

# Rich and yet poor?

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**Poor and yet rich? In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king! The psychology of the social comparison provides insight into social and psychological treadmills. Someone can do well at school, graduate cum laude at a good university, have a good job career, eventually buy a very ambitious apartment at a triple A location, and ... stand socially down the ladder again. So you may become rich, move to a higher socio-economic status (SES) and then ... you are once again at the bottom of the social ladder that you have just reached.**

Everyone around you is "richer", (seemingly) more successful; you are "poor" again and you get contempt from your new physical and social environment. Feeling poor again comes from (upward or downward) social comparison. We even know about (Hollywood) stars that live satisfaction seems impossible beyond a certain point of wealth. Rich and yet poor, disturbed and yet successful, successful and yet unhappy, normal and yet dissatisfied; all of these concepts have complicated and certainly no clear linear causal relationships with each other.

In everyday life, non-linear causal relationships can be investigated excellently and that is precisely why applied science appeals to me. Practice is leading in applied science. In the context of psychopathology, this means that we do not only look at general knowledge that can be derived from a large number of people with a certain mental condition (disorder). The emphasis is mainly on people who, despite a certain diagnosis, do not (or no longer) experience the problems that most people with such a diagnosis encounter.

This makes falsification central to the practical study of people in particular, instead of just verification: if this person meets the conditions for being diagnosed with x, but is nevertheless able to lead a successful and integrated life, then disorder x is not always a disturbing one. However exceptional such a success story may be, sooner or later the focus on possible positive results inevitably raises the question of which factors make the difference between (often) failing and incidental success. When does a disability become a talent, when is less more? Or back to the beginning, when does rich become poor and when is poor rich?

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## Positive psychology

In psychology this is referred to as positive psychology. But positive can also mean "negative". After all, if a certain condition, for example giftedness, usually leads to success, but sometimes seems to be a serious disadvantage, a "positive" (applied) psychology will also study this. It is really about acknowledging that developmental results are not necessarily linearly causally related to generally accepted views. Reality is more complex.

The reality is not about everything in general, but about this person or situation in particular. There is much to learn from individual cases, from which other people with a similar condition may benefit. Then we may speak of differences and talents instead of disorders. After all, it is beneficial for our society to facilitate people in such a way that they can maintain themselves well in society and can be of special value, for example in the labor market. For example, upbringing, education and treatment can help make the poor rich!

