



## *The Balanced Life*

The balanced life is a state of equally moderate-to-high levels of satisfaction in important and multiple life domains that contribute to overall life satisfaction. This book strives to improve the reader's understanding of what the balanced life is, and how it can be both achieved and maintained. Its primary goal is therefore to identify the major principles of life balance and to introduce a comprehensive construct of the balanced life reflective of these principles. It discusses how life balance substantially contributes to subjective wellbeing – defined as life satisfaction, a preponderance of positive over negative feelings, and absence of ill-being – and explores strategies to attain life balance. It argues that achieving life balance, through manipulating one's thoughts and taking concrete action, will lead to increased personal happiness. Aimed at professional, academic, and lay audiences, this book is grounded in scientific studies related to work-life balance and the balanced life.

M. JOSEPH SIRGY is a management psychologist. He has published extensively in the area of business administration, business ethics, and quality of life. He cofounded the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies, the Macromarketing Society, and the Community Indicators Consortium. Over the years, he has received numerous awards for his research, teaching, and service to the management discipline.

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# The Balanced Life

Using Strategies from Behavioral  
Science to Enhance Wellbeing

M. JOSEPH SIRGY

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and North West University*



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*This book is dedicated to my wife (Pamela), my four children (Melissa, Danielle, Michelle, and Emmaline), my five grandchildren (Isabella, Alexander, Scott, Jake, and Luke), my two brothers (Abraham and Jimmy), and my cousins and their families scattered in the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Lebanon, and Egypt. The book is also dedicated to all those wellbeing researchers who have devoted much of their professional careers to the promulgation of the science of wellbeing, 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. Wellbeing, happiness, and quality-of-life researchers shine a beacon of light to the science that can elevate human existence and make people flourish.*

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## *Preface*

Much research has documented concepts related to the balanced life in the literatures of organizational/industrial psychology and human resource management. These concepts include work-life balance, work-family conflict, work-family interference, and work-family interface (see literature reviews of various concepts related to work-life balance by Allen et al. [2000], Bulger and Fisher [2012], Byron [2005], Casper et al. [2007], Danna and Griffin [1999], Eby et al. [2005, 2010], Greenhaus and Allen [2011], Kalliath and Brough [2008], Kossek and Ozeki [1998], Lee and Sirgy [2017], McNall et al. [2010], Sirgy and Lee [2016, 2018], Sirgy et al. [2008], and Yasbek [2004]). In the literature on subjective wellbeing and quality of life, only a few studies were found that specifically addressed the concept of life balance. For example, Diener et al. (2008) reported a study involving a representative sample from around the world to assess people's affect balance (positive versus negative affect) on the previous day and the various activities they had engaged in. The study found that the most popular activity that most people engaged in was socializing with family and friends. In this context, the study also found a *decreasing marginal utility* of this type of activity. That is, to ensure an optimal level of life satisfaction, people attempted to engage in a variety of activities because satisfaction from one type of activity diminishes over time. Sheldon and Niemiec (2006) demonstrated that life balance is achieved not only by the fulfillment of psychological needs (needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) but also by a *balanced effect among the satisfaction of these needs*. Matuska (2012) conceptualized life balance as congruence between both desired and actual time spent in activities and equivalence in the degree of discrepancy between desired and actual time spent across *activities that satisfy basic and growth needs* (needs related to health, relationship, challenge/interest, and identity). The author was able to

demonstrate a strong association between life balance and personal wellbeing. A similar conceptualization was introduced by Sheldon et al. (2010). They defined life balance as perceived low discrepancy between actual and ideal time-use profiles. The authors developed a life-balance measure on the basis of this conceptualization and were able to demonstrate that life balance is positively related to subjective wellbeing mediated by psychological need satisfaction.

I very briefly addressed the concept of the balanced life in my book *Psychology of Quality of Life* (Sirgy, 2002). In Chapter 14 of the book, titled “Balance,” I proposed that people make attempts to create balance in their lives to *optimize* life satisfaction (i.e., achieve and maintain an acceptable level of life satisfaction). A distinction between two balance concepts was made: within-domain balance and between-domain balance. *Balance within a life domain* is achieved by striving to experience both positive and negative affects. Positive affect reflects a reward function, namely goals are attained and resources are acquired. In contrast, negative affect serves a motivational function. That is, negative affect helps an individual recognize problems and opportunities for future achievement and growth (cf. Kitayama & Markus, 2000). *Balance between life domains* can be achieved through compensation (i.e., increasing the salience of positive life domains compensates for negative life domains, and conversely, decreasing the salience of negative life domains helps reduce the influence of negative affect from these domains on overall life satisfaction) (see also Sirgy, 2012). I, with a doctoral student (Jiyun Wu), published an article titled “The Pleasant Life, the Engaged Life, and the Meaningful Life: What about the Balanced Life?” in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* (Sirgy & Wu, 2009). In this article, we positioned the concept of the balanced life vis-à-vis other popular concepts of subjective wellbeing, namely, “the pleasant life,” “the engaged life,” and “the meaningful life” (as proposed by Martin Seligman in his 2002 book *Authentic Happiness*). Seligman has argued that life satisfaction stems from three major sets of experiences in life, namely experiencing pleasantness regularly (the pleasant life), experiencing a high level of engagement in satisfying activities (the engaged life), and experiencing a sense of connectedness to a greater whole (the meaningful life). In response, we (Sirgy and Wu) countered by suggesting that having a balanced life is equally important to life satisfaction. The balanced life is experienced when people are highly engaged in social roles in multiple domains. We explained the effect of balance

on life satisfaction using two concepts, namely *satisfaction limits* (i.e., people can derive only a limited amount of satisfaction from a single life domain; hence, engagement in multiple domains is necessary to optimize life satisfaction) and *satisfaction of the full spectrum of human developmental needs* (i.e., people have to be involved in multiple domains to satisfy both basic and growth needs; both sets of needs have to be met to induce a high level of subjective wellbeing). This article won the Best Paper award in the journal and was reprinted in *Explorations of Happiness* (edited by Delle Fave, 2013).

The goal of this book is to identify the major principles of life balance, and as such, I introduce to the reader a comprehensive construct of the balanced life reflective of these principles. To begin with, I describe how life balance contributes to subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction or perceived quality of life).

The balanced life is a state of equally moderate-to-high levels of satisfaction in important life domains contributing to overall life satisfaction. The balanced life can be achieved through a set of interdomain strategies. Two sets of interdomain strategies are identified, namely, strategies to prompt greater participation of satisfied domains to contribute to life satisfaction and strategies to increase domain satisfaction and decrease dissatisfaction.

Interdomain strategies designed to prompt greater participation of satisfied life domains to contribute to life satisfaction include: (1) engagement in social roles in multiple life domains (explained by the principle of satisfaction limits); (2) 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); and (3) engagement in new social roles (explained by the principle of diminishing satisfaction).

Interdomain strategies designed to increase domain satisfaction and decrease domain dissatisfaction include: (1) integrating domains with high satisfaction (explained by the principle of positive spillover), (2) compartmentalizing domains with low satisfaction (explained by the segmentation principle), (3) optimizing domain satisfaction by reallocating resources across domains (explained by the compensation principle), (4) stress management (explained by the principle of role conflict reduction), and (5) using skills, experiences, and resources in one role for other roles (explained by the principle of role enrichment).

I hope that by the time you have finished reading this book, you will walk away with a better understanding of what causes people to experience imbalance in their lives and conversely how to achieve or restore balance in your own life and the lives of others. Doing so should enhance your own quality of life and that of those people around you.

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## *About the Author*

*M. Joseph Sirgy* is a management psychologist (PhD, University of Massachusetts, 1979), the Virginia Tech Real Estate Professor Emeritus of Marketing at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (USA), and Extraordinary Professor at North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (South Africa). He has published extensively in the area of marketing, business ethics, and quality of life. He cofounded the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS) in 1995, served as its Executive Director/Treasurer from 1995 to 2011, and as Development Codirector (2011–present). In 1998, he received the Distinguished Fellow Award from ISQOLS. In 2003, ISQOLS honored him as the Distinguished Quality-of-Life Researcher for research excellence and a record of lifetime achievement in quality-of-life research. He also served as a president of the Academy of Marketing Science (2002–2004) from which he received the Distinguished Fellow Award in the early 1990s and the Harold Berkman Service Award in 2007 (lifetime achievement award for serving the marketing professoriate). In the early 2000s, he helped cofound the Macromarketing Society and the Community Indicators Consortium and has served as a board member of these two professional associations. He cofounded the journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, the official journal of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies, in 2005, and he has served as the cofounding editor (1995–present). He also served as the editor of the quality-of-life section in the *Journal of Macromarketing* (1995–2016). He received the Virginia Tech’s Pamplin Teaching Excellence Award/Holtzman Outstanding Educator Award and University Certificate of Teaching Excellence in 2008. In 2010, ISQOLS honored him for excellence and lifetime service to society. In 2010, he won the Best Paper Award in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* for his theory of the balanced life; in 2011, he won the Best Paper Award in the *Journal of Travel Research* for his goal theory of leisure travel satisfaction. In 2012, he was awarded the EuroMed Management



Research Award for outstanding achievements and groundbreaking contributions to wellbeing and quality-of-life research. In 2019, the Macromarketing Society honored him with the Robert W. Nason Award for extraordinary and sustained contributions to the field of macromarketing. He is currently serving as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Macromarketing* (2020–present). He also was the editor of ISQOLS/Springer book series on *International Handbooks in QOL* (2008–2015), *Community QOL Indicators: Best Cases* (2004–2015), and *Applied Research in QOL: Best Practices* (2008–2012). He is currently the coeditor of Springer’s book series titled *Human Well-Being and Policy Making* (2015–present).

His recent books include:

- Sirgy, M. Joseph (2021). *The Psychology of Quality of Life: Wellbeing and Positive Mental Health*. 3rd ed. Dordrecht: Springer Publishing.
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