

Sense of gratitude counters life dissatisfaction in psychological study

March 25 2015

Everyone knows that money can't buy happiness – but what might make rich people happier is revealed in the current issue of The Journal of Positive Psychology.

James A. Roberts of Baylor University and his two colleagues set out to explore the [relationship](#) between materialism – making acquisition of [material possessions](#) a central focus of one's life – and life satisfaction.

Numerous studies have already shown that people who are more materialistic are generally less satisfied with their standards of living, their relationships and their lives as a whole. With that being the case, the researchers wondered if anything could moderate that relationship and in effect make [materialistic people](#) more satisfied with their lot.

They write: "Given the negative relationship that materialism has with positive affect, it stands to reason that positive affect and related constructs such as gratitude might be important moderators in the association between materialism and life satisfaction. In contrast to materialism, gratitude is a positive emotion that is experienced when someone perceives that another person has intentionally given him or her a valued benefit."

To test their theory, the trio analysed the results of a specially designed questionnaire sent to 249 university students. The main results were as expected. "People who pursue happiness through material gain tend to feel worse, and this is related to negative appraisals of their satisfaction

with life," they confirmed.

However, their results also demonstrated that gratitude, and to a lesser extent, positive affect, both 'buffer' the negative effects of materialism, in effect making more grateful individuals more satisfied with their lives.

The team observed: "Individuals high in gratitude showed less of a relationship between materialism and negative affect. Additionally, individuals high in materialism showed decreased life satisfaction when either gratitude or positive affect was low."

The trio conclude that negative affect, positive affect and gratitude seem to be 'key pieces to the puzzle of the relationship between materialism and dissatisfaction with life.' They suggest that the 'pro-social, other-focused nature of [gratitude](#)' might help to reduce the 'self-focus' inherent in [materialism](#).

"Specifically, individuals who are able to appreciate what they have even while engaging in materialistic pursuits might be able to be maintain high levels of [life satisfaction](#)."

In other words, being rich isn't enough to make you happy; you also need to be grateful as well.

More information: "Looking for happiness in all the wrong places: The moderating role of gratitude and affect in the materialism–life satisfaction relationship," *Journal of Positive Psychology* [DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2015.1004553](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1004553)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

Citation: Sense of gratitude counters life dissatisfaction in psychological study (2015, March 25)
retrieved 19 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-gratitude-counters-life-dissatisfaction-psychological.html>

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