

Lack of relationships, education top list of common American regrets

June 8 2011

we've all had a few. Although too many regrets can interfere with life and mental health, a healthy amount of regret can motivate us to improve our lives, say researchers Mike Morrison of the University of Illinois and Neal Roese of Northwestern University in the current issue of *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

The researchers telephoned a [representative sample](#) of nearly 400 Americans to ask them about what they regret. The most frequent regrets of Americans are about [love](#), [education](#), and work. Romantic regrets—America's most common—focused on lost chances for potential romances, and relationships that did not live up to their potential.

The other common regrets for Americans involved family, education, career, finances, and parenting. Women were more likely to have regrets about relationships (romance, family), and men were more likely to have regrets about work (career and education). It was the lack of romantic relationships and the lack of higher education that were regretted most.

At first, people tend to regret the things they've done more than the opportunities they didn't take. But with time, people come to regret more keenly the chances they let go past. Over their lives, Americans had more regret about the times they've lacked opportunities than about the choices they've made.

"We tend to regret matters that are most important to us," said Morrison,

"people crave strong, stable social relationships and are unhappy when they lack them." Regret can be painful, but it can also be useful. "Some people say they try to live life without regret and, I think that's being unfair to the human condition," said Roese, "if we try to squeeze regrets away, we're sacrificing a bit of our humanity."

More information: The article "Regrets of the Typical American: Findings From a Nationally Representative Sample" in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, is available free for a limited time at spp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../401756.full.pdf+html

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: Lack of relationships, education top list of common American regrets (2011, June 8) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-06-lack-relationships-common-american.html>

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