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**Gregg Henriques Ph.D.**  
[Theory of Knowledge](#)

# Six Domains of Psychological Well-being

Ryff's six domains of psychological well-being.

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As scholars of the topic know, [happiness](#) and well-being are complicated constructs. This was evident this past weekend as my family engaged in a spirited discussion on the question what makes people happy and what constitutes happiness. One thing that they got hung up on, which is an area that scholars have debated much about, is the difference and relationship between being happy and optimal psychological functioning. As such, I thought it would be useful to share what I call “Ryff’s Six”, which is a helpful model for thinking about optimal psychological functioning. I have framed her work below in the form of an assessment, so that readers can get a better sense of applying her “six” to themselves and seeing what areas they are doing better at than others.

Long before the field of “[positive psychology](#)” was labeled, Carol Ryff was doing pioneering work on the study of psychological well-being (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Similar to some of the discussions and debates my family was having, she (rightly in my view) argued that most research on well-being up to that time largely translated into happiness. However, when she thought of well-being she thought about it more in terms of optimal psychological functioning rather than happiness. She engaged in a systematic review of theories and perspectives in psychology, where she identified six broad facets associated with optimal psychological functioning as follows: 1) self-acceptance; 2) positive relations; 3) autonomy; 4) environmental mastery; 5) purpose in life and 6) a sense of personal growth.

Here are the domains she identified, described and organized in the form of a questionnaire. At the end, I very briefly share some means that we obtained on a sample of about 500 undergraduates at the university I am employed.

1. Please rate your levels of self-acceptance, which refers to the degree positive attitudes you have about yourself, your past behaviors and the choices that you have made. Someone with high self-acceptance is pleased with who they are and accepting of multiple aspects of themselves, both good and bad. In contrast, individuals with low self-acceptance are often self-critical, confused about their [identity](#), and wish they were different in many respects.

1. Very low in self-acceptance
2. Low in self-acceptance
3. Somewhat low in self-acceptance
4. Neutral or sometimes high and sometimes low
5. Somewhat high in self-acceptance
6. High in self-acceptance
7. Very high in self-acceptance

disrespected, unloved, disconnected, hostile, rejected, or misunderstood. They tend to feel insecure and sometimes alone or distant from others.

1. Very poor relations with others
2. Poor relations with others
3. Somewhat poor relations with others
4. Neutral or sometimes positive and sometimes negative
5. Somewhat positive relationships with others
6. Positive relations with others
7. Very positive relations with others

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3. Please rate your sense of autonomy. Individuals with high levels of autonomy are independent, self-reliant, can think for themselves, do not have a strong need to conform, and don't worry too much about what others think about them. In contrast, individuals low in autonomy feel dependent on others, are constantly worried about the opinions of others, are always looking to others for guidance, and feel strong pressures to conform to others' desires.

1. Very low in autonomy
2. Low in autonomy
3. Somewhat low in autonomy
4. Neutral or sometimes high and sometimes low
5. Somewhat high in autonomy
6. High in autonomy
7. Very high in autonomy

4. Please rate your sense of mastery over the environment, which is the degree to which you feel competent to meet the demands of your situation. Individuals high in environmental mastery feel they have the resources and capacities to cope, adjust and adapt to problems, and are not overwhelmed by stress. Those with a low level of environmental mastery may feel powerless to change aspects of their environment with which they are unsatisfied, feel they lack the resources to cope, and are frequently stressed or overwhelmed.

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1. Very low in environmental mastery
2. Low in environmental mastery
3. Somewhat low in environmental mastery
4. Neutral or sometimes high and sometimes low
5. Somewhat high in environmental mastery
6. High in environmental mastery
7. Very high in environmental mastery

5. Please rate your level of personal growth. Individuals with high levels of personal growth see themselves as changing in a positive direction, moving toward their potential, becoming more mature, increasing their self-knowledge, and learning new skills. Individuals low in personal growth feel no sense of change or development, often feel bored and uninterested in life, and lack a sense of improvement over time.

1. Very low in personal growth
2. Low in personal growth
3. Somewhat low in personal growth
4. Neutral or sometimes high and sometimes low
5. Somewhat high in personal growth
6. High in personal growth
7. Very high in personal growth

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6. Please rate the level of your sense of purpose in life. Individual with a high sense of purpose sees their life has having meaning, they work to make a difference in the world, and often feel connected to ideas or social movements larger than themselves. Such individuals have a sense that they know what their life is about. Individuals low in this quality often question if there is a larger purpose, do not feel their life makes sense, and attribute no higher meaning or value to life other than the fulfillment of a series of tasks.

1. Very low in sense of purpose
2. Low in sense of purpose

5. Somewhat high in sense of purpose
6. High in sense of purpose
7. Very high in sense of purpose

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These questions were given to on a fairly large group of college students at James Madison University (N = ~500). For students at our university, the total mean was just under 32. The mean for each item was similar, each falling between 5 and 5.5 (somewhat high and high).

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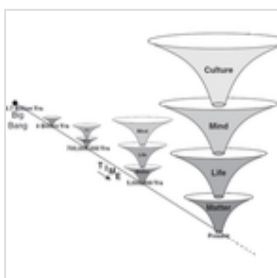
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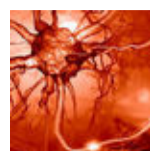
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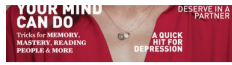
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