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## ■ FEATURE ARTICLE

# A Proposed Model of Lifestyle Balance

Kathleen M. Matuska &  
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The concept of lifestyle balance seems to have widespread acceptance in the popular press. The notion that certain lifestyle configurations might lend to better health, higher levels of life satisfaction and general well-being is readily endorsed. However, the concept has not been given significant attention in the social and behavioral sciences literature and, as a result, lacks empirical support, and an agreed upon definition. This article presents a proposed model of lifestyle balance based on a synthesis of related research, asserting that balance is a perceived congruence between desired and actual patterns of occupation across five proposed need-based occupational dimensions seen as necessary for well-being. It is asserted that the extent to which people find congruence and sustainability in these patterns of occupation that meet biological and psychological needs within their unique environments can lead to reduced stress, improved health, and greater life satisfaction.

**Key Words:** Quality of life, Resilience, Work/life balance, Time use, Activity patterns, Life activities, Need-based activity dimensions

The belief that living a balanced life is important for well-being has ancient roots in Chinese, Native American and Ayurvedic Medicine and more recent support (from diverse perspectives) in the contemporary literature of the economic, social and behavioral sciences (Christiansen & Matuska, 2006; Sternberg, 1997). Nowhere, however, does the concept enjoy more widespread support than in the popular press.

The demands of modern life in developed nations have led to widespread public perceptions of increased stress and insufficient time available to engage in occupations viewed as fundamental to well-being (Bachmann, 2000; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). American government reports are clear that perceived stress is increasing and a decade ago, epidemiologists predicted that stress-related diseases would be prominent among the most costly health conditions (Murray & Lopez, 1996). Changing practices associated with paid work, such as longer hours and increased shift work, have been at the heart of these concerns. It is commonly believed that modern work encroaches on non-work occupations to create an undesirable and unhealthy imbalance. Over time, growing concern with this perceived imbalance has given rise to such concepts as quality time, workaholism, and burnout (Hochschild, 1997; Perlow, 1999; Robinson & Godbey, 1997).

Although it is widely accepted that certain occupations are more beneficial to health and quality of life than others, little theoretical and empirical work has been done to identify optimal lifestyle patterns. Investigators in the management sciences, sociology and family studies have reported studies related to negative consequences of spillover of work requirements into non-work domains (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus,

Collins, & Shaw, 2002; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). Meanwhile, scholars in psychology, leisure studies, nursing, public health and occupational therapy have studied patterns of human occupation in an attempt to identify characteristics that contribute to higher levels of life satisfaction, health and general well-being (Camporese, Freguja, & Sabbadini, 1998; Marino-Schorn, 1986; Walker, Sechrist, & Pender, 1987; Zuzanek, 1998). An implicit assumption underlying these studies is that lifestyles with certain configurations of occupation are more likely to promote health and well-being by virtue of meeting essential needs and/or reducing stressful circumstances over time than others.

Given the assumed relationships between lifestyle patterns and well-being, an understanding of the recurring lifestyle occupations that reduce stress and promote health would be of potential interest to social scientists and occupational scientists. Despite this, surprisingly little attention has been paid to patterns of occupation within the health sciences literature. Moreover, there exists no consensus definition of lifestyle balance, even though the concept appears regularly in the popular press and seems to be implicitly understood by the public.

In this paper we propose a model of a balanced lifestyle that is resilient and health promoting. We recognize the complexity of this topic and offer a beginning attempt to conceptualize lifestyle balance, realizing that the task is formidable and understandings will progress over time. Our aim is to stimulate dialogue and additional research on this topic.

## Review of the Literature

This section summarizes a comprehensive review of the literature related to lifestyle balance published

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earlier (Christiansen & Matuska, 2006). That review included studies of time use, life roles, biological rhythms and need satisfaction. Those studies provided a context for identifying specific lifestyle characteristics related to health and well-being.

Ancient ideas of balance broadly focused on maintaining health through a balance among thoughts, actions and feelings, influenced by the physical and social environments in which people lived. In modern western cultures, new emphasis for balance was placed on time spent in work and home, and an increased focus on leisure as a valued activity for life balance (Pierce, 2003). Time use across these domains, then, became important in modern conceptualizations of balance with the assumption that a balance among them is optimal for health and well-being. However, studies examining time allocation alone have not proven very useful for understanding the broad complexities of lifestyle patterns and well-being because of methodological weaknesses and conflicting findings. Other approaches have provided richer time use data by supplementing diaries with event sampling procedures and/or interviews in order to gather more qualitative information on the meanings and feelings associated with different occupations (Erlandsson & Eklund, 2001; Erlandsson, Rögvaldsson, & Eklund, 2004; Klumb & Perraz, 2004; Reis & Gable, 2000). Additionally, studies of time structure (Jonsson, Borell, & Sadlo, 2000; Zuzanek, 1998) have found that lower levels of mental health are associated with both high and low levels of time pressure (i.e., activity requirements within a specified timeframe), suggesting that a moderate amount of structured time may be beneficial to well-being. This finding was also supported in a study of retirement adjustment (Jonsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner, 2001). Comparing health outcomes with the congruency of how people want to use their time and how they actually use their time may represent useful ways to conceptualize a balanced life. We conclude that enriched time use studies may have benefit, but that data on time use alone does not seem useful in formulating recommendations about balanced lifestyles.

Another way to understand what people actually do with their time is to study roles. Studies that explored roles, well-being, and quality of life have concluded consistently that participation in valued roles is related to life satisfaction and measures of well-being (Verbrugge, 1983). Too much conflict among multiple roles can be associated with stress (Goode, 1960); yet having more social roles typically has beneficial consequences, since it may enable the individual to have access to more social support, thus reducing a person's vulnerability to stress (Linville, 1987). Marks and MacDermid (1996) showed that finding a way to balance multiple demands on their time and role responsibilities correlated with peoples' perception of ease and satisfaction with adequately meeting daily role demands. They found that positive role balance was reflected in a person's "tendency to become fully engaged in the performance of every role in one's total role system, to approach every typical role and role partner with an attitude of attentiveness and care" (p. 421).

Although research on roles and time use has provided insight into factors that contribute to or alleviate the consequences of life stress, studies have generally failed to provide information about the patterns or types of specific occupations and practices that typify the roles of the most (or least) successful study participants. In other words, what is an optimal level of participation in various life occupations? Are people who have a balance among occupations better off than people who focus on only one or two primary occupations? These questions are keys to understanding lifestyle balance and have only begun to be explored.

There are only a few studies that have actually explored how a

balance among different types of activities might influence positive states. Seleen (1982) found that for older adults, perceived congruence between desired and actual time use among 10 categories of activities was related to life satisfaction. Using Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Sheldon and Niemiec (2006) provided evidence that a balance of satisfaction in the three need areas of competence, autonomy, and relatedness is important for well-being. In four studies using multiple designs, they found that a balance of satisfaction in the three need areas had unique additive effects on psychological well-being. In other words, people who experienced balanced need satisfaction (similar scores across the three need areas) reported higher well-being than those with greater variability in need satisfaction, even when the sum of total scores was equal.

The most directly relevant work was a pilot study done in Australia, exploring the perceptions of occupational balance and its relationship to health from the viewpoint of physical, mental, social and rest occupations. It was found that for the respondents, ideal balance was represented by approximately equal involvement in each category and a significant relationship was found between the closeness of current occupational patterns to those perceived by the respondents to be ideal and his or her reported health (Wilcock et al, 1997). This finding was supported by Håkansson, Dahlin-Ivanoff, and Sonn (2006), who found that women with stress-related disorders reported a sense of balance (that they felt was synonymous with well-being) when they had a harmonious repertoire of daily occupations that was meaningful and created a positive self image, and when they used strategies to manage and control everyday life.

According to current supposition, living a balanced life should yield positive states such as happiness, subjective well-being, resilience and quality of life. Cummins, Gullone, and Lau (2002) theorized that people who maintain a state of subjective well-being homeostasis are able to do so by having adequate core resources (such as healthy relationships, financial stability, etc), thus faring better after stressful life events than people without such core resources. A similar argument can be made that people with balanced lives should have adequate core resources and thus should be better able to cope successfully with life's stressors and regain homeostasis.

Clearly, the idea of living a balanced life and the psychological and physiological outcomes is multidimensional and complex, and only beginning to be explored. The research summarized above highlighted different ideas related to dimensions such as time allocation, role demands, and need satisfaction and their relationship to well-being. In the following section, we describe a proposed model of lifestyle balance that synthesizes these concepts. Our intention is to stimulate research and dialogue that moves the idea of lifestyle balance beyond philosophical and lay formulations toward practical application based on evidence.

## **A Proposed Model of Lifestyle Balance**

The proposed model builds on interdisciplinary research about the physiological and psychological attributes considered important for well-being. It is also influenced by research that has explored relationships between well-being and situational/contextual/ or environmental factors. The model's approach to conceptualizing life balance is based on how the configurations of everyday patterns of occupation meet essential human needs. We acknowledge that people can meet the same needs through participation in different daily occupations, and the model thus allows for variability in

occupational configurations based on individual differences and cultural and environmental influences. Balance then, is construed as the extent to which an individual's unique patterns of occupation (in context) enable needs essential to resilience, well-being and quality of life to be met. The focus on *occupational patterns* (i.e., doing things over time) and the combination of their perceived and actual states of balance (i.e., what people actually do relative to what they desire doing) differentiates this concept from other positive state constructs such as happiness and satisfaction with life. Definitions of those constructs typically focus more on global, subjective appraisals of well-being. The current model proposes that lifestyle balance is best represented by a continuum of occupational patterns over the life-course with a variable range of satisfactory states rather than a designated point on a fulcrum. Rather than prescribing a static or ideal state of balance, our model suggests a dynamic interaction between the environment and everyday patterns of occupation, with varying degrees of satisfaction and sustainability in how these occupations meet important needs and are congruent with people's values over time.

The model defines a balanced lifestyle as *a satisfying pattern of daily occupation that is healthful, meaningful, and sustainable to an individual within the context of his or her current life circumstances*. The term *satisfying* in this definition means congruence between actual participation in occupations and *desired* participation in occupations. This definition recognizes that individuals have different roles, role requirements, personalities, values and interests and that these change over time. It also recognizes that the opportunities and means for meeting needs vary according to the resources available within given physical, social, and cultural environments. It is conceivable, then, that resource limitations can influence the extent to which a person can meet needs and participate in valued activities, thus constraining the opportunity to attain a balanced lifestyle.

Furthermore, the need related aspects of the model suggests that lifestyle patterns must consist of a congruent array of occupations that enable people to: (1) meet basic instrumental needs necessary for sustained biological health and physical safety; (2) have rewarding and self-affirming relationships with others (3) feel engaged, challenged, and competent; (4) create meaning and a positive personal identity; (5) organize their time and energy in ways that enable them to meet important personal goals and renewal.

The model proposes that to the extent people are able to engage consistently in overall patterns of occupations that address these dimensions, they will perceive their lives as more satisfying, less stressful, and more meaningful, or *balanced*. The model also proposes that lifestyles with greater balance contribute to psychological well-being and overall health (i.e., people with greater balance will be less likely to become victims of illness, chronic disease or depression).

### **Support for a need-based approach to lifestyle balance**

Our concept of lifestyle balance implies a satisfactory congruence between an array of actual and desired occupational patterns; what people want to spend their time doing and what they actually do. Studies show that in addition to satisfaction with occupational congruency, the particular array of occupations chosen is an equal determinant of a balanced life. For example, an individual may consider himself balanced because of a satisfactory congruence between time spent at work and the time spent in leisure playing video games, yet have minimal personal relationships and poor health habits (e.g. excessive drinking, obesity, and a sedentary

lifestyle). Intuitively, most individuals would agree that his perceived congruency does not represent a balanced life, although this individual may call it a satisfactory life. Studies suggest that a potentially useful approach for determining which types of occupational patterns need to be included in a balanced lifestyle involves determining the extent to which an individual's pattern of regular occupations enables a core set of psychological and physiological needs to be met. How these needs are met will vary with individuals in context. Thus it is not the particular occupational patterns that need to be balanced, but the way needs are met through occupation. For example, two of the dimensions in our model include the importance of practices that support physiological health and occupations that enable satisfactory interpersonal relationships. The occupations chosen to meet these needs may look very different for each individual and will change for individuals over time. Although the particular occupations change, the needs remain. Thus the individual in the example above may feel satisfied with his lifestyle because he is not recognizing the importance of these other needs, but over time may experience physical or psychological health consequences as a result. We propose that meeting core needs through a balanced and satisfactory repertoire of everyday occupations fosters health and well-being, and provides a buffer to stressors.

What is it that influences people to choose the particular occupational patterns that make up their lifestyles? The five need-based occupational dimensions identified in the model are supported by theories of motivation and well-being and provide some understanding about lifestyle choices. Maslow's theory (1943, 1970) recognizes the interrelatedness of the needs, drives, perceptions, and the environment and how these influence motivation. Maslow asserted that both *being needs* (cognitive, aesthetic and self-actualization) and *deficiency needs* (drives, safety and security, affiliation, and esteem) motivate everyday occupational choices and drive the behavior that makes up people's lifestyles. Although Maslow's theory has been criticized (Haymes & Green, 1982; Strong & Fiebert, 1987), a growing recent literature is finding support for the assumptions and motivational categories Maslow proposed, particularly as elaborated in his later writings (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001; Hagerty, 1999; Wicker, Brown, et al., 1993; Wicker & Wiehe, 1999; Wicker, Wiehe, Hagen, & Brown, 1994).

Recent research on positive psychological functioning has included studies of the protective features associated with well-being. These have shown that basic psychological needs associated with living a meaningful life must be satisfied if optimal functioning and well-being are to be achieved (Ryff, 1995). Ryff and Singer (1996) found similarities among many mental health, clinical and life-span developmental theories of well-being and converged the ideas into a theoretical model of positive psychological well-being. Their theory of psychological well-being contains six theory-guided dimensions that have been supported in numerous publications of empirical findings (Ryff, 1989, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). The six dimensions considered core to well-being in their theory include: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

In their Self Determination Theory (SDT), Deci and Ryan (2000) asserted that humans have innate needs that specify necessary conditions for psychological growth, well-being, and integrity. They identify competence, autonomy and relatedness as the fundamental psychological needs that must be satisfied for self-organization and effective social relations. Deci and Ryan proposed that satisfaction of these needs is associated with effective functioning and alternatively, negative consequences will result from their neglect. According to Self Determination Theory, well-being requires competence and

flexibility to interact effectively with a changing environment; relatedness to connect meaningfully with others and integrate into society; and autonomy for self-regulation of actions and to be true to one's identity.

Considered together, Maslow's need hierarchy, Ryff's Psychological Well-being Theory, and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory propose need categories that support each of the five occupational dimensions proposed in the lifestyle balance model outlined in this paper. Table 1 shows a convergence of these theories with the lifestyle balance model.

If there are empirically strong theories of needs essential for well-being, one might ask what is new or different about the lifestyle balance model since it is based on meeting those essential needs. We

assert that the need-based theories form the empirical foundation and the model focuses on how these needs are met through occupational choices and the satisfaction, congruence, and sustainability of the total configuration of occupations over time. Because life is complex, it is likely that a person's choices at any one instant will be motivated by a multitude of factors with changing valences of potency. Moreover, people often make choices that, in hindsight, are contrary to their best interests. What seems evident is that unmet needs influence human occupation, and that being satisfied with the balance of occupations that in totality meet biological needs, foster rewarding relationships with others, are interesting and challenging, are congruent with one's desired identity, and allow goals to be met constitute important dimensions of well-being and a balanced lifestyle.

**Table 1: Comparison of Need-based Theories Related to the Model of Lifestyle Balance**

Maslow (1943, 1970) Hierarchy of Needs	Ryff (1989, 1996, 1998) Psychological Well-Being	Deci & Ryan (2000) Self Determination Theory	Matuska & Christiansen (2008) Lifestyle Balance Model Occupational Patterns
Self actualization	Self acceptance Purpose in life Autonomy	Autonomy	Create meaning and a positive personal identity through occupation
Aesthetics/cognition Esteem	Personal growth Environmental mastery	Competence	Feel engaged, challenged, and competent Organize their time and energy in ways that enable them to meet important personal goals and renewal
Affiliation	Positive relations with others	Relatedness	Have rewarding and self-affirming relationships with others
Safety/Security	These appear to be treated as "givens" determined more by physiological drives and instincts than conscious thought. Therefore they are so obvious and ubiquitous that the theorists accept them as deficiency needs and move on		Meet basic needs Instrumental needs necessary for sustained biological health, security and physical safety

## Support for the Dimensions of the Model

### *Dimension 1: Biological health and physical safety*

Creating lifestyles that meet the needs of biological health, security and safety seem to be accepted as a given by most people. How to best meet these needs may still require research and dialogue, but the idea that they are essential is rarely disputed. Cumulative research is convincing on the beneficial effects on health of good nutrition, exercise, safety practices (seat belt use, safety equipment use), adequate sleep, and avoiding addictive substances. Although health and safety were clearly identified as important needs by Maslow (1943), they are not typically highlighted in positive psychology literature because of their general acceptance as health-promoting. The model brings these basic needs to the forefront, asserting that one important part of a balanced lifestyle would be sustainable patterns of occupation that maintain physiological health and safety. Without good health, the likelihood of sustaining occupations to meet other critical needs is diminished.

One of the key influences to physiological health is managing stress, and it has direct relevance to the model of lifestyle balance because stress is related to lifestyle choices. Research has established that chronic stress can have serious health consequences (McEwen & Lasley, 2002), whether resulting from situations where people are

feeling constantly pressed for time, or because people live in environments that do not enable them to pursue a satisfying pattern of occupations that support human flourishing. The negative physical effects of chronic stress on health can be measured as allostatic load, or the cumulative affect of 10 physiologic responses to stress. When allostatic load is elevated over a long period, the physiological responses are harmful to the body, and can contribute to cardiovascular disease and immune response suppression (McEwen & Lasley). Stress has also been associated with depression, disrupted sleep patterns, memory problems, obesity, and various other health conditions (Sapolsky, 2004).

Given the significant impact of stress on health and well-being, a balanced lifestyle would be one where stress is managed in a way that minimizes its long term negative effects. Considerable research has shown that there are certain lifestyle choices that buffer against stress and improve overall health. For example, regular exercise has been associated with decreased stress response (Skully, Kremer, Meade, Graham, & Dudgeon, 1998), improved sleep (Youngstedt, O'Connor, & Dishman, 1997), and decreased depression (Craft & Landers, 1998). Good nutrition and eating habits have also been associated with lower stress effects and better overall health (Baum & Posluszny, 1999). Reams of evidence support the idea that healthy lifestyle choices have long term beneficial effects on overall health and well-being. Therefore, this factor is considered one of the key dimensions in our model of a balanced life.

## ***Dimension 2: Rewarding and self-affirming relationships with others***

Having rewarding and self-affirming relationships with others is also well supported in the literature and for brevity, only a few studies are mentioned here. For example, socially supportive environments have been associated with psychological well-being (Thompson & Heller, 1990), quality of life (Achat, et al, 1998), higher cognitive performance (Seeman, Lusignolo, Albert, & Berckman, 2001), and healthy aging (Gurung, Taylor, & Seeman, 2003). Socially supportive family environments have long term effects in children by reducing their risk for mental health disorders, chronic diseases, and early mortality (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). Even when people live in stressful situations such as in low socioeconomic conditions, social support seems to lower stress associated with living in impoverished environments (Taylor & Seemen, 1999).

The link of positive relationships to overall health status has growing evidence with strong associations found between social support and specific physiological functions, including the cardiovascular, immune and endocrine systems (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Social support also appears to be a buffer to stress because it has been linked to lower levels of allostatic load (Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002; Seeman, Singer, Ryff, Love, & Levy-Storms, 2002; Seeman, et al., 2004). The positive physiological benefits of social support have also been shown to reduce worker sickness and absenteeism. In research of middle aged employees, workers with satisfactory social relations reported significantly less sickness and less absenteeism than workers who did not have satisfactory social support (Melchoir, Niedhammer, Berkman, & Goldberg, 2003). Additionally, studies show that even when people become ill, better recovery from the illness and less onset of disability in daily living occupations is fostered by social support (Mendes de Leon, et al., 1999).

One component of healthy relationships that requires more research involves understanding the balance between care for self and care for others. Healthy relationships involve both giving and receiving support, but little is known about a healthy balance between the two. Care giving can be deeply meaningful, but in excess it can be depleting as well. The Western focus on individualism is also contrasted by the Eastern values of collectivism, and these cultural differences can influence one's perception of optimal balance. The proposed model of lifestyle balance does not prescribe occupational patterns necessary for healthy relationships, but states that the meaning and satisfaction with their chosen occupational patterns in context influence perceived balance.

## ***Dimension 3: Feel interested, engaged, challenged, and competent***

An important component of a balanced lifestyle includes opportunities to feel competent and engaged through occupations that are interesting and challenging. Engagement in occupation is fundamental to life because it is through the active transactions with people, places and things in an environment that people develop a sense of competence and self-efficacy. This contributes to identity and creates meaning in lives (Christiansen, 1999). When people are successful in their actions to meet their needs and fulfill their roles, they develop mastery, which increases their sense of competence and self-efficacy. This leads to a willingness to try other novel or challenging things (Bandura, 1977, 2000, 2001). Since life is continually changing, people need to have the ability to respond to these challenges in new ways that allow them to continue to grow as individuals.

Competency and efficacy are not only important for continued adaptation to the demands of living; they also have been linked to well-being and quality of life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A sense of control over one's personal environment relates to competency and efficacy and is fundamental to life and drives behavior. For example, the ability to make decisions and control many of the events in life has been linked to improved alertness, participation and well-being in nursing home residents (Langer & Rodin, 1976). In a study of personal project dimensions, Christiansen, Backman, Little, and Nguyen (1999) found that efficacy and stress were the factors explaining the most variation in well-being. Efficacy emerged as a central factor in explaining progress and outcome, and was significantly related to the dimension of project meaning. Britt and Bliese (2003) also found that being personally self-engaged in meaningful occupations was related to well-being of soldiers in stressful situations, through their effect as a stress-buffer.

The idea of an optimal person-environment match for a sense of well-being was researched extensively by Csikzentmihalyi (1990, 1997). He described a phenomenon termed flow that occurs when people have a sense of control over what they're doing, where they feel competent and efficacious in their ability to do the occupation, where they know the goal of the occupation and receive feedback from their efforts, and where time is suspended because they are deeply involved in the occupation for its own sake. This optimal state is achieved when there is a balance between high skill and high challenge resulting in enjoyment, interest and motivation. In contrast, occupations that provide low challenge and require low or medium skills results in apathy or boredom (Persson, Eklund, & Isacson, 1999). The physical and psychological consequences of engagement and participation in occupations can range from emotional rewards (such as pleasure and satisfaction) to increased knowledge, wisdom, and a sense of life meaning and are important for a balanced lifestyle.

## ***Dimension 4: Create meaning and a positive personal identity***

Frankl (1984) and Antonovsky (1979, 1987) are among prominent clinical scientists who have asserted the importance of creating meaning (or life purpose) in human flourishing, suggesting that it may be the lifestyle characteristic that is most important for resilience under stressful conditions. Life is given meaning by what we do. The meaning dimension of occupations includes all of the subjective, emotional appraisals of the events in our life, the significance attributed to them in relation to our goals, and the underlying values, beliefs, and personal identity that are created and supported by them. Meaning is infused in the five occupational dimensions of the model and is stated explicitly in the dimension that people need to pursue occupations that enable the development of a positive personal identity. To conceptualize meaning in the context of human lifestyles requires an integrative approach and fortunately, human occupation is an ideal framework to enable this synthesis to occur.

A growing body of research in the social and behavioral sciences demonstrates wide agreement on the importance of meaning to human flourishing (Christiansen, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Klinger, 1977, 1998; Little, 1988, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Taylor & Seeman, 1999; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). We believe that in pursuing meaningful lifestyles and creating a positive identity, people engage in an array of occupations, some of which are related to understanding of their situations at the moment and others pertaining to evaluating purpose in their lives over the longer course. These occupations range from regular meditation and contemplation during walks in the forest to the more formal rituals and fellowship embodied in the activities and worship of organized

religion. These spiritual occupations, and their meanings, must be fully considered if studies of lifestyle and health are to be complete.

We contend that a physically healthy lifestyle but with little meaning, is insufficient for a balanced lifestyle (Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Wong, 2000). Maslow (1970) distinguished between people who are “merely healthy” and those who are “transcenders.” The transcenders are those who live more at the level of being, who have more peak experiences and are motivated to a greater good beyond them. It is the meaningfulness of life that makes it worth living and supports well-being. Similarly, Victor Frankl (1984) believed that “man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life” (p. 121). Frankl considered finding meaning as fundamental to existence, that we accomplish by creating or doing, experiencing people or things, and by the attitude we take towards suffering. This ability to find meaningfulness in our everyday events, even in deplorable circumstances makes the difference between a life worth living and despair. Other theorists support the belief that a prolonged existence without meaning, values or ideals creates boredom and apathy, lack of personal fulfillment, personal distress, and illness (Frankl, 1984; Maslow, 1970; Yalom, 1980).

The inadequacy of defining health as the absence of symptoms is clear when one considers why two individuals given similar illnesses have remarkably different lifestyle outcomes or why individuals considered physically robust can be at the brink of despair. Certainly, some of these differences are related to how different actions are experienced and interpreted. Persson, Erlandsson, Eklund, and Iwarsson (2001) described value dimensions of occupations and related these to how people assign meaning to what they do. They concluded that personal meaning is based on the perceived value underlying action and that individuals, within the context of their lives and situations, interpret meanings uniquely. Yet, although they are highly individual, such meanings must also have coherence. Aaron Antonovsky (1979) proposed a salutogenic model of health that emphasized factors that keep people healthy. His clinical work revealed that a basic attitude of experiencing the world as manageable, meaningful and comprehensible seemed to contribute to a sense of coherence that was central to maintaining health. According to Antonovsky, this attitude reduced states of tension and was related to increased health promoting behaviors (Antonovsky, 1987).

Other researchers have found that living a meaningful existence or having a purpose in life is associated with well-being. Studies of personal projects have shown that having projects with personal meaning in and relating to one’s identity are associated with greater well-being (Christiansen, 1999; Little, 1998; Little & Chambers, 2003). Of particular interest in these studies is the finding that people make time for those goal-related occupations that are viewed as important by themselves and others. In summary, there is abundant empirical evidence supporting the importance of having lifestyles that engender the creation of meaning and a positive identity.

#### ***Dimension 5: Organize time and energy to meet important personal goals and personal renewal***

In order to meet needs, people must manage the multiple demands on their time sufficiently to accomplish their goals and create opportunities for energy renewal. This dimension is different from the others because it is a contextual dimension that influences all other aspects of occupational patterns in a lifestyle. Time and energy are viewed as key dimensions in the proposed model because they are central to lay understandings of lifestyle balance, play a

pervasive role in the orchestration of social occupation, influence how and when occupations are undertaken and experienced, and perhaps most importantly, contribute in significant ways to the creation of meaning. Organizing time and energy is viewed in two distinct ways in our model; one view refers to the more immediate perception of time as in the allocation of time in day-to-day occupations, while the other view recognizes that lifestyle choices and values change with the passage of time and context.

Lay understandings of lifestyle balance universally involve the perceived time-stress associated with social pressures to fit more occupations within a timeframe that cannot be expanded. In contemporary Western society, there is a growing perception that the routine demands of living exceed the time available for them, and that there is insufficient time to rest or participate in discretionary pursuits or to accomplish work-related tasks at desired performance levels (Robinson & Godfrey, 1997). Time is seen as a commodity that must be rationed (Peloquin, 1990) and stress results when there is a perceived press for time or multiple demands on time.

Time management can also be viewed as *occupation* management because it represents a planned and purposeful choice of which occupations will be engaged in over time. As the proposed model suggests, a balanced lifestyle would be one where there is satisfaction in the congruency between desired and actual use of time. One approach to finding congruency is using time management strategies that organize attention and energy for satisfactory completion of daily occupations. This was demonstrated in several studies of college students who typically have multiple demands on their time. Compared to college students who had poor time management, students who used effective time management strategies demonstrated less stress (Misra & McKean, 2000), and had better academic performance (Britton & Tesser, 1991). Employees who used effective time management strategies reported less role overload and greater work and life satisfaction, and had fewer job-induced and somatic tensions (Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips 1990).

Well-being and life satisfaction are compromised when time is perceived as inadequate to meet goals and fulfill roles. Satisfaction with how time is spent was one of the moderate predictors of life satisfaction in adults with spinal cord injuries (Pentland, Harvey, & Walker, 1998) and older adults (Sleen, 1982). People are also more satisfied and report a higher sense of well-being when they feel they are achieving the goals of their long or short term projects (Christiansen, Backman, Little, & Nguyen, 1999). Conversely, having too much time available with subsequent boredom and inactivity has been related to lower levels of mental health and life satisfaction (Jonsson, Borell, & Sadlo, 2000; Zuzanek 1998). Time allocation, then, is one factor in a balanced lifestyle, but partitioning certain amounts of time to various occupations does not adequately represent a well balanced life. Rather, it is the contextual influence of time relative to healthy habits, positive relationships, challenge, and meaning that contributes to lower stress and life satisfaction. In other words, we assert that, in balanced lifestyles, need-based occupations are engaged in through time in a manner that, at the end of the day, week, or year, people feel satisfied that their needs have been met and that their important roles have been fulfilled.

Time can also be viewed from a more biological perspective when considering the control exerted by nature, such as circadian rhythms that impose an internal structure and rhythm on occupation. People spend one-third of their lives sleeping, and regular routines (acting as zeitgebers) are necessary to help entrain people to their natural environments. Disentrainment interrupts

customary occupational routines and can have deleterious health consequences (Monk, et al., 1997; Monk, Flaherty, Frank, Hoskinson, & Kupfer, 1990; Szuba, Yager, Guze, Allen, & Baxter, 1992). Research shows that biological rhythms and social occupations have a reciprocal relationship, and when loss of synchrony occurs, sleep and mood disturbances result (Brown, et al., 1996; Monk, Reynolds, Buysse, DeGrazia, & Kupfer, 2003).

There is also a temporal influence on the selection and subjective experience of occupations. The nature and timing of chosen occupational pursuits, while influenced by social expectations, seems also to be a function of stage of life. Early stage theories of development posited that as individuals move through stages of life chronologically, they are motivated by different primary tasks or issues (Erikson, 1982; Havighurst, 1972). As people age, they tend to pursue goals that are more meaningful and with more emphasis on the present, in recognition that time remaining is diminishing (Carstensen, 1998), and they choose personal projects that are more congruent with their values and identity (Christiansen, 2000; Little, 1998; McGregor & Little, 1998).

Finally, time is also a factor in the creation of meaning. The perspective of time as experienced in most Western cultures is that of a progressive, continuous, finite, and normatively sequential series of occupations marked typically by cultural milestones such as puberty, marriage, children, the completion of formal schooling, retirement and the end of life. This linear structure provides a means for understanding past, present and future occupations and events as part of an unfolding narrative or story, as described in the section on meaning. In anticipating the future in the context of their lives and personal stories, people are motivated to pursue occupations that shape positive identities and address unmet needs and potentials (Christiansen, 1999; Markus, 1986; McAdams, 1992, 1993, 1999). Thus time creates a contextual backdrop that influences the selection of occupations and their meanings both prospectively and retrospectively.

### The environment

The proposed model of lifestyle balance recognizes that lives are dynamic and that economic, social, political, physical, and cultural environmental influences have a profound effect on participation in daily occupations. Each of the primary motivational theorists whose work has influenced our thinking about lifestyle balance recognizes that an individual's choices, actions and success in goal attainment represent the product of their personality, experience, and the opportunities provided them within a given situation or environmental context. The interaction between the person and the environment is dynamic; where one's presence and actions influence the environment and alternatively, the physical and social characteristics of the environment influence the emotions and actions of the individual (Shaw, 2003; Wells, 2002).

Ideal situations provide just right levels of stimulation, challenge and support to elicit feelings of competence, comfort, support, growth and need fulfillment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Depending on their circumstances, however, people may be unable to participate regularly in the types of occupations that address needs considered essential for a balanced lifestyle. Terms such as occupational deprivation, alienation, and disruption have been used to describe situations when people are unable to engage in daily occupations that foster health, well-being and quality of life because of environmental constraints (Christiansen & Townsend, 2004; Whiteford, 2000, 2001, 2004). A convincing example of how social class privilege influenced role balance was found in research where financial strain was a robust predictor of lower levels of role

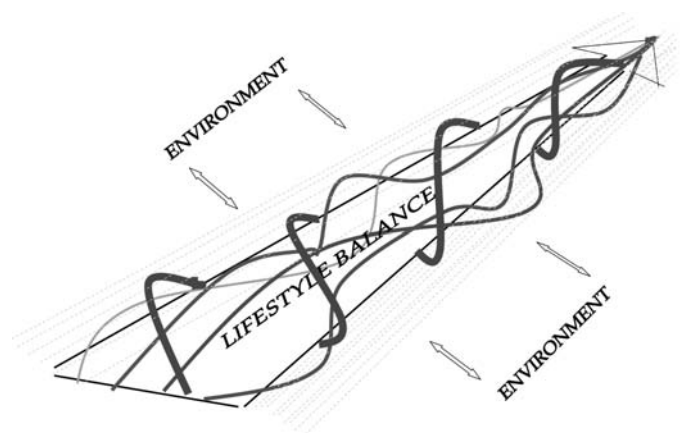
balance for married women (Marks, Huston, Johnson, & MacDermid, 2001).

Environments may also encourage and support occupational patterns through the availability and character of physical and social resources (Gibson, 1979). For example, having family and friends who are physically active, or living in communities that have attractive parks and recreational facilities, represent helpful environmental features for maintaining an exercise regimen. There are also advantages to having stable living environments, since consistent and recurring features, such as social conventions, customs and rituals, can influence habits and routines that provide helpful rhythms to sustain occupational patterns (Clark, 2000; Zerubavel, 1981). Lawton, Nahemow, and Yeh (1980) contributed important research showing the associations between neighborhood environmental factors and well-being. For example, among 3000 older tenants in 153 planned housing units, living in safe, quiet, and small communities accounted for a significant proportion of variance in every index of well-being. The model recognizes the profound impact of the environment on occupational choices and opportunities and proposes that needs can be met in different ways given the context and conversely, in some contexts essential needs cannot be met.

### Visual model

Figure 1 shows a visual depiction of the model, which conveys the idea that perceived satisfaction in the five need based dimensions of the model will vary in a given time frame but that over the life course (measured in months, years, decades) a balanced life is one where adjustments and adaptations are made in occupational patterns when they feel imbalanced. The five dimensions are represented by the wavy lines showing various degrees of balance/imbalance over time. Balance or imbalance is related to perceived satisfaction in each of the five occupational areas. The line representing *organizing time and energy* is shown encircling the others because it is a contextual dimension influencing them. Satisfaction and sustainability in occupational patterns are highly influenced by the environmental constraints or affordances, thus the environment is shown as affecting and being affected by an individual's occupational patterns.

Figure 1: Visual Depiction of the Model of Lifestyle Balance





## Implications for Research

Clearly, lifestyle balance is a broad concept that cuts a wide swath across many disciplines in the health and social sciences. Much research currently underway, including that related to understanding the role of emotions in cognition and motivation, the psychoneuroimmunology of lifestyle factors, sophisticated research in time-use, and efforts in positive psychology, are contributing important information to support this construct. The authors are currently developing a lifestyle-balance screening tool, which, in preliminary research, has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and has shown evidence of concurrent and construct validity. Additional research is needed to identify life-stage related differences in wellness promoting occupations and research that provides insight into the occupational categories that, when neglected, place the individual at highest risk. Research is also needed to increase understanding of the impact of habits and routines (both healthful and maladaptive) and their relationship to a health and well-being (Yerxa, 2002).

## Conclusion

This paper presented a proposed model of lifestyle balance, asserting that sustained patterns of occupation that meet biological

and psychological needs within the unique environments of individuals can lead to reduced stress, improved health and well-being, and greater life satisfaction. Five dimensions regarding occupational areas necessary for well-being were identified and supported by brief reviews of empirical research. The concept of lifestyle balance, particularly as it may serve as an antidote to life stress, is worthy of more empirical research and conceptual development. The present model is proposed as a first step toward understanding how specific characteristics of lifestyles viewed as occupational patterns can positively influence overall health and well-being.

## Editor's Note

*Differences exist in the terminology employed in the interdisciplinary research into well-being and that used by occupational scientists. There is tension between being true to the scholarship that informs the discussion and promoting an occupational perspective of health. While both arguments have merit, occupational terms consistent with the Journal of Occupational Science are used in this discussion. The equivalence in meaning of the terms activity, life activity and occupation; activity patterns and patterns of occupation; and need-based activity dimensions and need-based dimensions of occupation, as used in this article, are nonetheless asserted.*

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Ruth Zemke Lecturer in Occupational Science  
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