

Melany Santos

Professor Nobles

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Is Life Hard?

How The Controllable and Uncontrollable Shape Our Life

Introduction

“The purpose of life is to find your meaning & to discover. That could mean something different to everyone ranging from wanting to spend your life having a lot of fun or living life in isolation. For me, I feel that the meaning of my life is to do what I can for the people around me.”

-Unknown, Qualtrics Survey

“Life just happens, and it is important to make the most out of it while you can. I've dedicated my life to pursuing my dreams of economic stability and having a family, as it is what I believe will bring me happiness.”

-Unknown, Qualtrics Survey

When reflecting on our life, we tend to be judgmental and look at what impacted us heavily. We base our conclusion on mere moments in time that determine what was good and bad. Society, health, and all its implications have inevitably shaped our human experience. Life is something we all do; we all go through. In the process, we meet various road bumps and difficulties that shape us into the person we become. Based on the question ‘is life hard’ many can endure the rigor or learn to despise their lives. Specific moments in time cause people to view their life from unique perspectives. I became interested in researching this topic because it is one of the most complex questions that does not have a correct answer. A better way to look at this question is that it is biased and relative to everyone’s life in accordance with their situation.

Life takes its course on everyone differently, and our situations cause us to have a sense of ambiguity in what life means when regarding the good and bad.

Self-Care & Personal Growth

Atomic Habits

It is important to emphasize that so many books, articles, magazines, and other reading materials stress different views on what should be labeled as a hard or easy life. There isn't just one answer or idea that is right instead it is a topic of exploration. The journey of exploring if life should be labeled with a negative or positive connotation lies within personal embodied experiences. The moment I experienced another human experience that wasn't mine was in a personal-growth book. An author by the name of James Clear wrote a best-selling book based on habits that he learned to implement when he was at the lowest point in his life (Clear). This book helped many of its readers implement small tweaks into their daily lives to create a sense of ease in what life can mean. In his opening paragraph, he talks about the traumatic situation that made him think his life was over (Clear 5). From this experience, Clear really emphasizes that life for him was unimaginably hard, but the habits he discusses in his book set him on a path he never imagined. I use this book as the basis of the question 'is life hard' because not many books can make a reader sit and ponder about a subject after the book is finished. Clear starts the book by telling the story of when he got severely hit in the face with a baseball bat. The impact of the bat in collision with his face was so strong that his nose became distorted. In a matter of moments, he had multiple fractures and a broken nose. He got rushed to the hospital and didn't recall the moment of impact nor did he have knowledge of the place and time he was in. Clear's body started shutting down and went into a coma no one thought he would wake up from.

This would become the hardest moment of his life, and when trying to reclaim his life as a baseball player, he would fail (Clear). This to him meant a life with no prosperous future or opportunities. Clear's once-promised full-ride athletic scholarship was gone. He went to college with dreams of becoming a great baseball player but instead discovered the habits that would turn his life around. In his story, Clear had two options, to call his life either good or bad. But he doesn't define it in such a way, he uses a terrible experience to prove that his path in life was to be challenged but not destroyed. This leads to the first point of looking at people's approach to what a hard life means. People of various places and backgrounds go through these life experiences that mark them but do not define them.

Faith & Motivation

If we look at life in terms of enjoying it in whatever way it comes people can be optimistic or pessimistic. Optimistic as defined by Merriam-Webster is defined as: "feeling or showing hope for the future." (Merriam-Webster) People cope with the hardships of life differently to the best of their ability. A magazine from New York Amsterdam News, which was an exclusively African American Newspaper, included a small token of motivation for its fellow community by sharing a wake-up call. The author challenged the underrepresented community to focus their lives on the things they did for the greater good, not the things they did wrong (Tatum). An important idea of the newspaper was to not worry about the past or what the future holds but to accept what they knew now.

Another viewpoint was offered by Mary McGlone, the author of the National Catholic Reporter. McGlone took the approach of faith and religion to show how this immensely impacts the meaning of people's lives (McGlone 23). She mentions that life can be looked at and dedicated to God, all while trusting in Him regardless of the difficulties that arise. Religion plays

a major role in the lives of many people all around the world, and many delve into this higher calling to trust that wherever life is taking them will be all right, all while maintaining hope during hardships. Enjoying life through faith, hope, and motivation can make the hard times manageable. Personal growth is about connecting with yourself and your potential while realizing that a hard life can be a good life.

Health Science Approach

The social determinants of health (SOH) play a role in the environments people are born in, live in, learn, work, play, worship, and grow up around that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life outcomes and risks (Healthy People 2030). Areas of poverty cause a chain of low-paying jobs, no healthy food available, and a decrease in educational opportunities. Let's say, for example, a person who is born in an area with violence with less attainable opportunities in school. This person becomes challenged by the outside world and the opportunities they can't receive. This becomes a chain; one thing embeds into the other. From this scenario, the person achieves less in school causing them to have a harder time pursuing higher education. Higher education is something needed for most high-paying jobs to create a sustainable future. This inability to achieve a well-established future causes an impact on quality of life. When put into this situation, how can a person feel? Most of the time, this causes a feeling of distraught, thinking they're unfortunate for being born into less favorable circumstances. It is noteworthy to know how health science plays a role in the tiny things of life that become the most important over the course of time.

Rags to Riches

In one peer-review article, I examined a writer from the Wall Street Journal by the name of Kathy Chen who wrote about Rebiya Kader. In this short article, Chen talks about a successful

legend that defied poverty, abuse, and trauma (Chen). This points to an important category under the SOH that explains the neighborhood and built environment a person grows up in. Coming from a Muslim-orientated area of China caused Kader to have more implications on her that came off as her defying the odds. Chen points out that Kader trusted her process and defied all odds to become successful. The Wall Street Journal stressed that her story was important to show the possibilities a person can give to themselves. Rebiya Kader shows a pattern of being near to nothing but finding a turnaround. Many people across the world come across these barriers of violence and unsafety in the place they consider home. Racial/ethnic minorities with these disadvantages are exposed to more harmful factors (Healthy People 2030). But it is safe to note that these circumstances bring out character and determination to become a fighter in any rigorous moment.

Controlling the Uncontrollable

When it comes to the things we can't control, a lot of it falls into that category. We come into this world with a preset of race, home, genetic factors, and opportunities that sometimes aren't predictable due to life's circumstances. Using the examples in the previous paragraphs and using them comparatively is easier said than done. But this, in fact, is not the reality. Another article I examined titled; *I Ain't no Fortunate One* explores a writer who tries to look at the biases of more fortunate people in America (Phillips 1404). The same fortunate people justify their hardships compared to minorities stating that minorities' hardships aren't as serious as we hear. The author Taylor Phillips explains in her abstract that not exposing this inequity gives unearned advantages to some groups over others (Phillips 1404). Phillips investigates this across many several experiments exploring certain self-attributes that cause this sense of who suffers more than others. While historically many have taught division among communities based on

what they have or don't, this causes an infliction on putting one race or group of people in a hierarchy. The fact that history shows underrepresented people suffer the most does not mean that other people who are well-off don't suffer or have never suffered to the magnitude an underrepresented person has. This article provides a different point of view- that being a certain race or unchangeable factor doesn't change how hard it can be. A measure of a negative connotation on life is based on the perspective that person has known which comes in different magnitudes.

Cultural Difficulties

The first book I ever pondered on was a children's novel about a Mexican teenager surviving in America. A so-called children's book that would make me look at my life differently. I can say that it made me belittle my own perception of what I thought was hard and took me to the most vulnerable places of my identity. Erika Sánchez's novel *I am not your Perfect Mexican Daughter* demonstrates a story that is heartbreaking but uplifting. Sánchez uses this novel to really show generational trauma and how the life we live can sometimes leave a mark so deep we have no other choice but to see it as a bad life (Sánchez). Sánchez talks about uncontrollable factors, like the social determinants of health I previously mentioned, and how many must struggle more to reach a semi-decent life. She uses immigration, abuse, and trauma to show how a teen uncovers dark secrets embedded in her family while trying to break her generational barriers. This book also puts importance on living in poverty and how that is one of the biggest factors that makes life hard.

Researching in My Life

After having these personal connections and eye-opening realizations with books and articles, I had to find ways to see life from all the angles I could. I have a limited capacity on

knowing every situation because I have only been confined to my personal experiences. So, I took on the experience of the next best person, my roommate. Nadia and I both were born in Virginia with family roots in Guatemala. I grew up all my life in Richmond learning how to implement my identity in a place that wasn't so welcoming at times. Nadia left back to Guatemala at around six years old and came back to Virginia at age twelve. As we grew older, I noticed these significant differences even though we were almost the same in personality, culture, and beliefs. One day, I sat down and asked her where these small but significant changes came from if we had such similar backgrounds. This was where I noticed that there are so many things life throws at you that test your ability to withstand difficulties. Nadia talked about being sheltered in poverty knowing her life could've changed if she wasn't forced to be back in our home country (Turcios). She lost so much by being in an unfortunate place at the wrong time. Nadia talks about some of her life's events in such a sad way that made me question how I could even think what I went through was *hard*:

“Being in Guatemala made me feel this lack of communication with those whom I called family, I didn't deserve those painful times, but it made me see the world in the eyes of being grateful for what I have and don't have. People describe me as a funny and an empathetic person- little do they know it was my way of fighting for myself when I thought I had nothing else to fight for.” (Turcios)

Conclusion

Over the course of eighteen years, there have been times I considered my life as hard, in my eyes my personal experiences have led me to this exact moment in time; writing about life being hard or not. I want to end with the fact that my research can never be proven as right or wrong, it is such an ambiguous question that I wanted to explore because it truly ignited my

curiosity. Life can be hard and to what magnitude is up to the reader to decide. As the author of your life, always look for the thing that defines you positively or negatively and continue from there. Road bumps always come with a situation that seems invincible but connecting with who you are and what makes you feel alive can make life bearable. Life is the longest thing we'll ever do, and we all live it from different perspectives. I asked what the meaning of life was in my survey and personally, I would say that the meaning of life is to be felt. Life needs to be hard at times so we can feel the low lows and truly enjoy the high highs. We decide our path in life, but not always does it turn out the way we expect it. We control our choices to a certain extent, but some choices chose us. Regardless of what arises in our time here, we go through different situations based on the choices we make, what background we come from, and what life has in store for us. Life goes on and we can choose to simply exist in it or to live in it. There will always be one thing that sets you back and pushes you to the edge. From that, we make a path of our own, challenge what has challenged us, and for mere moments in time realize that what is falling apart is actually falling into place.

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