

I've always been interested in the problem of wanting more. Economists argue that want drives our societies. Some of us may even seek to be free from it every now and then. But it's worth asking the real value of wanting more.

Recently, I read about this poll by the Pew Research Center, which found that only about 54% of all people in the developed world are satisfied with their lives. Let's think about that for a moment. This includes people who, for the large part, have health coverage, jobs, even enjoy substantially more freedoms than most others. In other words, you and me. Yet, among us there is widespread dissatisfaction.

But this poll got me thinking: is that really bad? It's certainly unfortunate that people anywhere should be dissatisfied. But is it possible that dissatisfaction, even among those far better off than most others, may push us to something better?

It's a question that I first encountered much earlier in life.

Of course, as a little kid at home I always wished for unreasonable amounts of most things, but then I left for boarding school.

And through a substantial portion of my teenage years, spent in the quaint town of Dehradun in North India, I learned that desires were most appropriately met in moderation. I learned to live on a uniform coat and tie, one pair of frequently polished black shoes, and even a prescribed limit of monthly talk-time with my parents. Sure, I may have been better off with more of each, but learning to be satisfied with less seemed like a great habit. And it was, at the very least, a part of growing up.

When I reflect on that time now, though, I've come to see it very differently. I've realized that the austerity of my environment wasn't designed to make me settle for less, but to push me to earn more if I aspired to it. I would need a leadership position to be able to wear a different tie, and certain academic credentials for a special blazer. And as someone who found great value in these pursuits, I recognize that I hadn't suddenly or in any real way stopped wanting more, material or otherwise.

When I got to senior year of high school, I was convinced that wanted to matriculate in a college environment that was filled with determination and even ambition. A place where students would willingly overcommit, and work overtime to meet deadlines; where professors would push me to challenge my intellectual capacity. In short, somewhere I would perhaps **not** be satisfied.

During my last 18 months at Harvard, this persistent desire has stayed with me everyday. In fact, the increasing awareness of how short my time here is, has only made me want to absorb as

much of it as possible. Now, I even try to shop random classes and participate in clubs I had never competed before.

But while I've always convinced myself that I gain from this constant pursuit, there have been times when I've wondered if it governs too many of my decisions. Perhaps that is the lesson I should have taken home with me from school. It's a thought that has crossed my mind during some of the more grueling times in college – weeks when I've felt overwhelmed with work I willingly signed on for. As many of you may know, I did spend most of freshman year between Greenough and Lamont.

To be sure, I don't think there is a moral inferiority to wanting more, so long as it doesn't harm anyone else, and isn't unjust. But often the longing for more tomorrow is also an admission of dissatisfaction today. Shouldn't we then just prefer to be content, and to chase things that might be easier to get?

It may not be a question I ask myself everyday, but answering it has helped me realize why I truly value wanting more.

The aspiration to something better is undoubtedly a force for good. Wanting for selfish reasons can give purpose to our lives. And wanting more for others can even help transform them.

Perhaps it's not dissatisfaction and the consequent want that we should find obscene, it's not wanting to share.

And I do think what's true for us as individuals is also true for our societies. After all, it's not an America wanting greatness that we necessarily fear, it's an America wanting greatness at others' expense.