

Late-Adolescent Well-Being: The Balance of Life Domains

by

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PREVIEW

**A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Psychology
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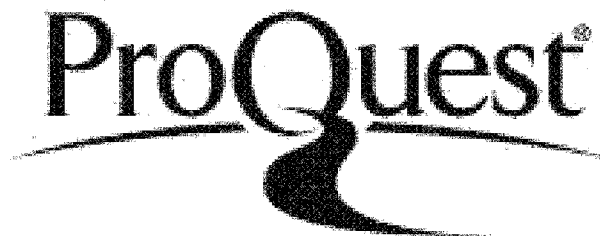


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ABSTRACT

Life balance is a widely heralded, yet commonly contested, strategy for reducing stress and maintaining psychological well-being. Popular culture has seen a rise in over-scheduling children's activities to build focused expertise early on, in hopes of fostering success. Dissidents worry that such narrow investment is an unhealthy approach. Nevertheless, little is known about the components of the life-balance construct and how they contribute to an experience of well-being and satisfaction with life. The purpose of the current study was to survey late adolescents on their domain use profiles to determine which aspects of life balance lead to satisfaction with life and psychological well-being. Late adolescence was determined to be a period of development when individuals are first beginning to create their own schedules and resolve where and how their time will be spent. Understanding which components of time-use and balance contribute most to well-being, should provide important information to university clinics and therapists in best advising their student population.

University undergraduates ($N = 139$) were surveyed and administered a Life Domains Survey based on Frisch's (2006) 16 life domains, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS). Findings indicated that life domain balance, when defined as participating in a broad range of domains, was significantly related to overall positive well-being, as well as autonomy, personal growth and feelings of having a purpose in life. Life domain integration, when defined as pairs

of integrated activities, had a positive association with life satisfaction, academic success, well-being, and feelings of personal growth and self-acceptance. Also, the more time one spent in integrated activities, the higher levels of over-all well-being, and feelings of personal growth and self-acceptance they reported. It is beneficial to know that particular life activities, such as self-esteem, philosophy of life, recreation, friendship, community, work, physical health, and creativity-related activities, better predict aspects of well-being for adolescents. These findings suggest that it may be one's pattern and profile of time use that are actually more important than balancing a specific number of hours across a number of domains, which has been the common definition in previous research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have seen a growing trend in youth who specialize very specifically in one academic or extracurricular domain. Elite gymnasts and figure skaters may train as many as eight hours a day. In some instances, these talented athletes will drop out of school and all other social activities to dedicate all of their time and energy to a sport in which they or their parents believe they can be successful. These young athletes sometimes have trouble separating their own identity as a person from their identity as an athlete. Unfortunately, failure for these devoted athletes, who have invested so much, can lead to feelings of worthlessness and in extreme cases, to burnout, self-destructive behaviors, or eating disorders (Moceanu, 2012; Ryan, 1996).

There is currently an interest, or even obsession, within certain strains of American culture in molding children from a very young age into high achieving, extremely disciplined prodigies. But is this healthy for the children? In her 2011, *New York Times* bestseller, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Amy Chua shares her story of raising her American-born children the “Chinese way.” Many first and second generation Asian-American immigrants instill a strong work ethic, narrow focus, and stringent goals for success and achievement in their children from a very young age. Often these children excel in a particular academic domain or with a musical instrument, but live rigorously structured lives with minimal time for other activities. Chua explains,

“I saw childhood as a training period, a time to build character and invest for the future” (Chua, 2011, p. 97).

Since this book’s publication there has been a strong backlash among many Americans who feel that such an overwhelming focus on academic and extracurricular success, to the exclusion of other activities such as sleepovers, play dates, television, computer games, and even school plays, is shocking and outrageous. In China, students have a longer school year, spend more time studying, and have higher test scores (Paul, 2011). However, the resounding question erupting from this clash of cultures seems to be, which children are, in fact, happier, or which approach leads to a happier life?

Chua explains that she has her children’s happiness at heart and believes that by requiring their intense focus on music, she is teaching them a tool to find fulfillment in their life’s work. Further, Chua explains, “nothing is fun until you’re good at it.” During her own childhood, Chua feels that her parents restricted her choices which, in turn, provided her with more opportunities as an adult, leading her to a life she loves (Chua, 2011; Paul, 2011).

In a paper commenting on historical changes in childhood, Steven Mintz (2000) discusses the popular belief that modern day childhood is disappearing and that as a result, children’s well-being is suffering from all of the over-scheduling, heightened pressures and exposure to adult realities. Similar to Lareau’s views (2003), Mintz believes that social class plays an important role, as affluent families tend to instill “high pressure, hyper-organized, fast-track” mentalities. In turn, the parents themselves are experiencing a great deal of anxiety about what is best for their children. One source of this anxiety is the current widely held belief that childhood is the critical window of time when the

strongest foundations of personality, cognitive, and emotional development are built; so maximizing a child's development early on, becomes crucial (Mintz, 2010).

In another *New York Times* bestseller, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, by Malcolm Gladwell (2008), he touches on this "Tiger Mother" phenomenon more broadly and its connection to success. Children from wealthy families spend hours in multiple activities and are the recipients of what has come to be called, concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003), which includes promoting children's talents and sense of entitlement in social situations through excessive involvement in organized clubs, museum trips, sports, and musical groups, yet these children never learn or have time to really play or relax. Gladwell notes that to be an expert in a field, it takes about 10,000 hours of practices, which averages out to about 20 hours a week, or three hours a day, for ten years. Many experts, including those in the fields of hockey, soccer, music, and computer sciences, among others, have started this process in childhood. So although this concerted cultivation may lead to success, what about well-being and life satisfaction?

The self-help literature has taken an interest in the relationship among balance, success, and life-satisfaction. Sports psychologists have questioned the buffering effects of balance as well, commenting that, "A thorough consideration of the interplay between multiple life domains is warranted to gain more holistic insight about the experience of athlete burnout in the student-athlete population" (Perreault, Lapointe, & Lacroix, 2007, p. 448). It is recognized that highly successful individuals have a desire and need to fit in intellectual, spiritual, and recreational pursuits, even those with highly demanding personal obligations. Furthermore, some thrive on fitting it all in (Carter, 2010; Orlick, 1998).

To achieve success in a particular field, one often has to spend a great amount of time practicing in that area. Others seek involvement in a variety of activities, desiring a more well-rounded portfolio. It is often parents that make the decisions for their children of where their involvement will lie, and, as children get older, they can begin to make these decisions for themselves. But which lifestyle leads to greater life satisfaction, broad involvement across many life domains or narrow, focused involvement in one or few life domains? Research on the effects of lifestyle balance on happiness has been minimal up to this point (Veenhoven, 2009).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives

The principle components of positive psychology date back to William James, who looked at optimal human functioning and subjective experience, which he discussed in his 1906 presidential address to the American Philosophical Association (Froh, 2004; James, 1906). However, philosophers have been pondering the issues of happiness and well-being for centuries. The Greeks, such as Aristotle, took note that happiness is intrinsically valued for its own sake. Epicurus believed that happiness was the result of self-discipline. Later, utilitarian philosophers such as John Locke and Jeremy Bentham envisioned a good society that allowed for the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. When utilitarian philosophy was at its peak, there were also great strides made in public health and the distribution of goods. At this time, the sentiment was that increases in affluence would lead to pleasure and happiness. Later, the United States would share in the belief that materialism would lead to a happy life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Before World War II, psychology focused on mental illness, but also worked on nurturing talent and making people's lives more fulfilling. In 1933, Carl Jung studied life-meaning, and in 1939, Lewis Terman studied giftedness, both areas very relevant to positive psychology. Since WWII, clinical psychology has been largely a science about healing damage, based on a disease model. However, many psychologists felt the field

should have some focus on positive phenomena such as love, courage, and happiness. A decade later, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and other humanistic psychologists founded the “third way,” in psychology, as a new way of looking at psychological issues, which varied from behaviorism and clinical psychology. Humanists studied man as a whole, feeling that individuals are more than just the sum of their parts. This movement began in the 1950s in Europe, and started with Maslow in the United States (Froh, 2004; Maslow, 1970; Seligman & Csiksentmihalyi, 2000).

Maslow believed that human life would never be fully understood without examining the tendencies of higher aspirations like growth, self-actualization, health, striving toward identity and independence, and the quest for excellence. He encouraged people to get past the idea that they must achieve permanent, lasting happiness, and instead learn gratitude and fulfillment from relationships and developing intelligence and talents. Maslow believed that clinical psychology should be distinct from abnormal psychology. He felt that clinical psychology should take the liberty to study successful, happy, and healthy individuals, looking at health and not exclusively illness. Maslow thought these positive influences needed to be examined with equal zeal. He explained that positive psychology needed to go on to look at all forms of health, to study the good man, the creator, the saint, the hero, the genius, and other examples of good humanity (Maslow, 1970).

Satisfaction with Life and Psychological Well-Being

One of the seminal volumes addressing the theory of happiness, well-being, and life-satisfaction, is Martin Seligman’s *Authentic Happiness* (2002). In his research, Seligman developed a comprehensive theory on what makes people happy. He believes

that authentic happiness comes from three life aspects. One is experiencing pleasantness regularly, which includes hedonistic gratifications, bodily pleasures, and positive emotions. The second is experiencing engagement in satisfying activities; using one's strengths to obtain gratification in the main realms of one's life. The third is experiencing connectedness to a greater whole; using one's strengths in service of something larger than oneself.

Satisfaction with life is a cognitive, self-assessment of how one judges and assesses one's own quality of life. An analysis of the factors contributing to psychological well-being found multidimensional facets to be involved, with life satisfaction contributing most to the primary, global factor involved in well-being. In other words, satisfaction with life is considered to be a good indicator of general psychological well-being (Wissing & van Eeden, 2002). While life satisfaction is one's judgment about one's subjective level of well-being, the emotional or affective component is the other piece of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). There is growing interest in our society about the experience and cultivation of well-being. This aspect of health has become a focus of professionals, researchers, and political organizations (Delle Fave & Fava, 2011).

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of developmental psychology and clinical psychology, Carol Ryff (1995) identifies common themes in their descriptions and understanding of well-being. She posits six key dimensions which are drawn from previous research and theory. These include self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, and purpose in life. The six dimensions used in Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS) reflect areas of well-being that

have not been represented in other well-being assessment indices. While self-acceptance and environmental mastery demonstrated convergent validity with other measures of life-satisfaction, affect-balance, self-esteem and morale, the other dimensions of positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth were not represented in empirical investigation, suggesting that Ryff's theory is more comprehensive and inclusive of previous theoretical frameworks (Ryff, 1989). The components of well-being suggested in Ryff's theory are supported by confirmatory factor analysis using a nationally representative sample. However, correlations between the factors suggest a five factor model, as self-acceptance and environmental mastery display some overlap. Nevertheless, Ryff's model suggests that there are more nuanced aspects to well-being than feeling happy and satisfied with life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Life Domain Balance

In 2007, M. Joseph Sirgy and Jiyun Wu hypothesized an additional life aspect that they feel contributes to well-being, in addition to the three that Seligman proposed. They propose that balance in life further contributes to subjective well-being. "Putting all your eggs in one basket," as the saying goes, is not as effective. In other words, one should not allow a single life domain to overwhelm one's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life. They hypothesize that investing in several domains is a better tactic, as it allows compensation for dissatisfaction in some domains with satisfaction in others. Balance contributes to well-being because there is a limit to the satisfaction one can derive from a single life domain. These theorists feel that people must be involved in many domains in order to satisfy the full spectrum of human development needs (Sirgy & Wu, 2007). Psychologists have long been noting the value of time management and

balance for one's quality of life. Both William James (1890) and Herbert A. Simon (1969) have acknowledged time as being the ultimate scarce resource, and that its allocation has direct implications for quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

The term life-balance refers to an even and diverse pattern of life domain involvement, including areas like work, leisure, recreation, and relationships. It refers to a judgment about the way someone's lifestyle is arranged. An imbalance is considered to be when particular components carry too much weight over other areas. Work is often an area where imbalance is noted to occur. Balance can also be defined as "a lifestyle where components are in proportion relative to each other" (Veenhoven, 2009). Both definitions will be utilized to explore life balance in the current study.

In 2006, Michael Frisch developed a model of therapy called Quality of Life Therapy (QOLT). This is a positive psychology-oriented approach to relapse prevention for depression, which uses cognitive therapy as well, and is considered a comprehensive intervention. Its aim is to increase "inner abundance" and prevent burnout. QOLT includes interventions such as promoting balance by redistributing where one's time is spent, more diffusely, across several life domains. Frisch delineates 16 areas of life that constitute overall happiness and well-being. He advised priorities among these life domains should be more balanced with respect to a person's time and mental energy spent in those areas.

The 16 areas include health, self-esteem, goals-and-values/spiritual life, standard of living, work, recreation, learning, creativity, helping, love, friendship, children, relatives, home, neighborhood, and community. Health is explained as being physically fit, not sick, and without pain or disability. Self-esteem is an area involving any activities

related to further liking and respecting of the self and the ability to handle problems.

Goals-and-values/spiritual life represents one's philosophy of life; what matters most in life and pursuing a like-minded spiritual community (Frisch, 2006). People engage in spiritual, religious, and meditative activities to fulfill a sense of purpose and to create a positive identity (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008). Prayer, meditation and relaxation have been linked to the alleviation of stress, pain, and disease (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Findings converge in support of building a lifestyle that allows for the creation of meaning and positive identity (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008).

The domain of money, or standard of living, reflects one's activities that result in money and possessions (Frisch, 2006). Having plentiful and supportive resources in one's life is shown to have a moderating effect on work-life balance (Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002). The domain of work refers to one's career. Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between work and life satisfaction and balance. These findings will be discussed further in the Role Balance section below. The domain of learning refers to gaining new skills or information. Creativity is about using one's imagination to come up with clever ways to solve every day problems. Helping involves social service or the volunteering of time or resources (Frisch, 2006).

Play, or recreation, is what one does during free time to relax, have fun, and improve oneself (Frisch, 2006). Individuals perceiving high levels of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), total engagement and interest in one's activity, during leisure pursuits, experience more positive emotion than those satisfied with either career progress or with their intimate relationships (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2010). Levels of perceived stress are on the rise and free time is on the decline. However, studies from the

1985 and 1990 US National Health Census data have found that physically active leisure has a positive impact on health (both physical and mental), life expectancy, and well-being. Certain populations, such as those with higher income and education, also have better health, but surprisingly were also found to have higher levels of stress. As the World Health Organization has noted, many health issues, including cardiovascular disorders, are in huge part a function of lifestyle. Stress often results from fragmentation in social rhythms, not a paucity of free time; and introducing more periods of respite and leisure activities can reduce stress (Zuzanek, Rabinson, & Iwasaki, 1998).

The domain of love represents time spent in close romantic relationships with another person. Friendship is about spending time with those one cares about. The children domain involves being with and getting along with the young children in one's life. Another social domain, that of relatives, includes being with and getting along with family members and extended family members (Frisch, 2006). An international study of adults from Europe, Australia, and Africa explored the relationship between life domains, life meaning and happiness, using both the Satisfaction with Life Scale and qualitative, open-ended questions. Of the life domains explored, family and social relationships were most strongly related to happiness, meaning, and satisfaction with life. Furthermore, individuals most commonly defined happiness as a condition of psychological balance and harmony (Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011).

The home domain is about satisfaction with one's living situation. The neighborhood domain refers to satisfaction with the area around one's home and with one's neighbors. The community domain is about one's satisfaction with the area in which one lives, the local people, government, and schools (Frisch, 2006). A study of

older adults found the community in which they lived to have an important effect on well-being. After controlling for personal factors, it was the smaller, safer neighborhoods that promoted active lifestyles that correlated most with psychological and social well-being (Lawton, 1980).

Frisch (2006) gives examples of life activities that fall into each of the 16 categories. He suggests that individuals assess where their time and energy is being spent, and reprioritize if there is imbalance. Some psychologists refer to this as a “life bucket analysis;” assessing how much of one’s time is spent at work, commuting, with family, asleep, and in other activities, and making changes if there is incongruence between one’s distribution of time and one’s values (Clay, 2011).

Complexity in self-representation, that is, seeing oneself as fulfilling multiple personal roles, has been found to relate to increased mood stability over time and better self-esteem. It is also believed to be a buffer against depression. In other words, putting one’s eggs in multiple cognitive baskets leads to more well-being. A woman whose self-representation includes a variety of roles, including those related to work, recreation, friendship, and family, conceptualizes herself in a way that allows for multiple life experiences. The broadness of these life experiences buffers against a failure or set-back in one domain, from impacting overall self-esteem and mood. The benefit of having multiple distinct aspects of the self, results in positive mental health, such as reductions in depression, anxiety, sadness, and poor self-esteem (Linville, 1985). One can then extrapolate that involving oneself in multiple, distinct life domains, which yield varied personal roles and self-conceptualizations, would also be beneficial to an individual’s mental well-being, which is explored here.

Metuska and Christiansen (2008) theorized that the balanced life comes from the feeling that one's needs are met and roles satisfied over time. They believe that this is achieved through a match between one's ideal configuration of where time is spent, and the actual configuration of how time is spent; when the actual and ideal are commensurate. Furthermore, they propose five life dimensions based on previous theories of human needs. Table 1 illustrates the fit and synthesis between previous theorists of human needs and Frisch's (2006) 16 life domain approach being utilized here.

The 16 domains used in the present study tap the need categories and support the use of the lifestyle domains outlined here. The configuration of life domains will yield a pattern of need achievement. Christensen and Matuska (2008) believe that the five dimensions included in their model represent necessary life domains, all of which must be tapped by an individual's activity profile. In other words, they feel that meeting the need dimensions is what creates a profile of balance, not the particular categories of activities involved. One of the critical domains included in this theory is time organization. This is a unique domain, but the theorists consider including time management to be integral because it underlies life balance. This is considered to be the contextual domain because people can change their environment to a certain extent to pursue more balance when it is needed.

As of yet, Sirgy and Wu's model of life domains has only been used to understand tourists' experience of well-being through activity in the various life domains (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee & Yu, 2011), but other studies have looked at more general, daily life experiences with life domain balance. A 25-year study of German households found many of the life domains mentioned, as contributing to overall life satisfaction.