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M. Joseph Sirgy

Positive Balance

A Theory of Well-Being and Positive
Mental Health

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A Theory of Well-Being and Positive Mental
Health



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M. Joseph Sirgy
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA, USA

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This book is dedicated to my wife (Pamela), my four children (Melissa, Danielle, Michelle, and Emmaline), my four grandchildren (Isabella, Alexander, Scott, and Jake), my two brothers (Abraham and Jimmy), and my cousins and their families scattered in the USA, Canada, Australia, France, Lebanon, and Egypt. The book is also dedicated to all those well-being researchers who have devoted much of their professional careers to the promulgation of the science of well-being, happiness, and quality of life—those who believe that there is more to life than simply surviving or minimizing the stresses and strains of daily life. Well-being, happiness, and quality-of-life researchers shine a beacon of light to the science that can elevate human existence and make people flourish.

Preface

Here is a little history to help the reader better understand my personal motivation in writing this book. I am a management psychologist (Ph.D. in social/industrial/organizational psychology) and an endowed professor of marketing at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I have been a professor of marketing for the last 40 years and have written much about quality-of-life issues related to psychology, sociology, economics, political science, marketing, management, business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and public policy, among others.

Much of my early research has employed the concept of life satisfaction as a pivotal concept in several quality-of-life (QOL) research streams capturing aspects of material well-being, consumer well-being, employee well-being, residential well-being, and community well-being. I viewed life satisfaction as the primary concept that reflects well-being, and I treated it as the ultimate dependent variable. This perspective was clearly captured in my 2002 book on the *Psychology of Quality of Life* (Sirgy, 2002). In 2012, I published my second book on the *Psychology of Quality of Life* (Sirgy, 2012). The subtitle of that book was *Hedonic Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, and Eudaimonia*. At that time, I was able to document three major sets of well-being concepts, namely the three well-being concepts as captured in the book's subtitle. More recently, my colleagues and I have broadened our conceptualization of well-being to include these three concepts of well-being as articulated in the 2012 book, namely hedonic well-being (i.e., positive and negative affect), life satisfaction (overall life satisfaction as well as domain satisfaction), and eudaimonic well-being (i.e., personal growth, meaning in life, environmental mastery, self-actualization, social actualization, social integration, and social contribution)—addressed as dependent variables in various studies (Joshianloo, Sirgy, & Park, 2018a, 2018b).

In parallel, one of the research programs I carried out over the years dealt directly with the balanced life. My initial ideas of the balanced life were documented in my 2002 book on the psychology of quality of life (Sirgy, 2002; also see Sirgy, 2012). In that book, I wrote about how people achieve a balanced life by engaging in cognitive, affective, and behavior-based strategies dealing with satisfaction

segmented in various life domains such as work life, family life, social life, and financial life. Specifically, I introduced two major balance principles: the principle of balance within life domains and the principle of balance between life domains. Balance within a life domain is achieved by experiencing both positive and negative events. Positive events serve a reward function. That is, goals are attained, and resources are acquired. Negative events serve a motivational function (i.e., these events lead the person to recognize problems and opportunities for further achievement and growth). In contrast, balance between life domains is achieved through compensation. Compensation takes two forms. One form involves the increase of the perceived importance or salience of life domains containing much positive affect to act as a countervailing force to life domains containing much negative affect. The second form involves the increase of salience of negative life domains to compensate for positive life domains. Increasing the importance of negative life domains motivates the individual to pay greater attention to that domain by prompting the individual to engage in corrective action within these domains. The goal is to decrease the negative valence of beliefs related to one's evaluation of the totality of a negative life domain.

I wrote (with one of my doctoral students) a paper (Sirgy & Wu, 2009) on that topic published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*. This paper won the Best Paper Award in that journal and was reproduced in a book on happiness, edited by Antonella Delle Fave (Sirgy, 2013). In that paper, we argued that a balanced life (in addition to a pleasant life, an engaged life, and a meaningful life) contributes significantly to subjective well-being. Balance contributes to subjective well-being because of the satisfaction *limit* that people can derive from a single life domain. People must be involved in multiple domains to satisfy the full spectrum of human development needs. Different life domains tend to focus on different human developmental needs. More specifically, balance contributes to subjective well-being because subjective well-being can only be attained when both survival and growth needs are met. High levels of subjective well-being cannot be attained with satisfaction of basic needs or growth needs alone. Both sets of needs must be met to contribute significantly to subjective well-being.

In 2016, my colleague Dong-Jin Lee and I wrote a conceptual paper dealing with work-life balance (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). In that paper we identified four research streams that have well-articulated four corresponding factors in work-life balance: (1) balanced role commitment, (2) positive spillover, (3) role conflict, and (4) social alienation. Based on these four factors, we classified individuals into four work-life balance groups with differing levels of life satisfaction. We then explained the psychological dynamics of the model by articulating three balance principles: satisfaction spillover across life domains, need satisfaction quota, and satisfaction from basic plus growth needs.

In 2018, the same colleague (Dong-Jin Lee) and I reviewed much of the literature on work-life balance and developed an integrated model involving two key dimensions: engagement in work life and nonwork life and minimal conflict between social roles in work and nonwork life (Sirgy & Lee, 2018a). We cited much evidence suggesting that work-life balance has substantive consequences in terms of work-

related, nonwork-related, and stress-related outcomes. We also identified a set of personal and organizational antecedents to work-life balance and explained their effects. Then, we described a set of theoretical principles to explain the effect of work-life balance on life satisfaction. These principles include satisfaction limits, satisfaction of the full spectrum of human developmental needs, role conflict, positive spillover, role enrichment, segmentation, and compensation. Doing so provided us with a solid foundation to further develop these theoretical principles of work-life balance, which were further articulated in another conceptual paper (Lee & Sirgy, 2018). In that paper, we proposed a formative conceptualization of work-life balance composed of a set of inter-life domain strategies used to increase life satisfaction. Specifically, work-life balance was conceptualized as a higher-order construct composed of four behavior-based life domain strategies and four cognition-based life domain strategies. The behavior-based strategies involve role engagement in multiple domains, role enrichment, domain compensation, and role conflict management. The cognition-based strategies involve positive spillover, segmentation, value compensation, and whole-life perspective. Our ideas of work-life balance were cultivated further to make the case of the balanced life in general in another book chapter in *e-Handbook of Subjective Well-Being* (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). We formally defined life balance as a state of equally moderate-to-high levels of satisfaction in important life domains contributing to life satisfaction. We argued that life balance is commonly achieved through two sets of inter-domain strategies, namely strategies to prompt greater participation of satisfied domains to contribute to life satisfaction and strategies to increase domain satisfaction and decrease dissatisfaction. Inter-domain strategies designed to prompt greater participation of satisfied life domains to contribute to life satisfaction include:

- Engagement in social roles in multiple life domains (explained by the principle of satisfaction limits)
- Engagement in roles in health, safety, economic, social, work, leisure, and cultural domains (explained by the principle of satisfaction of the full spectrum of human development needs)
- Engagement in new social roles (explained by the principle of diminishing satisfaction)

Inter-domain strategies designed to increase domain satisfaction and decrease domain dissatisfaction include:

- Integrating domains with high satisfaction (explained by the principle of positive spillover)
- Optimizing domain satisfaction by changing domain salience (explained by the value-based compensation principle)
- Compartmentalizing domains with low satisfaction (explained by the segmentation principle)
- Coping with domain dissatisfaction by engaging in roles in other domains likely to produce satisfaction (explained by the behavior-based compensation principle)
- Stress management (explained by the principle of role conflict)
- Using skills, experiences, and resources in one role for other roles (explained by the principle of role enrichment)

In parallel, my colleagues and I used the concept of the balanced life to develop and test models of business ethics (e.g., Lee et al., 2014), the digital workplace (Lee & Sirgy, 2019), and marketing and retailing (e.g., Ekici, Sirgy, Lee, Yu, & Bosnjak, 2018; Lee et al., 2014; Sirgy, Lee, & Yu, 2020).

This work culminated in providing me with a foundation for my theory on positive balance. The foundation for the theory of positive balance was published in a recent article in *Quality of Life Research* (Sirgy, 2019). In that paper, I developed a hierarchical model of the balanced life (and positive mental health). I called it “positive balance.” Specifically, I argued that individuals with positive balance are characterized to experience:

- A preponderance of neurochemicals related to positive emotions (dopamine, serotonin, etc.) relative to neurochemicals related to negative emotions (cortisol), at a physiological level
- A preponderance of positive affect (happiness, joy, etc.) relative to negative affect (anger, sadness, etc.), at an emotional level
- A preponderance of domain satisfaction (satisfaction in salient and multiple life domains such as family life and work life) relative to dissatisfaction in other life domains, at a cognitive level
- A preponderance of positive evaluations about one’s life using certain standards of comparison (satisfaction with one’s life compared to one’s past life, the life of family members, etc.) relative to negative evaluations about one’s life using similar or other standards of comparison, at a meta-cognitive level
- A preponderance of positive psychological traits (self-acceptance, personal growth, etc.) relative to negative psychological traits (pessimism, hopelessness, etc.), at a development level
- A preponderance of perceived social resources (social acceptance, social actualization, etc.) relative to perceived social constraints (social exclusion, ostracism, etc.), at a social-ecological level

This book is a direct extension of the Sirgy (2019) article. I further build the positive balance model by further articulating the concept of positive balance at the different hierarchical levels and developing the theoretical links between the hierarchical levels. This is my goal in writing this book. I hope that I met my goal. The reader will be the ultimate judge.

Blacksburg, VA, USA

M. Joseph Sirgy

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I am most grateful to Alex Michalos, the editor of Springer’s Social Indicators Research Book Series, who read the Sirgy (2019) article that was published in *Quality of Life Research* and encouraged me to further elaborate on the theoretical links between the hierarchical levels by writing this book. Alex Michalos has been my role model and a major source of inspiration since I first met him back in the early 1990s. I am equally grateful to Shinjini Chatterjee, senior editor at Springer who had enough confidence in me to produce a good book likely to make a lasting impact in our field of study, namely quality-of-life research. I am also grateful to Krithika Shivakumar and her production team at Springer for their excellent work in transforming the manuscript into a fine book.

I am additionally grateful to my family for moral support and love—my wife, Pamela Jackson, and my four daughters: Melissa Racklin (her husband Anton Racklin and her three beautiful children: Isabella, Alec, and Jake), Danielle Gray (and her son Scott), Michelle Sirgy, and Emmaline Smith. My many thanks are also extended to my two brothers, Abraham and Jimmy, and their families, as well as his many cousins and their families scattered in many places around the world.

About the Book

In the first chapter (Chap. 1: The Theory of Positive Balance in Brief), I briefly describe the theory at large. The theory can be summarized as follows. Individuals with high levels of well-being and positive mental health are characterized to experience (1) a preponderance of neurochemicals related to positive emotions (dopamine, serotonin, etc.) relative to neurochemicals related to negative emotions (cortisol), at a physiological level; (2) a preponderance of positive affect (happiness, joy, etc.) relative to negative affect (anger, sadness, etc.), at an emotional level; (3) a preponderance of domain satisfaction (satisfaction in salient and multiple life domains such as family life, work life, etc.) relative to dissatisfaction in other life domains, at a cognitive level; (4) a preponderance of positive evaluations about one's life using certain standards of comparison (satisfaction with one's life compared to one's past life, the life of family members, etc.) relative to negative evaluations about one's life using similar or other standards of comparison, at a meta-cognitive level; (5) a preponderance of positive psychological traits (self-acceptance, personal growth, etc.) relative to negative psychological traits (pessimism, hopelessness, etc.), at a development level; and (6) a preponderance of perceived social resources (social acceptance, social actualization, etc.) relative to perceived social constraints (social exclusion, ostracism, etc.), at a social-ecological level. Furthermore, well-being at each hierarchical level influences its superordinate constructs through emergence.

Chapter 2 (Positive Balance at the Physiological Level: Positive and Negative Neurotransmitters) advances the following definition of positive mental health at the physiological level. Individuals with high levels of well-being (specifically hedonic well-being) experience a preponderance of neurochemicals related to rewards (dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin) relative to negative neurochemicals related to stress (cortisol), at a physiological level. This definition of positive mental health at the physiological level is based on much of the research literature on the neurobiology of hedonic well-being and the stress response system.

Chapter 3 (Positive Balance at the Emotional Level: Hedonic Well-Being) discusses the concept of positive balance at the emotional level of analysis. I define

positive mental health at the emotional level as follows: Individuals with high levels of well-being experience a preponderance of positive emotions (happiness, joy, elation, contentment, serenity, etc.) relative to negative emotions (anger, hate, disgust, fear, jealousy, envy, etc.). This definition of positive mental health at the emotional level is based on much of the research related to three programs of research in well-being, namely the measurement of positive and negative affect, the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, and flow theory. How does well-being at the physiological level (neurochemicals associated with the reward system and stress) influence the formation of well-being at the emotional level (hedonic well-being)? Positive neurochemicals (dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin) at the physiological level mediated by a process of cognitive appraisal result in positive affect (happiness, joy, contentment, etc.) at the emotional level; and conversely, negative neurochemicals (cortisol) mediated by a process of cognitive appraisal result in negative affect (anger, sadness, jealousy, envy, depression, etc.).

Chapter 4 (Positive Balance at the Cognitive Level: Domain Satisfaction) discusses the concept of positive balance at the cognitive level as reflected in domain satisfaction. I define positive mental health at the cognitive level as follows: Individuals characterized as having positive mental health tend to experience a preponderance of domain satisfaction (satisfaction in salient and multiple life domains such as family life, work life, and social life) relative to dissatisfaction in other life domains. This definition of positive mental health at the cognitive level is based on a program of research related to three balance principles: the principle of satisfaction limits, the principle of the full spectrum of human developmental needs, and the principle of diminishing satisfaction. How does well-being at the emotional level (hedonic well-being) influence the formation of well-being at the cognitive level (domain satisfaction)? I argue that positive and negative affect (at the emotional level) is mediated by a domain segmentation process to produce domain satisfaction.

Chapter 5 (Positive Balance at the Meta-Cognitive Level: Life Satisfaction) provides a definition of positive mental health based on the concept of positive balance at the meta-cognitive level. Individuals characterized as having positive mental health tend to experience a preponderance of positive evaluations about one's life using certain standards of comparison (satisfaction with one's life compared to one's past life, the life of family members, etc.) relative to negative evaluations about one's life using similar or other standards of comparison. I then discuss five programs of research supporting this definition of positive balance at the meta-cognitive level: multiple discrepancies theory, congruity life satisfaction, temporal life satisfaction, social comparison, frequency of positive affect, and homeostatically protected mood. I describe how domain satisfaction contributes to life satisfaction through an emergence process involving a bottom-up process. Specifically, domain satisfaction at the cognitive level, mediated by a bottom-up process at the meta-cognitive level, results in life satisfaction; and conversely, domain dissatisfaction mediated by a bottom-up process results in life dissatisfaction.

Chapter 6 (Positive Balance at the Developmental Level: Eudaimonia) offers a definition of positive mental health based on the concept of positive balance at the

developmental level and discusses nine programs of research, supporting this definition: hedonic versus eudaimonic happiness, virtue ethics and balance, self-determination theory, personal expressiveness, psychological well-being, purpose and meaning in life, authentic happiness and orientations to happiness, flourishing, and resilience and satisfaction of the full spectrum of human needs. The definition is as follows: Individuals characterized as having positive mental health tend to experience a preponderance of positive psychological traits (self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others, etc.) relative to negative psychological traits (pessimism, hopelessness, depressive disorder, neuroticism, impulsiveness, etc.). Following this discussion, I describe how positive balance expressed in eudaimonia (at the developmental level) is produced in part by life satisfaction (at the meta-cognitive level) mediated by a process involving personal growth and intrinsic motivation. Life satisfaction at the meta-cognitive level, mediated by a process involving high personal growth, results in high levels of eudaimonia at the developmental level; and conversely, life dissatisfaction mediated by a process involving low personal growth results in low levels of eudaimonia.

Chapter 7 (Positive Balance at the Social-Ecological Level: Socio-Eudaimonia) provides a definition of positive mental health based on the concept of positive balance at the social-ecological level: Individuals characterized as having positive mental health tend to experience a preponderance of social resources (social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social integration, social harmony, social belongingness, social attachment, familial attachment, etc.) relative to social constraints (social alienation, social discord, social exclusion, ostracism, etc.). Five programs of research support this definition of positive balance at social-ecological level: social well-being, social harmony, social belongingness, attachment theory, and social ostracism. I then describe how eudaimonia (at the developmental level) serves as a building block for socio-eudaimonia (at the social-ecological level). The key process involves a process involved in social and moral development. As such, I argue that high levels of eudaimonia at the developmental level, mediated by a process involving high social and moral development, result in high levels of socio-eudaimonia at the social-ecological level; and conversely, low levels of eudaimonia, mediated by a process involving low social and moral development, result in low levels of socio-eudaimonia.

In Chap. 8 (Concluding Thoughts) I provide the reader a brief synopsis of the theory. I discuss the emerging trend in positive psychology, coined as the “second wave.” I then discuss two well-accepted definitions of quality of life, health, and mental well-being, namely the definitions provided by the WHO (1997) and Garlderisi et al. (2015). In doing so I compare these definitions to the definitions introduced in this book. Lastly, I compare selected models of mental health that involve hierarchical concepts of quality of life to my proposed theory: models proposed by Wilson and Cleary (1995), Dambrun et al. (2012), Huta and Waterman (2014), and Lomas, Hefferon, and Ivztan (2015).

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