predictions outlined above, namely, that a psychologically rich life is distinct from a happy or meaningful life, according to both self-report and informants and third-party observers (e.g., obituary studies). We then examine the personality and situational characteristics of people leading psychologically rich lives, and show that they are distinct from those leading meaningful or happy lives. Finally, we present evidence that psychological richness uniquely predicts political attitudes, emotional intensity, and challenge-seeking, and that it is a desirable and important part of people's self-described concept of a good life.

Psychological Richness Is Distinct From Meaning and Happiness (Prediction #1)

We begin by reviewing evidence that meaningful and happy lives are distinct and can be additionally distinguished from psychologically rich lives.

Psychometric Evidence

We asked a large sample of college students (n = 583) to report the extent to which their lives possessed the following characteristics: happy ["happy," "enjoyable," "comfortable," "unstable" (reversed), "sad" (reversed)], meaningful ["meaningful," "fulfilling," "purposeful," "meaningless" (reversed), "disorganized" (reversed)], and psychologically rich ["interesting," "dramatic," "psychologically rich," "uneventful" (reversed), "monotonous" (reversed)]. A 3-factor model, in which richness, happiness, and meaning represented three separate factors, was the best fit, and fit reasonably well.[1] In other words, richness, happiness, and meaning represented three distinct factors (see Table 2).

We formally tested this model against competing alternatives in a series of confirmatory factor analyses where psychological richness was *not* distinct from happiness or meaning. First, we tested a general 1-factor model, in which richness, happiness, and meaning formed interchangeable components of a "good life." This model fit poorly. Next, we tested a 2-factor model, comparing a psychologically rich life to the combination of a happy life *and* a meaningful life (i.e., equating happiness and meaning). This 2-factor model did not fit well either—nor did a different 2-factor model, combining a psychologically rich life and a happy life (i.e., equating happiness and richness). Finally, we tested a 2-factor model, comparing a happy life to the combination of a psychologically rich life and a meaningful life (i.e., equating richness and meaning). Once again, combining factors resulted in unacceptable fit indices. Overall, even the best-fitting 2-factor model fit significantly worse than the 3-factor model: $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 201.55$, $p < .001$. In short, combining psychological richness with meaning, or with happiness, yielded a poorer fit than a 3-factor model representing psychological richness as a distinct construct.

Table 2
Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Model Fits of All Five Potential Structural Models of a Good Life

Model	CFI	SRMR	χ^2	*df*
One-factor model				
Happy/meaning/richness as one factor				
Study 1	.760	.105	1,294.91	75
Study 2	.690	.091	775.03	75
Study 3	.697	.103	416.53	9
Two-factor model				
F1 (happy/meaning) and F2 (richness)				
Study 1	.795	.106	1,119.53	74
Study 2	.809	.091	677.60	74
Study 3	.936	.049	94.44	8
F1 (happy/richness) and F2 (meaning)				
Study 1	.872	.099	725.93	74
Study 2	.887	.093	431.13	74
Study 3	.736	.151	363.98	8
F1 (meaning/richness) and F2 (happiness)				
Study 1	.888	.088	645.95	74
Study 2	.900	.080	391.87	74
Study 3	.735	.140	364.73	8
Three-factor model				
F1 (happy) and F2 (meaning) and F3 (richness)				
Study 1	.927	.089	444.40	72
Study 2	.936	.078	274.49	72
Study 3	.951	.040	72.10	6

Note. CFI = comparative fit index. SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. We followed Hu and Bentler's (1999) recommendation to use a cutoff value close to .95 for Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) in combination with a cutoff value close to 0.09 for SRMR.

We replicated the 3-factor structure in two additional independent samples (*N*s = 348, 405; see Table 2). In the latter study (Oishi et al., 2021), in addition to the 15-item Good Life Scale (GLS) described above, we added additional measures in the form of the SWLS (Diener et al., 1985), Meaning in Life Questionnaire's (Steger et al., 2006) presence subscale, and the Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire (Oishi et al., 2019). Here each latent factor was indexed by the two scale scores (e.g., a happy life factor was indexed by the Satisfaction with Life Scale; SWLS and the 5-item happy life subscale of the GLS). As can be seen in Table 2, the fit was excellent.[2] In sum, a series of confirmatory factor analyses in three independent samples found that a 3-factor model, in which a psychologically rich life, a happy life, and a meaningful life are three distinct factors, fit participants' data best. Psychometrically, psychological richness cannot be reduced to an aspect of meaning or happiness.

Multitrait–Multimethod Approach

However, the above results rely solely on self-report. Thus, in the next studies, we incorporated informant reports to test convergent

[1] The error terms for all the reversed items were allowed to correlate in all the analyses reported in Table 2.

[2] In this study, one of the 2-factor models (combining happiness and meaning) fitted the data quite well, although a still significantly worse fit than the 3-factor model: $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 22.34$, $p < .001$.

and discriminant validity using a multitrait–multimethod approach (Oishi et al., 2019). First, we found the 17-item Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire (see appendix) to be highly reliable (Cronbach's α = .87–.93 across four studies[3]), with high 2-week test–retest reliability (r = .80). Self-reported psychological richness was positively correlated with informant reports, r = .35, p < .001 (see Table 3; 36% family members, 64% close friends). Furthermore, self-reported psychological richness was significantly *more* strongly correlated with informant reports of psychological richness than with informant reports of life satisfaction, positive affect, or meaning in life. In other words, the strongest agreement was between how psychologically rich an individual rated their own life and how rich their close friends and/or family rated it, suggesting that such ratings converged on the same construct. Finally, the key "monotrait–multimethod" coefficient was higher than the respective "multitrait–multimethod" coefficients, providing evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Oishi et al., 2019, study 1).

Finally, we examined the association between psychological richness and a common measure of eudaimonic well-being, namely, Ryff's (1989) six subscales, among 1,214 American adults. Self-reported psychological richness was moderately correlated with (but not identical to) self-acceptance (r = .54), purpose in life (r = .47), positive relations (r = .47), personal growth (r = .46), environmental mastery (r = .40), and autonomy (r = .27, p < .001). In all, across three factor-analytic studies and four psychometric validation studies we found that psychological richness is related to (but distinct from) happiness and meaning in life, according to both the participants themselves and people who know them well.

Obituaries

However, the majority of the above studies rely on college students, who are not only not representative, but also have lived out only a small portion of their lives. To address these methodological issues, we coded obituaries (Oishi & Choi, 2020, study 1). An obituary succinctly summarizes a person's entire life, providing an ideal data source for testing whether a person's life maximizes all three dimensions of a good life—happiness, meaning, and richness, all together—or only one or two. Three research assistants (blind to hypothesis) independently coded all obituaries published in the *New York Times* in June 2016, using 12 adjectives (i.e., "interesting," "dramatic," "eventful," and "psychologically rich," for the psychologically rich life; "happy," "comfortable," "secure," and "pleasant" for the happy life; "meaningful," "fulfilling," "sense of purpose," and "devotion" for the meaningful life). Once again, interrater agreement was substantial (intraclass correlations for psychologically rich life = .72; happy life = .68; meaningful life = .64). Whereas all three dimensions were moderately correlated in the college student self-report samples, this was not the case for the obituary codings. The more psychologically rich an obituary, the *less* happy the person's life was, (r [99] = −.26, p = .01), and the *more* meaningful (r = .37, p < .001). Happiness and meaning in life were not correlated, r = −.08, p = .43.

One psychologically rich life from the *New York Times* is Dr. Simon Ramo, an aerospace engineer who died at the age of 103. Dr. Ramo authored 62 books, developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and became the oldest person to receive a patent, at the age of 100. After receiving his PhD in physics and engineering, he worked for General Electronic and Hughes Aircraft until, fed up with management, he quit to launch his own company. He was quickly awarded a government contract to develop advanced missile technology, which he did in secrecy from his headquarters in a former Catholic church. His life was rated as not only psychologically rich, but happy and meaningful as well.

Like Simon Ramo, many of the people featured in the *New York Times* obituary section were quite extraordinary. Thus, we turned to a local newspaper in Charlottesville, Virginia, where we coded an additional 116 obituaries detailing the lives of ordinary people who passed between June and August of 2016 (Oishi & Choi, 2020, study 2). Consider Paula Zo, who was rated as leading a particularly rich life. Ms. Zo died at the age 62 in June 2016. Although she suffered from postpolio syndrome and experienced disability due to multiple illnesses, Ms. Zo spent her life advocating for foster children in her job as a social worker. She loved theater, and starred in a number of local plays and commercials, including her self-authored one-person play "Crazy Mama." At the time of her passing, Ms. Zo was working on a second autobiographical comedy about her life as "a handicapped wheelchair bound woman." Consistent with the *New York Times* obituaries, Virginians who led psychologically rich lives were rated as less happy, r [114] = −.26, p = .005. Psychological richness and meaning were unrelated in this sample (r = .04, p = .67); happiness and meaning only marginally so (r = .16, p = .09). Thus, in obituaries from a local Virginian paper, richness, happiness, and meaning were once again distinct.

Does this generalize beyond Americans? To find out, we coded 111 obituaries from a major Singapore newspaper, *Straight Times* (Oishi & Choi, 2020, study 3). Leading a psychologically rich life was unrelated to a happy life (r = .02, p = .88), but positively associated with a meaningful life (r = .42, p < .01); happiness and meaning were also positively correlated (r = .37, p < .01). An example of a psychologically rich life is Louis Cha, who died at age 94 in Hong Kong. Mr. Cha launched his career as a journalist in Shanghai, before transferring to Hong Kong, where he authored an enormously popular series of martial arts history novels from 1955 to 1972. During this time, he also penned anti-Mao articles, which landed him on an assassination list; he escaped by fleeing to Singapore for nearly a year. These same political views resulted in a blanket ban of his works in China, which lasted until 1984. Despite his popularity, Mr. Cha never authored another book after 1972. Instead, he continued to re-read and revise his own novels, which he found deeply moving. He would cry upon re-reading his favorite characters' breakup (the very same breakup that he himself had authored). Like Paula Zo, Louis Cha clearly experienced major challenges and setbacks in his life. Fleeing assassination is not a marker of a happy life. Yet, both Mr. Cha and Ms. Zo led extremely interesting, psychologically rich lives. Taken together, an internal meta-analysis of the obituaries from the *New York Times*, the *Daily Progress* (Virginia), and *Straight Times* (Singapore) overall finds psychological richness to be distinct from happiness in people's lives (meta-analytic correlation = −.17), and correlated only moderately with meaning (meta-analytic correlation = .28). Happiness and meaning were only weakly correlated (meta-analytic correlation = .21).

In sum, across ten studies (three factor-analyses, four psychometric scale validation studies with both self- and informant reports, and three obituary studies), we found convergent support for our

[3] Alphas = .93 in 203 college students, .93 in 409 MTurkers, .90 in 2,021 U.S. representative sample, .87 in Indian MTurkers.

Table 3
Self-Informant Correlations Between Richness, Happiness, and Meaning From Oishi et al. (2019, Study 1)

Measure	Informant reports					*M* (*SD*)
	1	2	3	4	5	
Self-reports						
1. Psychological richness	**.349****	.220**	0.15	.184*	−0.07	5.21 (.86)
2. Happiness	.260**	**.418****	.190*	.265**	−.188**	23.84 (6.07)
3. Meaning	.165*	.187*	**.320****	.216**	−0.055	4.65 (1.14)
4. Positive affect	.169*	.332**	0.156	**.317****	−.247**	3.78 (.61)
5. Negative affect	−0.062	−.243**	−0.017	−.247**	**.362****	2.36 (.60)
M (*SD*)	5.35 (.79)	25.35 (5.26)	5.15 (.88)	3.98 (.56)	2.26 (.60)	

Note. Self-report data were assessed twice over a 2-week interval; scores were averaged across timepoints. Measures represent the Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire's presence subscale, and the positive affect and negative affect subscales of the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences; SPANE (Diener et al., 2010). Convergent validity coefficients are bolded.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

prediction that the three dimensions of a good life—happiness, meaning, and psychological richness—are related but separable from one another.

The Sources of a Psychologically Rich Life: Who Experiences Richness and Why (Prediction #2)

Below, we present further evidence that these dimensions stem from distinct sources. We begin by noting individual differences in who leads a psychologically rich life, before reporting longitudinal and experimental evidence for what creates psychologically rich experiences.

Personality and Individual Differences

Who has a psychologically rich life? Across seven studies, a psychologically rich life was best predicted by openness to experience, meta-analytic $r = .47$, and extraversion, meta-analytic $r = .44$ (see Table 4 for details). These effects held among American undergraduates, American and Indian mTurk workers, and a nationally representative sample of Americans (Oishi et al., 2019, Studies 1–4), and were replicated among Korean adults, and University of Florida and University of Virginia undergraduates. Tendencies toward fantasy, artistic sensitivity, and unconventional attitudes are thus associated with a psychologically rich life, but far from redundant with it. In contrast, a happy life was most strongly associated with extraversion, followed by conscientiousness, and low neuroticism, consistent with Steel et al. (2008). A meaningful life was associated fairly evenly with all Big Five traits.

Finally, although happiness was significantly associated with self-reported socioeconomic status (SES), $r = .30$, a psychologically rich life was only modestly associated with SES, income, or education, all rs $< .19$, and a meaningful life only weakly so, $r = .13$. Taken together, these initial studies suggest that openness and extraversion are associated with a psychologically rich life, whereas extraversion, conscientiousness, and high SES appear to be key to a happy life.

Life Experiences Associated With a Psychologically Rich Life

Because a psychologically rich life is characterized by unexpectedness, novelty, complexity, and perspective change, some life experiences should be particularly conducive to it. Studying abroad is a case in point. Study abroad places a student in unfamiliar environments for an extended period of time, forcing them to live differently than they did at home. Thus, we predicted that studying abroad should increase psychological richness.

To test this, we recruited college students studying abroad, as well as students from the same university interested in study abroad but who had stayed on campus. We followed both groups via 12 weekly activity surveys, and assessed the three types of good life at the beginning and end of the semester (Oishi et al., in press, study 3). Initially, there were no group differences in psychological richness (measured by the 17-item Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire; PRLQ), life satisfaction, or meaning in life. By the end of the semester, however, the study-abroad students reported significantly higher psychological richness than those who remained on campus. This pattern was unique to psychological richness; there was no corresponding increase in happiness or meaning, which remained unchanged among the study-abroad students across the semester. Furthermore, these effects remained significant even after controlling for demographics and individual differences, including openness to experience and the Big Five. Thus, changes in psychological richness were not due to preexisting differences in personality or background, and extended beyond self-reports: People who knew the students well also rated the study-abroad students' lives to be subsequently psychologically richer than of those who stayed on campus (Oishi et al., in press, study 4).

What about studying abroad led to psychologically richer lives? The increase in psychological richness was explained in part by study-abroad students' weekly engagement in artistic activities. In another 14-day diary study assessing daily activities as well as psychological richness (Oishi et al., in press, study 1), participants reported greater psychological richness on days when they took short excursions. Like studying abroad, such short trips injected novel atypical experiences into everyday life.

Although not everyone is able to live or study abroad, people often voluntarily seek out similar novel experiences through popular means such as escape rooms (Cha et al., 2020). The goal in an escape room is to solve a series of puzzles to escape from one or more (often themed) rooms. In an initial study, we recruited individuals who had just exited an escape room. Consistent with our novelty hypothesis, people who had more previous experience with escape rooms reported less psychological richness after exiting. Individuals who "escaped" successfully reported being happier (and

Table 4
Big Five Personality Traits, Social Class, and the Triad-Model of a Good Life

Measure	Sample size	Sample	O	C	E	A	N	SES	Income	Edu
Richness	$N = 203$	UVa	.38**	.23**	.49**	.31**	−.27**	.13		
	$N = 369$	MTurk	.51**	.33**	.43**	.33**	−.19**	.04	.08	.07
	$N = 552$	India	.44**	.50**	.58**	.38**	−.26**	.20**		.08
	$N = 1{,}213$	Adults	.47**	.33**	.51**	.37**	−.15**	.22**		
	$N = 403$	UF	.48**	.28**	.38**	.12*	−.13**		.10	
	$N = 348$	UVa	.44**	.29**	.43**	.37**	−.01	.12*	.17**	
	$N = 2{,}176$	Korea	.47**	.12**	.21**	−.05*	−.21**	.39**		
Meta-analytic r			.47**	.30**	.44**	.27**	−.18**	.19**	.12**	.08**
95% CI			[.44, .49]	[.19, .41]	[.32,.54]	[.11, .41]	[−.33, −.10]	[.06, .32]	[−.00, .23]	[.01, .14]
Happiness	$N = 203$	UVa	.16*	.34**	.47**	.23**	−.38**	.38**		
	$N = 552$	India	.20**	.31**	.41**	.16**	−.16**	.26**		.06
	$N = 1{,}213$	Adults	.24**	.29**	.50**	.22**	−.12**	.35**		
	$N = 403$	UF	.17**	.28**	.19**	.09	−.29**	.10		
	$N = 348$	UVa	.33**	.42**	.41**	.33**	−.27**	.18**	.23**	
	$N = 2{,}176$	Korea	.21**	.18**	.21**	−.02	−.32**	.50**		
Meta-analytic r			.22**	.30**	.37**	.17**	−.25**	.30**		
95% CI			[.17, .27]	[.21, .38]	[.22, .50]	[.03, .29]	[−.35, −.15]	[.14, .45]		
Meaning	$N = 203$	UVa	.29**	.19*	.34**	.31**	−.25**	.03		
	$N = 552$	India	.30**	.48**	.51**	.35**	−.33**	.19**		.03
	$N = 1{,}213$	Adults	.32**	.31**	.45**	.29**	−.21**	.22**		
	$N = 403$	UF	.16*	.32**	.20**	.10*	−.27**	−.03		
	$N = 348$	UVa	.42**	.47**	.47**	.44**	−.29**	.13*	.15**	
	$N = 2{,}176$	Korea	.35**	.14**	.17**	−.01	−.27**	.18**		
Meta-analytic r			.31**	.32**	.36**	.25**	−.27**	.13*		
95% CI			[.22, .39]	[.17, .46]	[.19, .51]	[.07, .42]	[−.31, −.22]	[.03, .23]		

Note. O = openness to experience. C = conscientiousness. E = extraversion. A = agreeableness. N = neuroticism. UVa = University of Virginia. UF = University of Florida. India = Indian Mturkers. Adults = U.S. probabilistic sample of adults.

found the game more meaningful) than those who failed to escape. Interestingly, however, psychological richness was unrelated to their outcome (i.e., successful escape vs. failure).

Instead, the more difficult people found the escape room, the more psychological richness (and less happiness) they reported, consistent with our prediction that complex challenging experiences should also be psychologically rich. This is consistent with our obituary studies (Oishi & Choi, 2020), where we likewise coded the number of challenging and dramatic life events people experienced, such as tragedies (e.g., bereavements) and divorce. Obituaries of people who experienced more dramatic life events were rated as psychologically richer (but less happy); dramatic life events were unrelated to meaning.

In sum, life experiences that are novel, challenging, and perspective-changing seem to contribute to a psychologically rich life, whether they are "big" experiences, like studying abroad or divorce, or "small" everyday experiences, like short trips or an escape room. However, because none of the studies above are experimental, they cannot establish causal direction.

Experimental Evidence for Psychologically Rich Experiences

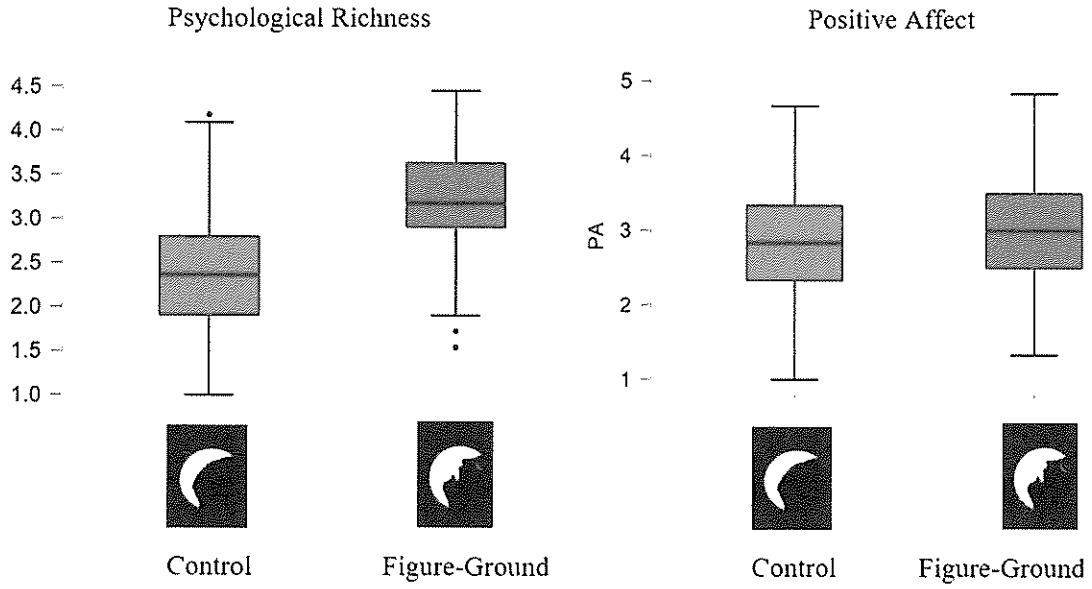
Fortunately, we have experimental evidence from a line of studies exploring causal mechanisms for what makes certain experiences richer than others. We predict that novelty, complexity, and a change in perspective are key to psychologically rich experiences. Figure-ground drawings fit all three criteria, as they literally depict different images depending on one's focal perspective. In a series of studies (Oishi, Choi, & Axt, 2020), we showed participants four figure-ground illusions where (for half of the participants) the image seen depended on whether one focused on the foreground (e.g., a moon) or background (e.g., a face; see Figure 1 for an example). The other half viewed modified versions of the same figure-ground illusions altered so that only the foreground image was visible (control).

In study 1 ($N = 299$), participants viewed and described each of the four drawings, one at a time, and then indicated their current mood (e.g., happy, sad) and evaluations of the drawings (e.g., how interesting, boring). As expected, participants in the figure-ground condition reported substantially higher psychological richness after viewing the figure-ground drawings than those in the control condition, $d = 1.38$ (see Figure 1). However, positive mood in the figure-ground condition did not differ: $d = .13$. That is, the figure-ground drawings evoked more psychological richness without evoking more happiness.

We replicated these effects in a second study ($N = 343$), testing whether prompting participants to see the hidden images (the prompt "What do you see?" followed by another prompt "What else do you see?") further increased psychological richness. The prompt did not matter; in both conditions, participants viewing the figure-ground illusions reported substantially higher psychological richness than those in the control condition, $d = 1.06$ and 1.08, respectively. Once again, there was no difference in positive mood between conditions, $|d| \leq .05$.

These findings suggest that duality, conflict, and complexity are associated with visual experiences of psychological richness. And, consistent with the correlational studies summarized earlier,

Figure 1
Psychological Richness and Positive Affect by Experimental Condition



Note. Participants viewed 4 drawings in each condition. Psychological richness was measured as the mean of 11 items (interesting, boring[r], intriguing, psychologically rich, complex, fresh, unique, surprised, unusual, typical[r], simple[r]) on a 1–5 point scale. Positive affect was measured as the mean of 6 items from the SPANE (Diener et al., 2010): positive, good, pleasant, happy, joyful, content, on a 1–5 point scale. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

this was true only for psychological richness; positive hedonic experiences (pleasant vs. unpleasant, happy vs. unhappy) were not associated with duality. Thus, the visual illusion studies provide initial causal evidence that psychological richness is distinct from happiness.

Such effects are not limited to visual experiences. Oishi, Choi, and Axt (2020, study 5) tested whether surprising information can make auditory experiences richer as well, among 238 college students who watched a video of world class pianist Nobuyuki Tsujii playing Chopin's *Etude Opus 10*. Beforehand participants learned a little background about the musician: that "Nobuyuki Tsujii is a Japanese pianist," "He began his formal study of piano at age 4," and "At age 10, he debuted with the Century Orchestra, Osaka." However, in the experimental "perspective change" condition (randomly assigned), participants read four additional words: "He was born blind." As a result, participants in the perspective change condition (who knew the pianist was blind) found Tsuji's performance psychologically richer than those in the control condition, who did not ($d = .26, p = .05$). But although this knowledge made the experience richer, it did not make it more pleasurable; there was no difference in positive affect between conditions ($d = .10$, $p = .44$). In short, information that induced a change of perspective increased psychological richness without increasing pleasure.

In sum, individual differences and situational features combine to facilitate psychological richness. Correlational and experimental evidence across a wide range of samples and contexts, including both lab and field studies, support the role of novel, complex, perspective-changing experiences as uniquely important to psychological richness. People high in openness to experience are more likely to report leading psychologically rich lives, perhaps because they are more likely to engage in such experiences. These patterns were very different for meaning and happiness, suggesting that the ingredients that make up a psychologically rich life are distinct from those that comprise a happy or meaningful life.

The Three Dimensions of a Good Life Have Unique Predictive Value (Prediction #3)

Above we present evidence that psychological richness is distinct from meaning and happiness in life, and stems from different sources. In addition, we (Oishi et al., 2021) have also tested whether the three dimensions of a good life uniquely predict important psychological variables, such as political liberalism, attributional complexity, curiosity, risk taking, and related constructs. For instance, people leading psychologically rich lives may be more open to changing current political structures and systems. Therefore, we simultaneously entered a happy life, a meaningful life, and a psychologically rich life as predictors of system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003) among over 500 college students (Oishi et al., 2021, study 1). Whereas a happy life and a meaningful life were positively associated with system justification (e.g., Butz et al., 2017; Napier & Jost, 2008), leading a psychologically rich life was negatively associated. That is, those leading happy and/or meaningful lives tend to prefer to maintain social order and the status quo, whereas those leading psychologically rich lives seem to embrace social change.

Subsequent studies confirm the system-*defying* tendencies of psychological richness versus system-*justifying* tendencies of happiness and meaning (Oishi et al., 2021, studies 2–4). For instance, in a national probabilistic sampling of Americans, a psychologically rich life was associated with political liberalism, whereas a happy

life and meaningful life were associated with political conservatism. Such associations could be due to third variables such as openness to experience, which is associated with liberalism (Butz et al., 2017). However, these patterns persisted after controlling for Big Five personality traits and demographics (e.g., age, gender, race). That is, the association between psychological richness and liberalism could not be explained by the link between psychological richness and openness (or other personality traits).

We argue that psychological richness should also result in wisdom, characterized in part by flexibility of thought. Consistent with this, we have found a psychologically rich life to be positively associated with holistic thinking styles (e.g., Choi et al., 2007), attributional complexity (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1986), and lower levels of discrete essentialism (a subscale of essentialism, e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2006). In short, those leading psychologically rich lives tend to have more complex reasoning styles, consider multiple causes for others' behavior, and do not believe that a few discrete categories can explain individual differences. These findings remain significant, even after controlling for openness (and other Big Five traits), as well as a happy life, a meaningful life, and demographics.

If psychological richness results in wisdom, as theorized, it may also manifest as a desire to seek out challenges and opportunities for learning. For instance, the degree to which college students took on challenging coursework was uniquely predicted by a psychologically rich life, above and beyond a happy and/or meaningful life (Oishi et al., 2021, study 1). In contrast, happiness and meaning were unrelated to coursework. Furthermore, while students leading a happy and/or meaningful life were oriented toward positive achievement outcomes (i.e., good grades), those leading a psychologically rich life were oriented toward actual learning (i.e., mastery outcomes). These findings are consistent with our "escape room" studies, in which perceived difficulty was associated with psychological richness, whereas objective performance (i.e., success vs. failure) was associated with happiness and meaning.

Consistent with this, participants high in psychological richness also reported greater curiosity, whereas those whose lives were happy and/or meaningful did not (Oishi et al., 2021). "Stretching" curiosity (i.e., appetitive strivings for novelty and challenge) is thought to represent *exploration*, while "embracing" curiosity (i.e., immersive engagement in specific activities) is thought to represent *absorption* (Kashdan et al., 2004, 2018). These effects replicate among Korean adults ($N = 2{,}176$), where once again, psychological richness predicted both stretching and embracing curiosity, above and beyond Big Five personality and demographics. Finally, while people leading happy and/or meaningful lives experience positive emotions *more* intensely and negative emotions *less* intensely, individuals with psychologically rich lives experience *both* positive and negative emotions more intensely, consistent with Larsen and Diener's (1987) theorizing regarding affect intensity. In other words, the psychologically rich life appears to be emotionally intense.

However, the studies detailed above are cross-sectional; causality could run in either direction, despite statistically controlling for potential third variables such as openness to experience (Oishi et al., 2021, studies 2–4). Another limitation is their reliance on self-reports. Thus, in more recent studies we have utilized behavioral measures as well as short-term longitudinal designs. For instance, psychological richness predicts how many balloons people pop in the Balloon Analog Risk Task (Oishi et al., 2021, study 5). Likewise, a psychologically rich life (measured at time 1) prospectively predicts how often participants go on to engage in daily novel (vs. routine) activities over a 2-week period (Oishi et al., 2021, study 6). Most of these relationships remain significant even after additionally controlling for happiness, meaning, openness (and other Big Five personality traits), and demographics.

The above provide preliminary evidence that psychological richness predicts important outcomes related to exploration and motivation for systemic change; and that people whose lives are psychologically rich tend to seek out challenges and value learning, and are less interested in maintaining the status quo. Perhaps as a result, they experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely than those whose lives are not particularly rich. Finally, psychological richness uniquely predicts a behavioral measure of risk taking, as well as everyday engagement in novel and routine activities. Equally important, these associations remain significant even after controlling for many possible third variables.

The Psychologically Rich Life Is a Good Life (Prediction #4)

The evidence thus far suggests that a psychologically rich life is distinct from a happy or meaningful life in terms of predictors, correlates, and outcomes. Still, if nobody actually desires a psychologically rich life (vs. a happy or meaningful life), then it is *not* a good life, and thus there is no point to expanding the current dichotomous hedonic–eudaimonic model of well-being. Furthermore, the entire concept of a psychologically rich life might simply be a WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) phenomenon (Henrich et al., 2010). Therefore, we asked people to describe their own ideal lives, and report the extent to which they themselves value psychological richness.

We asked participants across nine countries (the United States, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, India, and Angola; Oishi, Choi, & Koo, 2020, study 1) to describe, in their own words, their ideal life. We have summarized the most frequently mentioned words from four samples in Table 5; *family*, *job/work*, and *money* were by far the most common themes across cultures. There were however some interesting differences. American and Indian participants frequently mentioned *free*, *love*, and *friends* as main ingredients of an ideal life, whereas Japanese participants did not. Likewise, Indian participants mentioned *peace* and a *peaceful life* far more frequently than Americans. In contrast, Japanese participants emphasized a long-term focus on *old age/retirement age*, *the self*, and *hobby*, while Angolan participants were especially likely to mention *God* and *stability*.

After describing their ideal life, we asked participants to rate the life they had just described using 15 features associated with a happy life (e.g., *happy*, *comfortable*, *stable*), a meaningful life (e.g., *meaningful*, *fulfilling*), or a psychologically rich life (e.g., *eventful*, *interesting*). Overall, people rated their self-described ideal lives as all three: happy and meaningful, but also psychologically rich. Finally, we asked participants, if they had to pick just one, whether they would choose a happy life, a meaningful life, or a psychologically rich life. Consistent with Diener (2000), the majority of participants in all countries surveyed preferred a happy life. The second most popular choice was a meaningful life, followed by a

Table 5
Most Frequently Mentioned Words in Free Descriptions of an Ideal Life

Rank	United States	India	Japan	Angola
1.	Job/work (717)	Family (150)	Job/work (146) 仕事・就職	Família (45)
2.	Family (674)	Happy/happiness (141)	Self (109) 自分	Saúde/Saudável (healthy, 44)
3.	Money (528)	Job/work (134)	Marriage (93) 結婚	Estável/estabilidade (stable, 32)
4.	Time (473)	Money (106)	Family (88) 家庭・家族	Emprego (Job, 31)
5.	Able (434)	Peace/peaceful (97)	Person (80) 人	Deus (God, 28)
6.	Children/kids (377)	People (87)	Children (74) 子供	Mim (me, 26)
7.	Healthy/health (372)	Health/healthy (85)	Favorite (43) 好き	Feliz (happiness, 24)
8.	Having (337)	Time (84)	Time (36) 時間	Pessoas (people, 24)
9.	Love (272)	Need(s) (82)	Age (35) 歳	Amor (love, 18)
10.	Happy (268)	Children/kids (68)	Hobby (35) 趣味	País (parent, 18)
11.	Friends (263)	Free (60)	Happiness (34) 幸せ	Formação (formation, 16)
12.	Home (247)	Having (53)	Money (32) お金	Paz (peace, 16)
13.	House (239)	Things (53)	Later (29) 後	Dinheiro (money, 15)
14.	Travel (236)	Enjoy (52)	Old age (28) 老後	Casa (house, 14)
15.	Worry (234)	Love (51)	Death (24) 死	Financeira (financial, 13)
16.	Things (215)	Make (50)	Graduation (23) 卒業	Sonho (dream, 12)
17.	Enjoy (201)	Help (44)	University (22) 大学	Acima (above, 11)
18.	Make (177)	Way (43)	Stable (22) 安定	Filhos (sons, 11)
19.	Free (175)	House (42)	Every day/daily (21) 毎日・日々	Amigos (friends, 10)
20.	People (174)	Person (42)	Income (18) 収入	Problemas (problems, 10)
21.	Just (169)	World (41)	Travel (18) 旅行	Condições (conditions, 9)
22.	World (165)	Friends (40)	Comfortable (18) 楽	Lar (home, 9)
23.	Spend (164)	Different (38)	Health (17) 健康	Melhor (better, 9)
24.	Nice (15)	Just (32)	Difficulty (16) 困	Mundo (world, 9)
25.	Husband (142)	Tension (29)	Retirement age (16) 定年	Necessidades (needs, 9)
26.	Need (135)	Possible (28)	Spend (15) 過ごす	Oportunidade (opportunities, 9)
27.	Great (119)	Self (27)	Fulfilling (14) 充実	Professional (9)
28.	Financially (116)	Spend (27)	Enjoyable (14) 楽しい	Alçancar (reach, 8)
29.	Bills (115)	Care/earn/food (26)	Peaceful (14) 穏やか	Formar (form, 8)
30.	Day (113)	Society (25)	Relationship (14) 関係	Objectivos (goals, 8)

Note. The free response data were analyzed using voyant-tools (https://voyant-tools.org). Numbers indicate the frequency with which a word was mentioned. United States = 1,510 Mturkers. India = 553 Indian Mturkers. Japan = 232 college students. Angola = 150 college students. We did not count words included in the instruction (e.g., life, ideal, lead).

substantial minority of participants who chose a psychologically rich life.

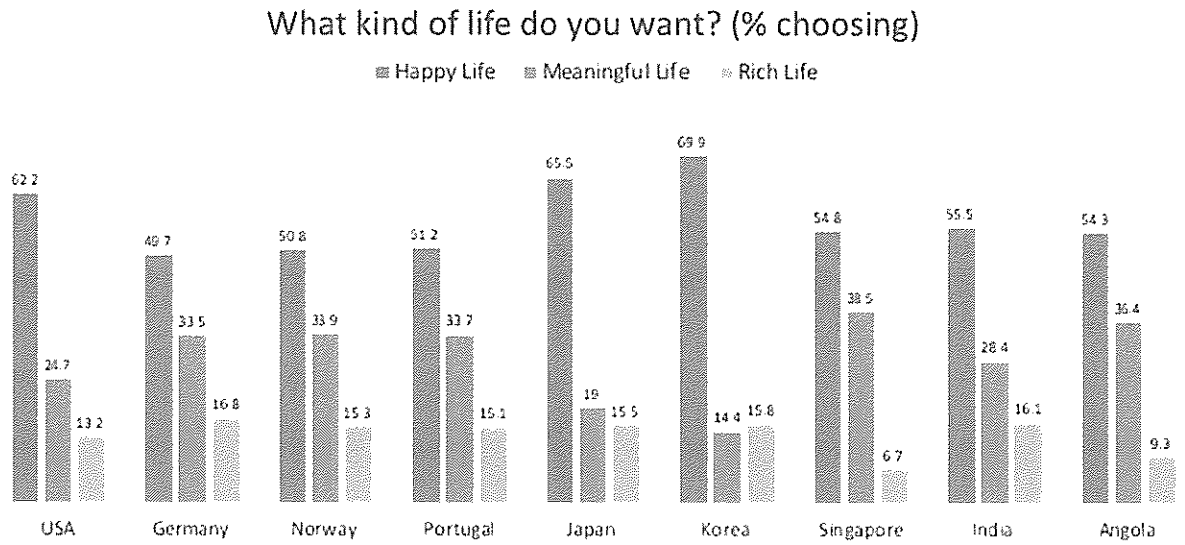
In all, there was remarkable consensus across cultures in the percentage of people choosing a psychologically rich life, ranging from 7% to 17% (see Figure 2). A psychologically rich life was most popular in Europe, India, Japan, and Korea. In Japan and Korea, the great majority chose a happy life, with the remaining split evenly between a meaningful life and a psychologically rich life (16% in both Japan and Korea). In India, the United States, and Europe, a meaningful life was more popular, although still not as popular as a happy life, with a minority favoring a psychologically rich life (16% India, 13% United States; 17% Germany, and 15% in Norway and Portugal). Finally, in Singapore and Angola, the majority were evenly split between a meaningful and a happy life, with a small minority choosing a psychologically rich life: 7% in Singapore and 9% in Angola.

Thus, although a happy life was the top preference across nine countries (followed by a meaningful life), a substantial minority would choose a psychologically rich life even at the expense of a happy or meaningful one. In three European countries, two East Asian countries, and one South Asian country (i.e., six of the nine countries studied), a psychologically rich life was chosen by 15%–17% of respondents, a nontrivial portion of the population in these countries.

Of course, it is possible that people may not know what they want, or are unable to verbalize it, especially if the very concept of a psychologically rich life is unfamiliar. Therefore, in follow-up studies, we used an indirect means of getting at the question (Oishi, Choi, & Koo, 2020, studies 2a and 2b). Specifically, we asked participants to think about the event that they regretted most in their lives. Consistent with previous research (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995), people's most common regrets involved missed educational, career, and relationship opportunities, and mistakes concerning their education, career, family, and romantic relationships. Next, we then asked participants to imagine undoing that regret. If they did so, would their lives have been happier, more meaningful, or psychologically richer (forced choice)? In a national probability sample of Americans (N = 1,611), we found that 28% said their lives would have been psychologically richer if they could undo their life's biggest regret (far higher than the 13% obtained in our earlier forced choice). The remaining respondents were split, with 35.7% of Americans saying their lives would have been happier and 36.7% saying their lives would have been more meaningful. We replicated this result among Korean adults (N = 680), 35% of whom felt their lives would have been psychologically richer if they could undo the most regretted event of their lives (vs. 16% in forced choice). Once again, the remaining respondents were split, with 27.6% of Koreans saying their lives would have been happier and 37.4% saying their lives would have been more meaningful. That a third of participants in both Korea and the United States regretted most an event that made their lives psychologically less rich

Figure 2

The Percentage of Participants Who Chose a Happy Life, a Meaningful Life, or a Psychologically Rich Life as Their Ideal Life in Oishi, Choi, and Axt (2020)



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

suggests that richness *is* implicitly valued as part of what it means to lead a good life.

In sum, a great majority of people desire a happy life or a meaningful life (Diener, 2000; King & Napa, 1998). Still a minority of individuals do seem to desire a different ideal life, ranging from 7% to 17% (in forced choice paradigms) upward to a third (28% to 35%) using indirect measures. Like Goldmund, Zarathustra, and Stephen Dedalus, some people do choose the life of the wanderer: unstable, unpredictable, but free. Such a life is not easy, nor is it necessarily pleasant. But the empirical evidence described above suggests that some people actively prefer it.

Summary of Empirical Evidence

A psychologically rich life, filled with a wide variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences, is distinct from a happy life and a meaningful life. Psychometrically, a 3-factor model, in which happiness, meaning, and psychological richness each constitute discrete constructs, fits the data significantly better than 1- or 2-factor models which conflate richness with happiness or meaning. Likewise, people with psychologically rich lives differ in personality from people leading happy or meaningful lives. Openness to experience, in particular, as well as extraversion strongly predicts psychological richness. Finally, leading a psychologically rich life predicts important outcomes above and beyond a happy and/or meaningful life, including system justification, political orientation, attributional complexity, and challenge-seeking.

In sum, the building blocks of a psychologically rich life are different. Particular life experiences and situational factors uniquely contribute to psychological richness, without increasing happiness or meaning. For instance, students' lives were psychologically richer after a semester studying abroad, but not happier or more meaningful. In experimental work, we likewise find that perspective change uniquely predicts psychological richness. Figure-ground illusions consistently evoke more psychological richness than comparable drawings (but do not increase positive moods). Shifts in perspective increase how psychologically rich (but not how personally meaningful) people find cognitive activities, and perspective-changing information (e.g., learning that a pianist is blind) enriches a musical performance. Finally, perceived difficulty is uniquely associated with psychological richness and (independent of outcomes) predicts how rich, but not how happy or meaningful, people find escape rooms. This is clearly illustrated in the obituary studies: Dramatic (and mostly unpleasant) life events such as unemployment and bereavement are positively associated with richness but negatively associated with happiness.

Remaining Questions and Future Directions

The evidence above provides initial support that psychological richness is distinct from happiness, meaning, and other common constructs in psychology. However, considerable work remains to be done. Here we detail remaining questions about the nature of a psychologically rich life, the challenges of tragedy and adversity, and other related issues.

The Nature of Psychological Richness

Does it matter whether rich experiences are acquired first-hand? Evidence from obituaries (Oishi & Choi, 2020) and students studying abroad (Oishi et al., in press) suggests that relatively rare, dramatic life events should enhance psychological richness. Such experiences might be called *experiential* richness, stemming from direct, first-hand experience, and may be similar to other positive mood states. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) "flow," or a state of psychological absorption featuring intense focus and concentration in moments of optimal challenge, is similar to momentary experiences of psychological richness. Likewise, rich

experiences may contain elements of awe and/or fear, wonder, and amazement (Anderson et al., 2020; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Piff et al., 2015; Shiota et al., 2007).

But psychological richness could be also experienced vicariously. For instance, in his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust (2003) describes his experience of intense events while absorbed in a novel: "These afternoons were crammed with more dramatic events than occur, often, in a whole lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading" (p. 116). He went on to describe the magic novelists wield, remarking how "for the space of an hour he [the novelist] sets free within us all the joys and sorrows in the world, a few of which only we should have to spend years of our actual life in getting to know, and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us" (p. 117). It is important to explore whether outcomes of experiential richness would be different from those of *vicarious* richness, stemming from such indirect, second-hand experiences.

Why Do People Desire Different Types of Lives?

We suggest three broad explanations for why some people desire a rich life, whereas others may desire a happy or meaningful life instead: (a) an individual differences/values based approach (i.e., people want a life that exemplifies their values), (b) a compensatory approach (i.e., people desire that which they lack), and (c) a self-justification approach (i.e., people desire that which they already have). One possibility outlined earlier is that personal dispositions and values guide different kinds of people to desire different kinds of lives. For instance, many people value security, stability, and comfort—and thus desire a happy life. Others aspire to make a difference in the world, and seek a meaningful life. Yet others value adventure and harbor a love of learning, desiring a psychologically rich life instead.

Another possibility is that the type of life people want depends on the type of life they are living now. For instance, people may desire that which is missing from their lives, in a *compensatory process*. For instance, a person living in unstable economic and political conditions might seek stability and a happy life. Similarly, a person whose life is stable and comfortable (but lacks adventure) might desire a psychologically rich life, while a person whose life is exciting (but lacks a clear sense of societal contribution) might desire a meaningful life. Or, the opposite may occur: People may desire more of that which they already have, in a *self-justification process*. For instance, a person already satisfied with their life might value and desire a happy life (which they already live), while a person whose life is full of purpose might value and desire a meaningful life (which they already live).

A separate but related question is whether people might wish to experience different types of life at different ages or times. For example, one might want to establish a happy life (with its accompanying security) first, before branching out to pursue a meaningful or psychologically rich life. This could explain why a happy life was the most dominant choice in our forced-choice cross-cultural study (Oishi, Choi, & Koo, 2020). It is critical to explore sources of systematic variation in why people prefer some lives to others, and the order in which they wish to experience them.

The Function of a Psychologically Rich Life

Most fundamentally, what is the function of a psychologically rich life? Happiness and meaning are thought to reflect (and reward) behaviors that foster long-term flourishing. For example, both happiness and meaning are associated with many positive outcomes, from health and longevity to strong relationships and creativity (Czekierda et al., 2017; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Some theorists have even suggested these benefits confer an evolutionary adaptation for the individual and the group (e.g., Diener et al., 2015).

The Exploitation–Exploration Dilemma

The Clash's famous song "Should I stay? Or should I go?" poses a fundamental evolutionary challenge (Cohen et al., 2007). All organisms face the trade-off between exploiting the resources available to them and expending time and energy pursuing new resources that may (or may not) materialize. Other species such as birds are known to optimally mix these two different strategies (Krebs et al., 1978), either by switching strategies as their environment changes or via individual differences, such that certain individuals in a population are drawn to exploitation whereas others are drawn to exploration.

We suggest that a happy and/or meaningful life relies on an exploitation strategy, in which people take advantage of familiar environments and deep social ties, more heavily than an exploration strategy. In contrast, a psychologically rich life relies more heavily on an exploration strategy by expanding horizons and broadening social ties. In rapidly changing environments, a psychologically rich life might be most adaptive for learning and accumulating resources, whereas happy and/or meaningful lives might be more advantageous in stable, benign environments. Ideally, people might combine all three, balancing exploitation and exploration strategies as needed.

Fostering Discovery and Learning

A life of curiosity-driven learning helps individuals acquire skills in perspective-taking, empathy, and creativity (e.g., what we might collectively term "wisdom") needed to solve recurrent adaptation problems encountered in navigating complex, shifting physical and social environments (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). These skills in turn accrue social and cognitive advantages that benefit not only the individual but also the group (e.g., Harvey, 2014). One pay-off of pursuing a psychologically rich life may be increased opportunities for discovery and learning. For instance, one of the strongest predictors of a rich life, openness to experience, is closely associated with what affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp (2011) calls the "seeking" system, which regulates the exploratory–investigatory system and motivates exploration and learning critical for long-term fitness (Montag & Panksepp, 2017). Openness to experience is also associated with creativity and problem-solving (Nettle, 2006), which not only allows people "to adjust to novel circumstances and to solve problems that unexpectedly arise," but "can also result in major contributions to human civilization" (Simonton, 2001, p. 2).

Similarly, another strong predictor of the psychologically rich life, extraversion, is closely associated with play (Montag & Panksepp, 2017). Robot learning paradigms suggest that curiosity-driven learning (or play-like learning) is key for healthy cognitive and social development (Oudeyer & Smith, 2016). And Gopnik (2020) has argued that humanity's extended childhood allows for a prolonged period of exploration and play before the

demands of adulthood force individuals to master useful (but repetitive) skill sets.

Coping With Boredom

The pursuit of psychological richness may also represent an antidote (and response) to boredom (Westgate & Wilson, 2018). In a famous quote, Pascal (1660/2006) once observed "that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber" (pp. 27–28). Boredom leads people to seek out novel experiences, even when those experiences are unpleasant (e.g., electric shocks, unpleasant sounds/images; Havermans et al., 2015). Incorporating unusual activities into the routine of otherwise mundane lives not only reduces boredom but increases psychological richness, as well. Indeed, empirical research finds that a lack of optimal challenge and meaninglessness are at the core of boredom (Van Tilburg & Igou, 2012; Westgate & Wilson, 2018), and that boredom pushes people away from exploitation toward exploration strategies (Geana et al., 2016), which better characterize the psychologically rich life.

Maladaptive responses to boredom are thought to spur a number of societal problems, including gang violence (Eligon, 2016). Interestingly, among the most successful interventions are youth sports programs that introduce sources of psychological richness to people's lives: reducing boredom (and gang violence) via engagement in novel activities. Such interventions reduce antisocial behaviors and internalizing problems, and improve academic achievement (Spruit et al., 2016). Nor are they confined to sports, spanning not only after-school soccer programs for Californian teens (Buckle & Walsh, 2013), but also arts and theater-based interventions among at-risk youth (Elliott & Dingwall, 2017; Wallace-DiGarbo & Hill, 2006). These interventions reduce boredom by introducing novel activities that youth might not otherwise encounter or turn to. In short, psychological richness (and the activities that facilitate it) may serve as both a response to, and defense against, boredom.

The Role of Tragedy, Adversity, and Other Challenges

Can a person who has suffered a major disaster or tragedy still be said to be leading a good life—that is, a life that is admirable, valuable, and worthwhile—despite their generally lower levels of subjective well-being (Nussbaum, 1986/2001)? Our argument is yes. We suggest that one important function of the psychologically rich life is to cope with tragedy and other adverse events. Difficult moments are inevitable. But by valuing them (and the perspective changes they bring), people may find value in experiences and lives that are not otherwise happy or meaningful. In other words, psychological richness requires valuing not only the bright moments of life, but also the darker moments that make such moments possible.

Aristotle was adamant about the necessity of good fortune for living a eudaimonic life, noting that "in old age even the most prosperous of men may be involved in great misfortunes ... nobody calls happy a man who suffered fortunes like [Priam's] and met a miserable end" (Aristotle, I009b21–I100a9, Thomson, 1955, p. 81). Empirical evidence generally supports him. For instance, three months after the Van earthquake in 2011, Turkish residents at the epicenter reported substantially lower life satisfaction than those who lived in Manisa, unaffected by the quake. Sixteen years later, residents who lost their homes in the 1995 Hanshin Awaji earthquake in Kobe, Japan, reported lower life satisfaction, more negative affect, and more health problems than residents whose homes were undamaged (Oishi et al., 2015), and survivors of Hurricane Katrina still report elevated psychological distress 12 years later (Raker et al., 2019).

Clearly, such tragedies have long-lasting effects on happiness. However, many victims of natural disasters, and other traumatic events, go on to lead admirable lives in other respects; earthquake victims, for instance, are more likely to ultimately pursue prosocial careers (Oishi et al., 2017). In short, while recovery from tragedies can lead to a greater sense of meaning (Park, 2016), it may also offer opportunities for perspective change, a key aspect of cognitive restructuring (Clore, 2011), and an ingredient for psychological richness.

The Power of Construals

Tragedy, trauma, and other adverse life events are powerful situational forces. However, two individuals experiencing the same ups and downs of life may internalize those events very differently. Thus, it is not enough to simply experience tragedy (or even a great variety of interesting/positive events). For such experiences to contribute to psychological richness requires the ability to remember, actively reflect, and integrate those experiences (e.g., resulting in narrative complexity and integrative growth; Bauer et al., 2008; McAdams et al., 2004). A basic prerequisite for such integration is the ability to store and recall memories (Fivush, 2011), which, at an extreme, certain brain injuries might preclude (Damasio et al., 1990). Thus, self-reflection and memory may be prerequisites for transforming experiential richness into psychological richness. For example, sensation seekers may encounter many thrilling experiences, but those thrilling experiences will not necessarily translate into *psychological* richness if merely unthinkingly "consumed." Similarly, to the extent that a psychologically rich life is defined by diverse experiences, it is likely related to affective complexity (Larsen & Cutler, 1996; Wessman & Ricks, 1966) and emodiversity (Quoidbach et al., 2014). However, the co-occurrence of various emotions (e.g., emotional complexity) need not inevitably produce a subjective sense of psychological richness. One could feel a wide range of emotions—from happiness, pride, and excitement to embarrassment and guilt—without necessarily experiencing psychological richness (e.g., one could simply feel torn and ambivalent; see Donahue et al., 1993).

Processing tragic, dramatic, or surprising experiences by making sense of them may be a key component. Consider Pennebaker and colleagues' influential research on the effect of writing on recovery from traumatic events (see Pennebaker, 1997, for review). Writing about a traumatic event not only improves health, but does so via people's ability to form a narrative or coherent story that explains the trauma they have experienced (see also Kross & Ayduk, 2011).

Thus, although tragedies and adversity may offer opportunities for revising mental narratives and structures to accommodate them (Perlin & Li, 2020), actually engaging in such accommodative processing may be necessary to ultimately experience such events as psychologically rich.

In sum, the same processes that promote psychological richness may also contribute to coping with tragic and traumatic events. It is thus critical to identify the individual, situational, and developmental

factors that facilitate resilience (Masten, 2001) and adaptive narratives (Pennebaker, 1997) in the short term, as well as psychological richness in the long term.

Cultural Variations

Like any psychological concept, what it means to live a good life is culturally construed. For instance, what it means to be "well" differs across cultures (e.g., Kitayama & Markus, 2000). In the United States, well-being is fostered via mutual praise and reaffirmation of autonomy. In contrast, in other cultures well-being may be fostered via mutual sympathy for shared predicaments and reaffirmation of roles. Just as there are diverse modes of the self (Markus & Hamedani, 2007), so too are there many views of the good life (see Table 5). Consider how students from Angola, Japan, Norway, and the United States described their own conceptions of the good life. A 22-year-old Angolan woman focused on the structural resources that allow people to flourish; in an ideal life she would "have the right to health and health care, a favorable education, universities with qualified teachers, stuffed libraries, employment with salary able to meet my needs, a shelter, have time and money for leisure." An 18-year-old American man also focused on resources, but from an individualistic perspective—his ideal life would be "on a beach with lots of money and a happy family. I would not want to worry about working as I would have been successful enough so I would not have to work anymore. I could fly around anywhere I wanted at any time." In contrast, students from Japan and Norway focused on social relationships. An 18-year-old Japanese man noted that his ideal life "doesn't have to be luxurious, as long as not unhappy. Preferably a family." And, in the words of a Norwegian woman, "The ideal life includes close and secure relationships, psychological growth, mastery, and a continuous curiosity and learning about life."

These examples (see Table 5) illustrate individual and cultural variation in what people desire from a good life, ranging from basic needs satisfaction to family and close relationships, to personal growth, freedom, and peace (see Tsai, 2007, on ideal affect). Psychological richness, meaning, and happiness touch on only some of these themes. Just as what it means to be well differs across individuals and cultures, what it means for a life to be interesting and psychologically rich is likely to differ across individuals and cultures. Documenting, quantifying, and predicting these variations is the next major step in understanding the good life.

Beyond the Three Dimensions of a Good Life

In this article, we have focused on extending the hedonic–eudaimonic dichotomy to include psychological richness. However, there is no reason to assume that there are *only* three dimensions to a good life. If a good life is defined broadly as a life worth living, and if values (defined as superordinate goals, or guiding life principles) represent the types of lives worth aspiring to, there could be as many forms of a good life as there are distinct values. For instance, Vernon and Allport (1931) proposed six values: theoretical, economic, esthetic, political, social, and religious. From these, we could derive six types of a good life: an intellectual life, a materially wealthy life, an artistic/creative life, an influential life, a loving/caring life, and a religious life. Likewise, Schwartz (1992) argued for the existence of ten universal values: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, and security. From these, we could derive ten corresponding forms of the good life (a powerful/influential life, a successful life, an enjoyable life, a stimulating life, etc.)

The same logic can be extended to other sets of values (e.g., Rokeach, 1973), as well as virtues and character strengths (e.g., wisdom and knowledge, courage; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Work on character strengths has tended to empirically classify strengths as belonging either to the "head" (e.g., creativity, curiosity, love of learning, appreciation of beauty) or the "heart" (e.g., love, forgiveness, kindness, spirituality; Park & Peterson, 2010). Interestingly, this "head versus heart" classification is consistent with Aristotle's own claim that two types of virtues exist: intellectual and moral (Thomson, 1955). Among these are many candidates (e.g., courage, modesty, patience) that might map onto other forms of the good life, and ultimately go on to comprise a comprehensive model of a good life that goes beyond happiness, meaning, and psychological richness.

A Psychologically Rich Life: Toward a More Inclusive Understanding of the Good Life

A key contribution of our work is widening the conceptualization of a good life beyond the extant two-factor model of hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being (King & Napa, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Many important literary figures—Muriel Barbery's (2008) Renée, Rabin Alameddine's (2013) Aaliya, Hermann Hesse's (1932) Goldmund—do not lead happy lives. Nor do they lead meaningful ones. Nevertheless, they appreciate moments of ineffable beauty, Proustian moments of elongated time and esthetics, and lead lives full of inner and experiential richness. The psychologically rich life is an attempt to capture such lives, which—according to existing definitions in psychology—simply lack happiness and meaning. In a sense, they and their kind are forgotten; overlooked and dismissed in the extant literature on well-being. Instead, we offer a new means to understanding them as individuals leading good lives—psychologically rich lives, full of interesting, complex, novel first- and second-hand experiences that, although not always pleasant, foster valuable changes in worldview and perspective. Our findings suggest that many people's lives are psychologically rich, even if they are not particularly happy or meaningful, and that these lives have subjective value. This recognition is a major benefit of conceptualizing a psychologically rich life as a type of good life to be valued and pursued.

Second, by exploring psychological richness as a new dimension of a good life, we shed light on what it means to lead a happy life. A happy life is characterized by comfort, safety, and stability; happy people tend to have stable romantic relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002) and secure, well-paying jobs (Drobnič et al., 2010). In a sense, then, a happy life is somewhat conventional. A surprising correlation between political conservatism and happiness (Napier & Jost, 2008) might be in part explained by conservative individuals' emphasis on marriage, stability, and security, in general. Such stability is, of course, antithetical to seeking out the kind of rich varied experiences required to live a psychologically rich life, which require venturing beyond what is known and certain to grapple with (often uncomfortable) new ideas and perspectives.

In addition to adding a new dimension to well-being research, understanding the psychologically rich life could provide new empirical answers to fundamental questions such as "What is the role of art?' and "Why do people watch sad films?" Some aesthetic experiences are not pleasant, but they are interesting (Berlyne, 1971; Silvia, 2008); for instance, people seek out sad movies when they want to gain insight into the human condition (Parrott, 2014; see also Tamir, 2016). And quite possibly, such experiences might not increase happiness but could increase psychological richness. For instance, Eskine et al. (2012) found that participants experienced geometric abstract art as more sublime when induced to feel fear versus when experiencing happiness or physiological arousal. Such unusual moods might likewise serve to enhance interest and richness. In the past, it has been difficult to pinpoint the benefits of art, literature, music, and sports on well-being. One possibility is that we have been looking for benefits in the wrong places, by focusing exclusively on happiness and positive affect (see Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018, for effects on social cognition). In the future, we could quantify the benefits of exposure to literature, music, sports, and so on using psychological richness instead.

Likewise, other important and societally valuable experiences have not always been associated with hedonic well-being. For instance, racial diversity in Facebook friendship networks is inversely associated with hedonic well-being among White American college students (Seder & Oishi, 2009). That is, students with more diverse friends reported lower life satisfaction and positive affect than those with racially homogeneous friendship networks. Likewise, immigrants tend to report lower hedonic well-being (du Plooy et al., 2019). These studies paint a bleak picture of diversity and immigration for conventional well-being. We suggest this interpretation is short-sighted; the negative correlates reported in past work may have been associated with an increase in psychological richness, had it been assessed.

Similarly, education is not generally associated with life satisfaction or positive affect, after controlling for income (Frey & Stutzer, 2002). But higher education is not a happiness-generating activity. It requires hard work, effort, and disquieting moments of doubt and uncertainty; such challenges may be desirable for learning but are not always pleasant. Thus, traditional measures of well-being may have simply failed to capture the positive aspects of learning. Unlike happiness, our conception of richness allows for moments of discomfort and unpleasant emotion. Research on a psychologically rich life suggests that a good life may not always be pleasant, and that there *is* value in leading lives that investigate different perspectives. Recognition of a psychologically rich life as another form of a good life may explain why people sometimes seek out such experiences (e.g., studying foreign languages, reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*) at the expense of their own comfort. The ability to make sense of such behaviors is a benefit of psychological richness.

Conclusion

The extant literature centers on a dichotomy: hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being (e.g., King & Napa, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is high time to move beyond it. Friedrich Nietzsche (1978) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* dismissed happiness and meaning, promoting the life of the wanderer instead. To be sure, we are *not* dismissing happiness or meaning. A happy life, full of enjoyment, stability, and comfort, is a good life, as is too a meaningful life. However, just as Hermann wondered whether his character Goldmund's life—unpleasant and painful at times, but eventful, dramatic, and interesting—was also a good life, so too do we. In short, we argue that psychological richness should join happiness and meaning as important components of well-being. Empirical research shows that psychologically rich lives are uniquely associated with curiosity, openness to experience, and willingness to defy systems. Complexity and difficulty fuel psychologically rich experiences, and informant and self-reports converge in suggesting that psychological richness grows over time in response to perspective-changing life experiences such as studying abroad. Finally, not only do people across cultures view a psychologically rich life as a good life, but also a small but consistent minority would even choose it at the expense of a happy or meaningful life.

Our concept of psychological richness expands our understanding of a good life to include people like Goldmund, Louis Cha, and survivors of natural disasters and other tragic life events, leaving them no longer forgotten by psychological science. In doing so, the addition of psychological richness broadens, deepens, and *enriches* empirical research on a good life.

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Appendix

The 17-Item Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire

(Instruction)

We define a psychologically rich life as a life characterized by variety, depth, and interest. A life could be psychologically rich if a person experiences a variety of interesting things, and/or feels and appreciates a variety of deep emotions via first-hand experiences or vicarious experiences such as novels, films, and sports on TV. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using the 1–7 point scale below.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. My life has been psychologically rich
2. My life has been experientially rich
3. My life has been emotionally rich
4. I have had a lot of interesting experiences
5. I have had a lot of novel experiences
6. My life has been full of unique, unusual experiences
7. My life consists of rich, intense moments
8. My life has been dramatic
9. I experience a full range of emotions via first-hand experiences such as travel and attending concerts
10. I have a lot of personal stories to tell others
11. On my deathbed, I am likely to say "I had an interesting life"
12. On my deathbed, I am likely to say "I have seen and learned a lot"
13. My life would make a good novel or movie
14. My life has been monotonous (r)
15. I often feel bored with my life (r)
16. My life has been uneventful (r)
17. I can't remember the last time I've done or experienced something new (r)

*Items with (r) are reverse items.

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