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Signature Well-being: Toward a More Precise Operationalization of Well-being at the Individual Level

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Abstract

The scientific study of well-being has grown exponentially in recent decades but has primarily focused on the macro level, identifying what *generally* contributes to well-being. As a result, schools have increased the well-being of students through character strengths and resilience curriculum; institutions have increased employee engagement through aligning interests and strengths; and governments have a new benchmark for success through the deployment of global well-being indices. While great strides have been made at this level, I propose the study of well-being is missing a vital component at the individual level: Signature Well-being. The basis for this proposal is the scientific study of character strengths and the benefits gained from working from one's *signature* character strengths. Signature Well-being suggests that, like signature character strengths, there is an element (or combination of elements) of well-being that is energizing, authentic and intuitive. I propose that the elements of well-being should be weighted based on this central element(s) to take into account individual differences and more accurately represent the status a person's subjective well-being. What is signature then is this unique operationalization of one's well-being. While the study of well-being at the macro level is a crucial endeavor, the additional study of well-being at the micro level will provide the field a more complete picture from which to build well-being.

Keywords

well-being, positive psychology, individual, strengths, unique, authentic

Disciplines

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Signature Well-being:

Toward a More Precise Operationalization of Well-being at the Individual Level

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A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Advisor: Amy Walker Rebele

August 1, 2014

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Introduction

Interest in well-being has exploded in recent decades and has become a fundamental objective for individuals, institutions and governments. There is a proliferation of well-being related literature such as *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements* (Rath & Harter, 2010) and *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (Seligman, 2011). Schools around the world have expanded their curriculum to cultivate well-being through the development of character strengths and resilience (Linkins, Niemiec, Gillham, & Mayerson, 2014; Waters, 2011). Companies like Google have decided to focus on physical, emotional and financial well-being to help employees with work-life balance (Paterson, 2011). Governments like Bhutan have even developed global well-being indices, like The Gross National Happiness Index (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012), to measure success through more than just the gross domestic product. Well-being is central to the field of positive psychology and is the focus of this paper.

So, what is well-being? Simply put, well-being (n.d.) is a state of being well. It is a robust condition that can be operationalized, or broken down into workable parts and measured. Consider one's physical health. Wellness, through an objective lens, is a cumulative assessment of several factors such as one's blood pressure, heart rate, blood chemistry, and so forth. A subjective assessment of how one feels provides important nuances and indicators that science may miss. Taken separately, subjective or objective measures don't provide the complete picture, but together they become more accurate (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011). For this reason, well-being is measured, subjectively and objectively, as those elements that contribute to one's overall well-being.

Positive psychology seeks to provide clarity and understanding of subjective well-being through a more objective and descriptive lens in order to *grow the good*. Therefore, it is important to capture what it is that contributes to one's well-being in order to build it. There is much debate in the field as to how well-being is operationalized (Hone, Jarden, Schofield, & Duncan, 2014). Consequently, numerous models have emerged that provide different descriptive lenses. While these generalized measurements enable large-scale comparisons and certainly also provide value on smaller scales, they seem to be missing a vital component at the individual level: Signature Well-being.

I propose that there is an element (or combination of elements) of well-being that is *signature* to each person. Let me briefly explain the rationale for introducing Signature Well-being. To begin, there are many individual differences that have an effect on one's well-being, such as one's signature character strengths (Niemiec, 2013), age and gender (Ryff, 1989b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2002), personality (Costa & McCrae, 1980), individual goals (Emmons & King, 1988) and culture (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2002). Additionally, people differ in their values - powerful drivers of a person's thoughts and behaviors (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Given this, one's values are likely to influence which elements of well-being are the most motivating and enriching for the life of an individual. While research and theory demonstrate these individual differences, their focus continues to be at the macro level. While the study of well-being at the macro level is a crucial endeavor, I believe that the additional study of well-being at the micro level will provide the field a more complete picture, and will enable more targeted and effective interventions for application. I propose that Signature Well-being is the avenue to specificity at the micro level. I will now provide the framework for this paper.

First, to set the stage for Signature Well-being I will introduce the field of positive psychology and provide more background to the study of well-being. Second, I will dive into eight models of well-being, providing context, the subjective and/or objective elements they include and how they are measured. Third, I aligned the theories based upon the operational definition of the elements. In order to illuminate the personalization of Signature Well-being, I will list the operational definitions of eight of the elements. Fourth, with this stage set, I will more specifically introduce Signature Well-being: What is it and where does it come from? Fifth, I will identify precedents within positive psychology literature that justify the proposal of Signature Well-being. Finally, I will answer some questions around *why* and *what next*: Why is Signature Well-being important and advantageous? How might living in alignment with one's Signature Well-being be better than not doing so? And what are the suggested next steps for the field?

Background: The Context For The Proposal of Signature Well-being

This contextual journey begins with a brief introduction to the field of positive psychology – from its inception to the foundational aspects of the field. It follows with a list of well-being theories that provide a backdrop to the missing component of Signature Well-being. Finally, this section takes a deeper dive into a few of the individual elements of well-being. This background will provide context to the development of Signature Well-being.

A Brief Introduction to Positive Psychology

Well-being is a state different to happiness, and is the path to flourishing (Seligman, 2011). These terms are broad and require explanation in order to know what is being studied and therefore how to achieve it. Happiness, or rather the pursuit of it, is forefront in the Declaration

of Independence (1776), as a basic, shared human right. Taking root in 1520, happiness (n.d.) was defined as “good fortune,” implying that it was something awarded to a lucky few rather than something that one could attain of their own volition. It has been more recently defined as a “pleasant and contented mental state,” (Happiness, n.d.) placing emphasis on one’s transient emotional state. The term well-being (n.d.), coined in 1582, pervades this emotional state. *Well* (n.d.) originated as an Old English verb as a satisfactory or (mostly) abundant state; being “happy, healthy, or prosperous” (Well-being, n.d.). Unlike happiness, well-being can be operationalized. Further, Seligman (2011) established flourishing as the yardstick by which his well-being theory is measured. The term flourish dates back to the 1300s and is a verb derived from Old French “floriss” or “florir” meaning “blossom, flower, bloom, flourish” and Latin “florere” “to bloom, blossom, flower, figuratively to flourish, be prosperous” (n.d.b). The current definition, to “grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, is especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment” (n.d.a). I will later argue this *favorable environment* may be better achieved through Signature Well-being. However, let’s continue with the introduction to positive psychology.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) ascertained that positive psychology has a “metaphysical orientation toward the positive.” In other words, positive psychology is fundamentally concerned with the *positive* aspects of life – those that make life worth living – and is just as real and worthy of study as is the *negative* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While great strides have been made in traditional psychology by alleviating mental illness, this is only half the picture and, therefore, psychology as a whole should focus on both traditional and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The field of positive psychology was founded by Martin Seligman (1999) in an address to the American Psychological Association.

The focus of psychology prior to World War II was much more inclusive of both ill- and well-being. However, World War II left in its wake an overwhelming number of veterans in need of care (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As a result, the Veterans Administration and the National Institute of Mental Health were established in order to provide grants for research directed at alleviating mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This shift to studying and treating ill-being set the tone of this next era in psychology, where a proposal of Signature Ill-being would have been more fitting. While this would also be an interesting concept to explore, the focus of this paper is Signature Well-being, an idea that emerges from the study of positive psychology. Positive psychology suggests that the scope of psychology should be expanded to include the study of human flourishing, in what is termed the eudaimonic turn (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). The study of *positive* psychology does not imply that there is a *negative* psychology, rather it predicates the focus of the field. So what is the relationship between the positive and the negative? First, they are complementary of each other. Both well-being and ill-being are very real. These two concepts are closely related, yet distinct and sometimes dichotomous: the absence of one does not denote the presence of the other (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and they may co-occur. The eudaimonic turn redirects psychology to focus on well-being in addition to ill-being (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). Second, the positive safeguards against the negative. For example, studies have shown that increasing gratitude not only increases one's well-being but may provide safeguard from and decrease depression (Seligman, 2011). Third, adversity may be a necessary ingredient in well-being by way of resilience, as in the saying, "what does not kill me makes me stronger" (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 33). Research confirms that adversity can facilitate resilience and well-being, like a muscle

strengthened with use (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). In conclusion, the good in life is inextricably linked to negative aspects of life.

Positive psychology was founded with three fundamental concerns: positive emotion, positive individual traits and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive emotions, such as gratitude and joy, are a fleeting emotional state and have a past, present and future focus. Thoughts about each drive our present subjective emotional evaluation (Ellis, 1962). For instance, a satisfactory evaluation of the past can provide contentment, or an optimistic evaluation of the future may inspire hope (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Further, there is a physiological link to one's emotional forecast that has tangible health implications (Fredrickson, 2009). Positive individual traits comprise strengths and virtues (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Character strengths are values-based and are flexible throughout one's life rather than fixed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These will be addressed in more detail later in the paper. Lastly, positive institutions comprise organizations at all levels: including family units, the corporate world, and governments (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). More specifically this domain includes individual and collective strengths that promote flourishing within these organizations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These three pillars of positive psychology create a comprehensive, expansive and scalable opportunity for vast amounts of research on flourishing.

Research has found a causal link between one's thoughts and emotions (Ellis, 1962). This link highlights the role of *thoughts* in one's well-being. Consider an example, where a person's spouse unexpectedly prepares dinner. Their thought may be, "Oh, sweet! That was so thoughtful", and may inspire a feeling of gratitude. This optimistic perception of the event may just as well have been a pessimistic one; the person instead might think, "I hate surprises," which

causes them to feel frustration. In the familiar glass metaphor, there is more than simply a glass half full or a glass half empty. Instead, one may see the glass and its content in changeable terms: the glass at risk of becoming empty, or as having the possibility to once again become full, the latter being a melioristic approach (J. Pawelski, MAPP Class Lecture, September 5, 2013).

Meliorism (n.d.) is “the belief that the world tends to improve and that humans can aid its betterment.” In terms of the above example, the person’s thought might be: “Perhaps we can plan to do dinner together next time,” a thought that may generate hope. This melioristic approach puts Nietzsche’s quote into a different perspective. For it is not the adversity that defines the outcome of a situation, but rather the way one *thinks* about the adversity that most impacts one’s well-being (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

There are two types of meliorism – mitigative and constructive – that provide the context for traditional and positive psychology (J. Pawelski, MAPP Class Lecture, September 5, 2013). Traditional psychology is focused on approaches that *mitigate* mental suffering (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology, on the other hand, is concerned with those *constructive* elements that encourage flourishing. Summarized in Shakespeare’s play, “The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together” (Shakespeare & James, 1909, 4.3, 69-70). Positive psychology research focuses on that which makes life worth living, which is translated into practical exercises for individuals to boost their well-being, such as in the “Three Blessings” (p. 33) exercise, which is explained in more detail later on in this paper (Seligman, 2011). Both traditional and positive psychology are necessary and mutually beneficial fields of study. While both can offer much in the consideration of Signature Well-being, the focus here resides within the field of positive psychology and the melioristic view. The next section of the paper looks more closely at well-being, by expanding on several different operational definitions.

Well-Being Models

Since the inception of the field, theoretical and empirical research on the cornerstones of positive psychology has increased exponentially (Rusk & Waters, 2013). The field initially focused on life satisfaction as a way to measure the good life, employing the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), which was well-established and preceded the founding of positive psychology. One of the advantages of the Satisfaction with Life Scale is its brevity and simplicity. It therefore still plays a valuable role in research. However, as the field developed, it became clear that more nuance was needed in the study of human flourishing – that there was something more to well-being that wasn't being captured in this scale (Seligman, 2011). The field has since been flooded with theories that define, operationalize and measure well-being – what it is and how it is achieved. The intent of this section is to provide sufficient context and background to the study of well-being to illuminate the breadth of elements that contribute to one's well-being, rather than to provide an exhaustive list and discussion of well-being theories. It will describe how each operationalize their construct of well-being. Further, this list provides a foundation upon which I will provide the argument that Signature Well-being is the missing component at the individual level. Therefore, I present the following models, which I feel best meet this intent. The models include those introduced in coursework throughout the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology program, as well as research on flourishing by Hone et al. (2014). A brief summary of each of these eight models is presented in chronological order below.

Psychological well-being. One of the first well-being models proposed is Ryff's (1989a) psychological well-being model. This framework was revolutionary in that it was grounded in theory and each individual dimension was empirically tested, thereby adding legitimacy and

measurability to the study of well-being (Ryff, 1989a). At the time this model was proposed, the majority of the research on well-being focused on life satisfaction and affect (positive and negative) and their relationship, which was positively correlated with well-being (Ryff, 1989a). However, these measurements were found to insufficiently measure one's well-being as they were too entrenched in a transient emotional state (Ryff, 1989a).

Ryff's (1989a) psychological well-being model includes six subjectively measured elements: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (see Figure 1 below for a visual representation). Each element was defined and operationalized by a 20-item scale (Ryff, 1989a). Participants were asked to respond to each item on a six-point scale (from agree to disagree) and then scored as possessing a high or low score on each individual element (Ryff, 1989a). This scale has proven a reliable and effective measure of one's psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

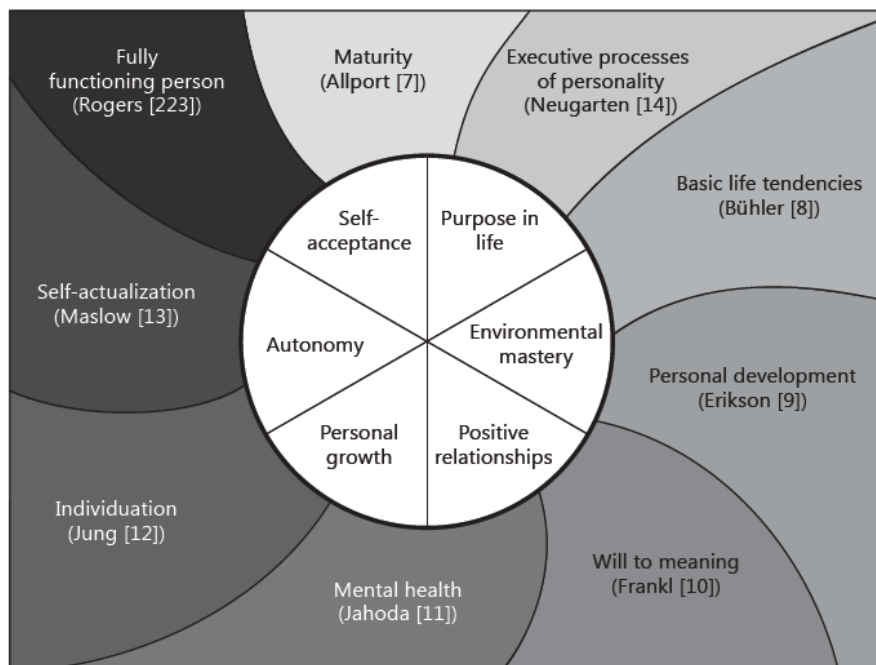


Figure 1. Elements of psychological well-being with theoretical underpinnings (Ryff, 2014, p. 11).

Mental Health Continuum. Keyes (2002) developed The Mental Health Continuum (MHC). The intent was to use the conceptualization of mental illness to create a framework for thinking about mental health (Keyes, 2002). Keyes (2002) conceptualized mental health as a *syndrome* with symptoms, where a mental health *syndrome* model would comprise *symptoms* of mental health. As such, Keyes (2002) looked at symptoms of mental illness, such as depression (as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III; American Psychiatric Association, 1987), and then identified mental health symptoms that would contrast them.

Keyes (2002) argued that mental health should be inclusive of more than just one's psychological well-being (Keyes, 2002). Therefore, in addition to measuring Ryff's (1989a) psychological well-being, the MHC also measures emotional well-being and social well-being (Keyes, 2002). Emotional well-being was measured by the respondent's self-evaluation of the presence of positive affective states such as happiness and interest in life, in addition to life satisfaction (Keyes, 2005). Keyes (2002) developed a model of social well-being which included social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence and social integration (Keyes, 1998). The mental health scale ranged from languishing (with and without co-occurring depression) to moderately mentally healthy and then to flourishing. Subsequent studies have supported the reliability and validity of the MHC and this combination of the emotional, psychological and social well-being has been shown to provide a comprehensive picture of flourishing (Hone et al., 2014).

Flourishing scale. Diener et al. (2010) developed the Flourishing Scale. An earlier version, the psychological flourishing scale, consisted of 12 elements (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). While psychological well-being had proven an effective measure of one's well-being, Diener et al. (2010) aspired to expand the focus of well-being to include other elements of well-

being, such as meaning and engagement, based on Seligman's (2002) authentic happiness theory, and factors of social well-being, as put forward by Keyes (2005).

The flourishing scale consists of eight elements: positive relationships, purpose/meaning, self-respect, competence, engagement, social relationships, optimism and social contribution. Flourishing is evaluated based upon a cumulative rating of the individual elements (Diener et al., 2010). Each of the eight elements is represented in a question for participants to self-evaluate on a seven point Likert scale (Diener et al., 2010). The collective score ranges from 8-56, where higher scores are representative of flourishing (Diener et al., 2010). However, it does not clearly identify thresholds on the continuum (of 8-56) that categorize someone as flourishing or languishing, or anything between (Diener et al., 2010). Rather, for this scale, it is a case of more is better. Subsequent studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of the scale in diverse populations to measure flourishing (Hone et al., 2014).

Gallup's well-being metrics. Rath and Harter (2010) were a part of the Gallup research team that developed a well-being model and have since popularized it in their book, *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements*. This model was developed in three phases: consultation of Gallup historical research, further research and analysis, and a pilot of the Wellbeing Finder (Rath & Harter, 2010). The first Gallup research on well-being dates back to the 1930s (Rath & Harter, 2010). This historical research provided the foundation upon which the questions in the Wellbeing Finder were based (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Gallup's research led to five distinct but interrelated elements: career, social, financial, physical and community well-being (Rath & Harter, 2010). In their book, Rath and Harter (2010) expound on these elements, backing each up with research and recommendations, in a descriptive and prescriptive fashion – a *how-to* thrive in each of the elements. Further, an

interactive website (www.wbfinder.com) provides a survey (the Wellbeing Finder) to evaluate users on their level of well-being for each element, as well as their overall well-being and categorizes them as either thriving, struggling or suffering (Gallup, 2010). While there is limited research assessing the reliability and validity of the scale, Gallup's research is the most far-reaching study to date, including over 150 different countries and representing over 98% of the world population from 2005 to present (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Wellness as Fairness. Prilleltensky (2012) has developed a model proposing fairness as a basis for well-being. Prilleltensky (2012) argues that perceived justice contributes to one's wellness, where a continuum of justice to injustice is correlated to one's ability to thrive or suffer, respectively. Therefore, wellness must encompass this level of justice in order to be an accurate portrayal—this is complex and requires a more robust explanation for clarity. A literature review revealed that while many predictors had been studied in relation to well-being (such as age, unemployment, etc), justice had not (Prilleltensky, 2012). Prilleltensky (2012) outlined four sources that necessitated the inclusion (or at least consideration) of justice in developing models of well-being. These sources were (1) societal impact, similar to the eudaimonic 'do good' justification in Huppert et al.'s (2009) model (see European Social Survey section below); (2) organizational development, where there is a reciprocal relationship of perceived justice, physical and mental health and job performance; (3) interpersonal relations; and (4) the inverse relationship of injustice to individual well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012). The inclusion of justice calls for objective measures of well-being (such as age, socioeconomic status, etc.) in addition to subjective measures (which are self-evaluated). Prilleltensky (2012) developed a model of concentric circles that account for personal, followed by interpersonal, organizational and communal levels of justice. He subsequently evaluated the elements and

levels of justice in terms of distributive and procedural justice. Prilleltensky (2012) defines distributive justice as “the fair and equitable allocation of burdens and privileges, rights and responsibilities, and pains and gains in society” (p. 6) and procedural justice as the “fair, transparent, informative, respectful, and...participatory decision making process” (p.7).

Prilleltensky’s (2012) model comprises six elements of wellness: economic, physical, occupational, psychological, community and interpersonal. See Figure 2 for a visual representation. The scale indicates whether one is thriving, coping, confronting or suffering in terms of a well-being continuum, while simultaneously evaluating optimal, suboptimal, vulnerable and persisting conditions of justice. Thriving and optimal conditions of justice include psychosocial processes, which mediate justice and well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012). The continuums of justice and well-being are both measured subjectively and objectively and balanced to provide a more complete picture.

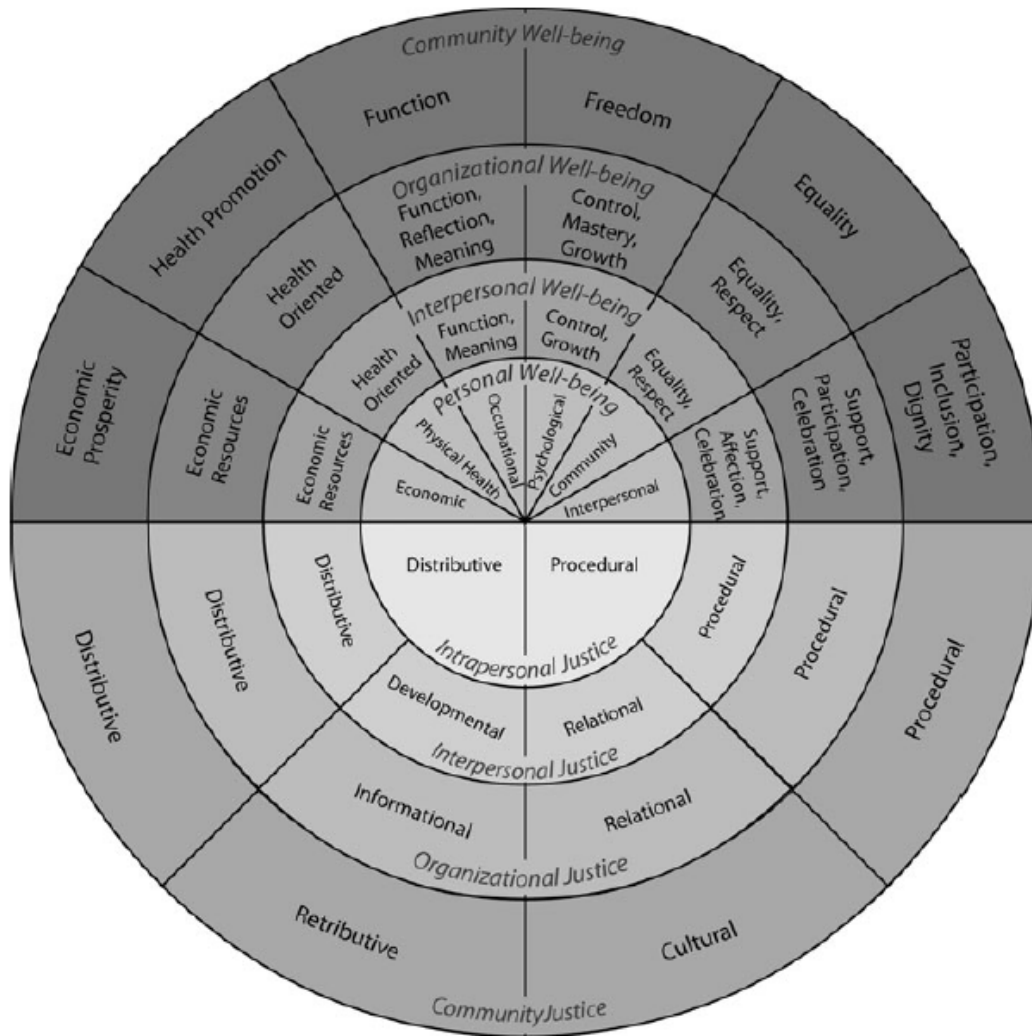


Figure 2. Elements of Wellness as Fairness model (Prilleltensky, 2012, p.11).

Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness. The Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2) model was developed by the University of Pennsylvania and the United States Army, specifically for the US Army (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). The program is organized into pillars such as resilience training (based upon the Penn Resilience Program; Reivich et al., 2011), the Global Assessment Tool (GAT), Master Resilience Trainers, and online tools that measure and/or enhance each of the model's elements (Harms, Herian, Krasikova,

Vanhove, & Lester, 2013). These pillars are further aimed at the spouse and family in addition to Soldiers. This program was developed to increase the resilience of Soldiers and their families and is one of the few within the Army that take a preventative approach to reducing the occurrence of depression, anxiety and other maladies that afflict this subpopulation as a result of war (Harms et al., 2013; Seligman, 2011). This approach aims at increased mental toughness by teaching of a variety of skills that help participants to hone in on their individual thought patterns and self-evaluate whether consequences are helpful or harmful to them (Reivich et al., 2011; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). The intent is to help participants be more accurate in their thinking and to therefore be more effective at managing their individual well-being (Reivich et al., 2011).

The elements of the CSF2 model are social, emotional, family, spiritual and physical (ArmyFit, 2014a). Training effectiveness and Soldier *fitness* is measured by the Global Assessment Tool (GAT), which allows Soldiers to self-evaluate on these five dimensions of *comprehensive* strength (ArmyFit, 2014b). Upon completion, Soldiers are provided a bar graph that illustrates their strength in each area (and more detail for the physical dimension to include RealAge; ArmyFit, 2014a) as well as cross-sectional, demographic information to see how they compare to norms across the army. This information also helps the Army to assess the efficacy of the program and trainings. Resilience and psychological health are evaluated on the dimensions of “adaptability, catastrophizing, character, good coping [problem-focused coping], friendship and optimism” (Harms et al., 2013, p. 10). Using these measures, the resilience training has been shown to increase the resilience and psychological health of its participants (Harms et al., 2013).

Well-being theory. Seligman (2011) developed his own well-being theory. As noted earlier, well-being he suggests “is about what we choose for its own sake” (Seligman, 2011, p.

10). His original model, authentic happiness theory, included three elements: positive emotions or the “pleasant life” (hedonic), engagement or the “engaged life,” and meaning or the “meaningful life” (Seligman, 2002). Nearly a decade later, Seligman (2011) re-conceptualized it as a theory of well-being. Seligman (2011) felt his original theory was inadequate, in that, happiness and life satisfaction were weighted too heavily to consider the overall (subjective) evaluation representative of one’s level of well-being. These states are too inextricably bound in positive affect, which have proven to be ineffective measures of well-being (Seligman, 2011). Further, these elements failed to be exhaustive elements of what people choose for their own sake.

Seligman (2011) proposes that the elements of well-being include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement, shortened to PERMA. Each element of PERMA has individual measurements that have proven valid and reliable (Seligman, 2011). For instance the positive and negative affect scale (PANAS) for measuring positive emotion. The PERMA-Profiler is a newly developed, not yet published scale that measures each of the five elements within one scale (as referenced in Hone et al., 2014). Participants are asked 16 questions (three per element and one for overall well-being) and instructed to evaluate their agreement with each on an 11-point Likert scale (0-10; Hone et al., 2014). The scores for each element are then averaged to provide a “dashboard” approach (Hone et al., 2014, p. 70). While there is no categorical representation for flourishing, the higher one scores, the more indicative it is of flourishing (Hone et al., 2014).

Seligman (2011) details the PERMA elements in his book, *Flourish*, and indicates that there may be individual differences in the manifestation of these elements. I will return to this idea later in the paper to provide support for Signature Well-being.

European Social Survey. Huppert et al. (2009) developed the European Social Survey (ESS) to capture both the hedonic (feeling) and eudaimonic (doing) approaches. The focus was to incorporate the eudaimonic approach, in line with the author's interpretation of Aristotle's original intent. This would need to accommodate not only individual well-being but also the interpersonal, functional impact of one's actions (Huppert et al., 2009). To clarify, Aristotle said that one achieved happiness if action was virtuous in nature (Melchert, 2002). Since virtuosity implies that one is concerned with how one's actions affects others, well-being should also depend on living in a way that affects the greater good. Huppert and So's (2013) model, then, aimed to incorporate this notion in their construct, and did so through the inclusion of an interpersonal domain.

In line with Keyes' (2002) approach, the mental health symptoms in Huppert and So's (2013) model are contrasts to mental illness symptoms. Huppert et al.'s (2009) original conceptualization assesses a total of 18 elements. The authors categorized these elements into quadrants (seen in Figure 3 below) to represent whether the elements are feeling (hedonic) or functioning (eudaimonic), and whether they reward personal or interpersonal well-being.

	Personal	Interpersonal
Feeling (having, being)	Satisfaction	Belonging
	Positive affect	Social support
	Negative affect	Social recognition
	Optimism	Societal progress
	Self esteem	
Functioning (doing)	Autonomy	Social engagement
	Competence	Caring
	Interest in learning	Altruism
	Goal orientation	
	Sense of purpose	
	Resilience	

Figure 3. Four domains of original European Social Survey (Huppert et al., 2009, p. 305).

Following rigorous research this list was further distilled to ten elements (or features of well-being): competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality (Huppert & So, 2013). This new list focuses on those items directly correlated with flourishing. The items inherently fall into three distinct categories:

- ‘positive characteristics’ (eudaimonic), consists of emotional stability, vitality, optimism, resilience, and self-esteem;
- ‘positive functioning,’ (eudaimonic), consists of engagement, competence, meaning and positive relationships; and
- ‘positive appraisal’ (hedonic), which consists of life satisfaction and positive emotion (Huppert & So, 2013).

Each category can further be distinguished by whether it fits into the eudaimonic or hedonic tradition. Flourishing as measured by this scale necessitates a high evaluation of positive

emotion, four of the five elements of ‘positive characteristics,’ and three of the four elements of ‘positive functioning’ (Huppert & So, 2013). This scale has been replicated and has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of individual flourishing (Hone et al., 2014).

Elements of Well-Being Models

The theories above were presented to illustrate that well-being is operationalized differently and consists of a substantial list of elements. There are parallels in some theories, however, these theories conceptualize the elements differently. I believe that this accounts for some individual differences within Signature Well-being. PERMA, unlike the other models presented, specifically looks at the impact of one’s motivation and volition on well-being (Seligman, 2011). While these features play an important role in Signature Well-being (expanded upon below), the other models demonstrate that there are so many other pieces to the well-being puzzle and therefore should be explored in relation to Signature Well-being, as well as generally. Additionally, despite disagreement in the field on the operationalization of well-being, it might be that Signature Well-being is a layer of specificity that could be inserted into existing well-being measures.

Table 1 below organizes the various elements between the theories so that we can better compare them. This table is based upon the one presented in Hone et al. (2014, p. 65) that organizes the Keyes’ (2005) MHC, Diener’s et al. (2010) Flourishing Scale, Seligman’s (2011) well-being theory and Huppert and So’s (2013) ESS. The remaining four theories have been added to the table based upon the elements included. This table provided the basis for my approach in the next section of this paper, to broaden the range of elements considered in the operationalization of well-being. Elements that were referenced (however loosely) in three or more models (highlighted in blue) will be discussed further - while the remaining elements are

valuable components of well-being, further understanding and expansion on them is beyond the scope of this paper.

Psychological Well-being (Ryff, 1989)	MHC (Keyes, 2005)	Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010)	Gallup's Wellbeing Metrics (Rath & Harter, 2010)	CSF2 (Harms et al., 2011)	Well-being - PERMA (Seligman, 2011)	Wellness as Fairness (Prilleltensky, 2012)	European Social Survey (Huppert & So, 2013)
Positive Relations with Others	Positive Relations with Others (PWB)	Positive Relationships	Social	Social	Positive Relationships	Interpersonal	Positive Relationships
Purpose in Life	Purpose in Life (PWB)	Purpose / Meaning			Meaning and Purpose		Meaning
Self-Acceptance	Self-Acceptance (PWB)	Self-Acceptance				Psychological	Self-Esteem
		Competence	Career		Achievement	Occupational	Competence
	Interested in Life (EWB)	Engagement			Engagement		Engagement
	Happy (EWB)			Emotional	Positive Emotion		Positive Emotion
	Social Acceptance (SWB)	Social Relationships	Community			Community	
			Physical	Physical		Physical	
		Optimism					Optimism
Environmental Mastery	Environmental Mastery (PWB)						
Personal Growth	Personal Growth (PWB)						
Autonomy	Autonomy (PWB)						
			Financial			Economic	
	Social Contribution (SWB)	Social Contribution					
	Social Integration (SWB)						
	Social Actualization (SWB)						
	Social Coherence (SWB)						
	Life Satisfaction (EWB)						
							Emotional stability
							Vitality
							Resilience
				Spiritual			
				Family			

Note: The top half of this table is highlighted in blue to identify the elements that are (however loosely) identified in three or more models and are therefore expanded upon below. The acronyms were used to condense the table and are expanded as follows: Psychological Well-being (PWB), Emotional Well-being (EWB), Social Well-being (SWB).

Table 1. Well-being theories organized by general categories.

The intent of this section is to focus on a subset of the elements of well-being introduced in the above, and to list how each is described by the different constructs. This will provide further context and background necessary for a proposal of Signature Well-being.

Positive relations with others, social and interpersonal

- Psychological well-being. Someone scoring high in positive relations with others “Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection and intimacy; [and] understands give and take of human relationships” (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).
- MHC. Positive relationships with others means one has “a warm and trusting relationship with others” (Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- Flourishing scale. Positive relationships are “social relationships [that] are supportive and rewarding” (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- Gallup’s well-being metrics. “Social Wellbeing is about having strong relationships and love in your life...[Someone with social wellbeing is] surrounded by people who encourage their development and growth, accept them for who they are, and treat them with respect” (Rath & Harter, 2010, loc. 1258-1274).
- CSF2. The social dimension is defined as “Developing and maintaining trusted, valued relationships and friendships that are personally fulfilling and foster good communication including a comfortable exchange of ideas, views, and experiences” (ArmyFit, 2014b).
- PERMA. Seligman (2011) states, “Very little that is positive is solitary....*Other people* are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up (loc. 408). Positive relationships are measured by asking about the extent to which one

receives assistance and support as needed, the extent to which someone feels loved, and how satisfied they are with their personal relationships (Hone et al., 2014, p. 70).

- Wellness as fairness. At the personal level, the objective indicators for the interpersonal element are one's "number of friends, number of conflicts, [and] fun activities with peers" (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5). The subjective indicators assess whether one "feel[s] supported, heard, valued, appreciated, [and is] treated with respect and dignity" (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5).
- ESS. Positive relationships are subjectively measured by a self-evaluation of having caring people in one's life (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Purpose in life and meaning

- Psychological well-being. Someone scoring high in purpose in life "Has goals in life and a sense of directedness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; [and] holds beliefs that give life" (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).
- MHC. Purpose in life is a "life [that] has a sense of direction or meaning to it" (Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- Flourishing scale. Purpose and meaning is measured by one's agreement with having "a purposeful and meaningful life" (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- PERMA. The "meaningful life" is one that is defined as "belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self" (Seligman, 2011, loc. 368).
- ESS. Meaning is assessed by asking whether someone "feel[s] that what [they] do in...life is valuable and worthwhile" (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Self-acceptance, self-respect, psychological and self-esteem

- Psychological well-being. Someone scoring high in self-acceptance “Possesses a positive attitude toward the self, acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of the self, including good and bad” (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).
- MHC. Self-acceptance means you “like most parts of your personality” (Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- Flourishing Scale. Self-respect is represented as one’s agreement with the statement, “I am a good person and live a good life” (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- Wellness as fairness. At the personal level, the objective indicators for the psychological element are “laughing, smiling, crying, sleeping, symptoms of anger, [and] depression” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5). The subjective indicators encompass “life satisfaction evaluations, reports of feelings, perceived self-efficacy, mastery, sense of control, spirituality, flow, meaning, growth, [and] engagement” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5).
- ESS. Self-esteem is measured by a very positive self-evaluation (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Competence, career, achievement and occupational

- Flourishing scale. Competence is measured by the extent to which someone feels they are “capable in the activities that are [personally] important (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- Gallup’s well-being metrics. “Career Wellbeing is about liking what you do every day...[Someone with career wellbeing has] the opportunity to do things that fit their strengths and interests. They have a deep purpose in life and plan to attain their goals” (Rath & Harter, 2010, loc. 1258).

- PERMA. Achievement or accomplishment is defined as “success, accomplishment, winning, achievement, and mastery for their own sakes” (Seligman, 2011, loc. 368).
- Wellness as fairness. At the personal level, the objective indicators for the occupational element are one’s “access to resources to do job, clear job description, communication channels, praise received, assets recognized, instances of conflict, [and] absenteeism” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5). The subjective indicators assess whether one “feel[s] appreciated and engaged, positive assessment of working climate, meaning making, [and] positive working relationship with boss” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5).
- ESS. Competence is subjectively measured by an evaluation of days when one “feel[s] a sense of accomplishment from what [they] do” (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Interest in life and engagement

- MHC. Interest in life is a component of one’s emotional well-being and is measured to the degree to which one possesses interest (Keyes, 2005; Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- Flourishing scale. Engagement is a subjective evaluation of being “engaged and interested in...daily activities” (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- PERMA. “Engagement is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity” (Seligman, 2011, loc. 262).
- ESS. Engagement is measured by one’s agreement with the statement, “I love learning new things” (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Happy, emotional and positive emotion

- MHC. Being happy is a component of one's emotional well-being and is measured to the degree to which one feels happy (Keyes, 2005; Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- CSF2. Emotional strength is defined as "approaching life's challenges in a positive, optimistic way by demonstrating self-control, stamina and good character with your choices and actions" (ArmyFit, 2014b).
- PERMA. The "pleasant life" is measured by one's general agreement with the questions, "how often do you feel joyful...how often do you feel positive...[and] to what extent do you feel contented?" (Hone et al., 2014, p. 70).
- ESS. Positive emotion is one's agreement with the question, "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?" (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 843).

Social acceptance, social relationships and community

- MHC. Social acceptance is a subset of one's social well-being and is measured by one's agreement with the statement, "people are basically good" (Keyes, 2005; Hone et al., 2014, p. 66).
- Flourishing scale. Social relationships are subjectively measured by one's response to "People respect me" (Hone et al., 2014, p. 69).
- Gallup's well-being metrics. "Community Wellbeing is about the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live" and are those that "have identified the areas where they can contribute based on their own strengths and passions" (Rath & Harter, 2010, loc. 1292).
- Wellness as fairness. At the personal level, the objective indicators for the community element are one's "access to education and services, social capital, volunteering,

clean air, [and] safety” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5). The subjective indicators assess whether one has a “sense of community, feel[s] accepted, respected, safe, [and has] pride in community” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5).

Physical

- Gallup’s well-being metrics. “Physical Wellbeing is about having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis” (Rath & Harter, 2010, loc.1274). Good health is defined as regular exercise, a healthy diet, and the proper amount of rest (Rath & Harter, 2010).
- CSF2. The physical dimension is defined as “Performing and excelling in physical activities that require aerobic fitness, endurance, strength, healthy body composition and flexibility derived through exercise, nutrition and training” (ArmyFit, 2014b).
- Wellness as fairness. At the personal level, the objective indicators for the physical element are one’s “symptoms of pain, biochemical markers of health and disease, disability, longevity, [and] functional assessment” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5). The subjective indicators assesses one’s “feelings of vitality, energy, [and] self-evaluations of health” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 5).

What is Signature Well-Being?

As I said, above, I propose that there is an element (or combination of elements) of well-being that is *signature* to each person. In this section I describe my hypothesis of Signature Well-being. It is my hope that this concept can be further developed, into a formal and robust theory, which can both be applied as a filter in existing well-being measures and developed into its own model.

Before defining Signature-Well-being it is helpful to think first about the VIA character strengths. The concept of Signature Well-being may be most easily understood in relation to the notion of signature character strengths: signature well-being is to flourishing, what signature character strengths are to character strengths. By definition, character strengths are a set of universally accepted and stable traits that are influenced by cognition, affect, volition and behavior (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While all the strengths are moral in nature and essential, one's *signature* character strengths are those that are authentic and intuitive to oneself and as such are energizing rather than exhausting in their use (Niemi, 2013). The set of strengths that meet this criteria create a unique *constellation*, not only in the structure but in the *signature* manifestation of that structure (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). This is perhaps influenced by one's values (Niemi, 2013). One's signature character strengths may influence which element of well-being feels the most natural and invigorating. I used this model to develop an initial definition of Signature Well-being. I have also extrapolated the criteria for finding Signature Well-being from some of those used to determine one Signature Character Strengths. Signature character strengths make someone feel as if they are being true to oneself (Niemi, 2013), and I therefore propose that the same will apply to the intentional focus on one's Signature Well-being.

My hypothesis is that for each person, there is an element (or combination of elements) of well-being that is intuitive, energizing and authentic, and is therefore central to their well-being: their Signature Well-being. This central element catalyzes one's well-being in that it provides a bridge to the other elements. In other words, without it one may feel incomplete or as if something is missing and may struggle to thrive in the other elements. What is signature then is this unique operationalization of one's well-being.

To operationalize, measures of well-being should weight elements based on a person's Signature Well-being to take into account individual differences. Allow me to break this down. As mentioned earlier, Signature Well-being may add a layer of specificity to existing well-being measures by filtering for one's Signature Well-being. A specific measure could then develop a method for weighting this element with respect to the other elements within the measure. One such method for weighting the elements in terms of personal importance suggests that a questionnaire be developed and administered in addition to previously established surveys (in this case PERMA, prior to the PERMA-Profiler; as cited in Hone et al., 2014; Seligman, 2011) to determine which element is most aligned with one's values (Rebele, 2009). This questionnaire would provide a values-based ranking of the elements, which could be translated into a percentage and multiplied by the results from each element's corresponding measure (Rebele, 2009). This is one way to conceptualize the measurement of Signature Well-being, however, more research needs to be conducted to further develop this.

A future model of Signature Well-being may include a subset of the elements introduced by the operationalization of each well-being theory, above. The subset of these elements, which were then detailed, are listed in Table 2 below, and will provide a basis upon which to further establish the concept of Signature Well-being. To bring this concept to life, I will now walk through a couple of vignettes – meet Amy and Michael:

Positive Relations with Others, Social and Interpersonal	Purpose in Life and Meaning	Self-Acceptance, Self-Respect, Psychological and Self-Esteem	Competence, Career, Achievement and Occupational
Interest in Life and Engagement	Happy, Emotional and Positive Emotion	Social Acceptance, Social Relationships and Community	Physical

Table 2. A list of the elements outlined in previous section.

Amy is in her mid-twenties and her Signature Well-being is positive relationships with others. She thrives on meeting and learning about other people. In her spare time she plays volleyball. When she is on the court (or sand) she goes into flow and when her team excels she feels a sense of achievement. When engaged in volleyball she feels connected to her teammates; as if life is in balance. Volleyball is pure joy. But it is not a singular experience. It provides connection in such a meaningful way that without the game she feels empty. When you strip the court away, what is most important at the end of the day is the diverse group of people that volleyball exposes her to. This format provides her the opportunity to bond and create lifelong friendships through a common interest. In fact, when she moved away from her friends and was unable to continue with her volleyball league she became disengaged. She buried herself in her work, stopped exercising regularly and though she kept in touch with her friends as much as possible, she craved that face-to-face connection with others that shared her interests. For it was the positive relationships with others that ignited well-being in her life, and volleyball was the vehicle through which she experienced them.

Michael is in his early thirties and his Signature Well-being is achievement. His life has been a series of accomplishments, from getting into medical school, graduating in the top of his medical school cohort and thereby becoming an orthopedic surgeon. The moment he walks into the operating room everything comes into alignment; it is his home base. He craves the exhilaration of working hard to give someone the ability to walk again and the ecstasy gained when the *rod fits in the hole* perfectly. This 'high' is enhanced by the high-fives from colleagues in the doctors' lounge following an operation or sharing a successful day of procedures with his wife over dinner. Despite a typical 60 to 80 hour work week, if paged in the middle of the night for a tough case, he is energized to get to work and begin operating. The hospital is a second

home, and an interwoven community that propels him forward to become the best surgeon he can be. While he experiences such a high from a successful operation, an unsuccessful one is disastrous. Not being able to *win* makes him lose a degree of self-respect, it is a personal blow to his abilities and causes him to momentarily step back. It is incredibly hard for him to accept defeat and move on as he feeds on achievement. However, failure ultimately drives him to put more energy into doing a better job next time. Michael's motivation to achieve is not limited to the operating room, however. For instance, while he was finishing his residency a few years ago, he and a few colleagues began a dice pool and gathered monthly to play various dice games. Michael enjoyed socializing but his participation dwindled as time went on. However, he recently took up basketball with some fellow surgeons and he feels invigorated – looking forward to playing during every break at work. Basketball and operating satisfy Michael's motivation to achieve – achievement is what helps Michael's world go 'round.

Both Amy and Michael experience high levels of well-being. However, they have a distinct route. While Amy cares if her team loses, it is not disastrous in the way that Michael's success and mastery in his work matter to him. Alternately, while Michael enjoys the hospital community, he would likely still practice if he was the only one on staff. Existing instruments to measure well-being are built on notions of balance and diversity in sources of well-being—each element is considered and valued equally by the measure. So, if you gave Amy and Michael a typical well-being assessment, they would probably both have scores in the middle of the road. However, I am arguing that they derive so much more from this one, signature element of well-being that the others are less important to them. A more specific, individual measure of well-being should account for this, as it has implications for both research in the field and for application.

Imagine Amy had sought out the help of a coach or therapist when she was living away from home but the coach did not understand this concept of Signature Well-being. Upon hearing about Amy's recent move and how it has affected her – she has been overworking and stopped exercising – her coach may propose interventions for her that may not be as effective, or could even be detrimental. For instance, her coach may suggest that she take up running and a diet that would complement this workout. While this may contribute to Amy's well-being in some ways, it may be something that reinforces her disengagement, as running tends to be a solitary activity. It is not that she does not enjoy exercise or value fitness (or physical well-being), however, at the root of her disengagement is a need for engaging with her friends. What's notable about Amy's volleyball experience, is that while the relationships are what drive and sustain her participation, it also enhances a number of other elements of well-being, such as physical, meaning and engagement. As suggested in many character strengths interventions, operating from one's signature character strength not only contributes to positive outcomes in and of itself but also provides a bridge to the expression of other character strengths (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Niemiec, 2013). In fact, in order to build a lesser character strength, it has been recommended that you find a way to incorporate one of your signature strengths into an activity to enhance motivation and speed of mastery (Slattery, 2013). Likewise, I hypothesize that working from one's signature element of well-being will improve their well-being.

To conclude this section, the scientific study of well-being has been predominantly focused on the macro level and what generally contributes to one's well-being. For the purpose of directing public policy and allocating resources and comparing the well-being of large populations, a global well-being index is necessary. However, I propose that science additionally

zoom in and study what contributes to well-being at the micro level to take into account individual nuances—Signature Well-being. Together, these different vantage points provide a more complete picture of well-being, can advance the science, and could spur on individuals in their own efforts to experience greater well-being. I will now transition to a discussion on the literary basis for Signature Well-being.

What Precedents Support Different Signature Well-being Models?

Positive psychology literature provides an abundance of theoretical and empirical justification for the study of well-being at the micro level and therefore for the viability of the proposal of Signature Well-being. What follows are a few key points meant to inspire further discussion and research on the topic. More specifically, I will discuss signature character strengths, a person-activity fit approach to positive interventions, intrinsic motivation, PERMA, the ABC model, enabling exterior conditions and cultural differences.

Signature Character Strengths

Signature character strengths provide the strongest link to the concept of Signature Well-being in that they hone in on individual differences. Character strengths and values are a fundamental aspect of the field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and as such now have robust empirical validation. In order to study these positive traits, the field needed to have a standardized descriptive language, or classification system (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Similar to the pursuit of a global well-being index, two founders of the field of positive psychology, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, sought to identify universally endorsed character strengths. They came up with 24 strengths of character that fall within six virtue categories (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The Values in Action survey was created to

measure the extent to which individuals demonstrate each of these 24 character strengths (Niemiec, 2013). An individual's results presents the character strengths in rank order, from those they put into action more to those they demonstrate least. From this list, individuals can identify their *signature* character strengths as those 5 (or so) at the top (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004) - it is proposed that these are strengths of character that are (1) intuitive, (2) energizing and (3) authentic to the individual (Niemiec, 2013). While there is value in each of the character strengths, signature character strengths allow for personalization and add necessary complexity to the scientific study of strengths (Niemiec, 2013), as everyone has a unique strengths makeup, which they deploy in a distinct fashion (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). Understanding one's signature character strengths and applying this knowledge to one's life can increase well-being (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Niemiec, 2013). For example, studies have found that individuals who employed new uses of *their* signature character strengths each day experienced a boost in their satisfaction with life and a decrease in depressive symptoms for up to six months (Gander et al., 2013).

Well-being theories outline valuable elements that generally contribute to well-being. The concept of Signature Well-being, on the other hand, extrapolates that there may be a single element or constellation of elements which naturally invigorate and feel authentic to an individual. It follows then that a focus on pursuing and living in ways that enhance this Signature Well-being element may have the most substantial impact on the individual's overall well-being. What follows is a discussion on positive interventions as a format for applying research to increase individual well-being.

Positive Interventions: A ‘Person-Activity Fit’ Approach

Signature Well-being proposes that well-being should not be a ‘one size fits all’ but rather take a person-activity fit approach. This individualization may be facilitated via positive interventions. Positive interventions are exercises employed in the field of positive psychology that have been theoretically and/or empirically shown to increase one’s well-being and decrease depressive symptoms (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Pawelski, n.d.; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Schueller, 2010). Layous & Lyubomirsky (2012) looked at the mechanics of positive interventions such as one’s motivation, effort, and culture. They concluded that one’s voluntary engagement, motivation and interest in a positive intervention facilitated its impact on their subjective well-being (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). This was because individuals autonomously put more consistent effort into the follow-through and adherence to the instructions of the intervention, which in turn generated more enduring effects (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). I propose that, like person-activity fit for interventions, there is also a person-element fit for well-being: an individual operating in concordance with their Signature Well-being will experience greater well-being. Relatedly, given a theory of Signature Well-being, people should benefit from choosing positive interventions that match their signature well-being. I hypothesize that this approach could make the person-activity fit even more successful.

Layous & Lyubomirsky’s (2012) research about Person-Activity Fit provides some of the foundation for the notion that nuanced, individual approaches can further enhance well-being, upon which the idea of Signature Well-being is based. Therefore, in addition to the global study of well-being it is necessary the field of positive psychology additionally adopts a more person-

activity fit approach to well-being. Next, I will discuss the role of autonomy in increasing well-being.

Intrinsic Motivation

Self-concordant goals are intrinsically motivated and in alignment with one's interests and values (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010). Self-determination theory identifies this continuum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that guides one's behavior and level of regulation (Brown & Ryan, 2004). External regulation, inspired by extrinsic motivation, describes actions one takes for the purpose of seeking rewards and avoiding punishment (Brown & Ryan, 2004). The opposing end of the spectrum is integrated regulation, inspired by intrinsic motivation. This is where one's actions are completely assimilated to and in alignment with the person's values, and are therefore sought as an end within themselves (Brown & Ryan, 2004). It is assumed that well-being is a broadly intrinsic goal for many. The concept of Signature Well-being suggests that, a) some elements of well-being are more intrinsically motivating than others for people, and b) there is individual difference in which elements of well-being these are. Signature Well-being posits that well-being is better achieved through one's concentration on an element(s) that is *signature* - particularly intrinsically motivating - to them. Signature Well-being provides one the opportunity to pursue well-being (a goal) in a manner that feels authentic, motivating and rewarding. What follows is a look at intrinsic motivation as it relates to what element(s) one may choose to pursue.

PERMA

The well-being theory, PERMA, alludes to individual differences in the pursuit of well-being. The criteria for inclusion in this theory was that an element must be what a free person would choose to pursue of their own volition, and as an end to itself (Seligman, 2011). The

PERMA-profiler measures individual well-being as a *dashboard* (Hone et al., 2014). It is the cumulative score of one's responses to each of the five elements and one's general well-being (Hone et al., 2014). This is because there is "no one number that tells you how an airplane [or person or company] is doing, there is a dashboard of indicators" (Adelaide Thinkers in Residence, 2013). It may be that one element of well-being scores higher than do the others but this balanced approach does not show these individual nuances. For instance, Seligman (2011) is a self-proclaimed "low-positive affective" (loc. 315), as is half of the population today. In the transition from authentic happiness theory to the well-being theory, he reduced the weight of positive emotion in one's overall well-being (from one of three to one of five elements), which he said was liberating to others who experience low affect (Seligman, 2011). While these individuals may never score high in positive emotion, they may still score high in well-being because another element(s) is central to their well-being. Signature Well-being accounts for these nuances and individual differences and supports that the elements of well-being should be weighted according to one's Signature Well-being. Next, I will look at the role of thoughts in identifying one's motivation to pursue a particular element.

The ABC Model

There is wide variability in subjective well-being, in part due to one's thoughts and perceptions. Albert Ellis (1962) spent his life studying the connection of one's thoughts and resulting emotions. He developed the ABC model as a way of breaking events down into an activating event, beliefs, and consequences (both emotional and behavioral; Ellis, 1962). An activating event is anything big or small that triggers thoughts. One's beliefs or thoughts are interpretations of that event – it is neither subjectively good nor bad, bizarre nor boring, until a person perceives it as so. These interpretations drive how one feels and consequently reacts

(Ellis, 1962). While it seems that an adversity might trigger consequences, there is broad variability in thoughts and beliefs, which explains how two people can experience the same event and have completely different sets of feelings and reactions as a result.

In conclusion, Signature Well-being accounts for these individual perceptual differences that may influence which element(s) feels authentic to someone. Recall Amy and Michael, whose participation in competitive sports trigger very different thoughts. While Amy may think “I’m so excited to see my friends at volleyball tonight,” Michael may think “I think I’ve mastered the offense, I can’t wait to try it out tonight.” The resulting emotion could be the same: excitement. However, cuing into one’s thoughts about the event may provide valuable information to tune into one’s motivation. Therefore, the inclusion of Signature Well-being allows for the more individualized application of positive psychology. What follows is a discussion on activating events in terms of those objective factors that are outside of one’s control.

Enabling Exterior Conditions

There are many individual differences, both from nature and nurture, that impact one’s well-being and perhaps one’s Signature Well-being. In fact, approximately forty percent of well-being is within one’s voluntary control whereas about fifty percent is determined through biology and ten percent via circumstance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This brings to light that there are conditions – biology and circumstance – exterior to volition and motivation that impact one’s well-being. What I term *enabling exterior conditions* are those elements relatively outside of one’s realm of control but that come to bear on one’s well-being. These conditions may include one’s age and developmental stage, gender, culture, genetics, personality, memory, or a sense of safety and security, among others. One must learn to cope with or more intentionally exploit

these exterior conditions in order to achieve or *enable* well-being. The following are a few research-based examples of some enabling exterior conditions. First, Ryff and Keyes (1995) found that all but two of the elements of her psychological well-being steadily increased with age. Personal growth decreased, while purpose in life, sharply decreased (Ryff & Singer, 2002). Second, women consistently scored relatively higher on personal growth (Ryff, 1989b) and significantly higher on positive relations with others than did males (who, despite acknowledging the value of, self-rated this as the least prominent element; Ryff & Singer, 2002). Third, two of the Big Five dimensions of personality were found to strongly correlate with positive affect (an element of well-being): neuroticism negatively and extraversion positively (Costa & McCrae, 1980). Finally, one's *personal strivings*, or goals that drive behavior, mediate between local and global motives (Emmons & King, 1988). For instance, Amy values and prioritizes her friendships (global motive) but feels compelled to put in overtime at work this weekend in order to show management she is ready for a promotion (local motive). In turn, this causes her to miss a volleyball tournament. When these motives are in conflict one's well-being is negatively impacted (Emmons & King, 1988). Signature Well-being may be a pathway to re-balance these motives by helping to understand and prioritize the element(s) that one most values and is most motivated by and therefore, live more in accord with that element(s)—working almost like a *trump card* in a person's strivings for greater well-being.

These examples suggest that nature and nurture may play a role in the evolution and manifestation of one's Signature Well-being. In combination with the concept of Signature Well-being, these exterior conditions may be better *enabled* – exploited or coped with. The next section takes a deeper look at the possible connection between culture and one's Signature Well-being.

Cultural Differences

As research in positive psychology takes more of a global perspective, and as assessments of well-being become more nuanced, cultural differences have begun to emerge. The greater social context in which one resides plays a major role in the ability to be authentic and follow one's heart and may impact one's individual values. It will likely also influence the make-up and expression of one's Signature Well-being profile, which will need to be explored further: Are certain Signature Well-being elements more prominent in certain cultures or groups than others? For example, Nisbett and Masuda (2003) found that Eastern Asians have a larger scope of reference than do Westerners, cognitively and socially. The former views their environment on the macro level and therefore, like a machine, becomes the need within that machine to maintain functionality (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003). The scope of the latter, then, is at the micro level, where the social context allows more autonomy in the pursuit of one's goals (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003). Further, Westerners are more apt to choose positive interventions for the sake of personal happiness, whereas Easterners tend to be more concerned with those that positively impact their community (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). In fact, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) found that independence (rather than interdependence) was strongly correlated with subjective well-being. As a result, there are vast differences in well-being from nation to nation (Adelaide Thinkers in Residence, 2013). These cultural differences underscore the necessity of an individualized operationalization of well-being. While there are many benefits to understanding well-being at the macro level, Signature Well-being allows the individual to look at exterior conditions (such as culture), how that impacts their individual well-being, and then more intentionally to balance their values with those conditions.

Based on these reasons alone, there is justification for the field of positive psychology to take the proposal of Signature Well-being seriously. This concept needs to be further researched and developed. However, if Signature Well-being proves to be right, science can zoom in even closer to understanding what it is that contributes to well-being and the impact at the individual level is copious. At this point, I will transition to the implications of this proposal on the field as well as the individual.

Signature Well-Being...The So What And The Why

Signature Well-being is an important piece of the positive psychology puzzle—its inclusion would be advantageous to the field as it, like character strengths, adds *necessary complexity* to the scientific study of well-being and its application. Seligman (2011) has put forward a challenge to increase global human flourishing to 51% by 2051. Doing this requires efficiency and accuracy. It could be the case that strategies that take Signature Well-being into account will expedite this goal. Given that the aim of positive psychology is to describe human flourishing as well as prescribe positive interventions that lead to flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Signature Well-being has the potential to provide greater precision to the science and its application, by more accurately describing individual experience, and therefore being able to prescribe interventions to individuals with greater precision. Again, research is needed.

Research on the application of character strengths may provide insight into the potential for Signature Well-being. As demonstrated in the application of *signature* character strengths, there is value in specificity at the individual level. To begin with, research during the past decade, has uncovered emotional, physical and psychological benefits of working from one's

signature character strengths, as opposed to any one of the 24 (Niemiec, 2013). For instance, a positive intervention known as the “Three Blessings” (p. 33) exercise asks participants to record three good things on a daily basis in order to increase gratitude (Seligman, 2011). The results revealed a subjective increase in well-being and fewer physical symptoms (Niemiec, 2013).

Signature character strengths may influence one’s Signature Well-being. In terms of signature character strengths, perhaps Amy possesses the signature character strength of kindness or teamwork. Michael may have a signature character strength of perseverance or appreciation of beauty and excellence. Research would need to be conducted to see if there is a causal relationship between these two concepts. However, research found an association between strengths and avenues of well-being (Niemiec, 2013). Specifically, higher subjective levels of meaning were found to be most closely associated with individuals with signature character strengths of religiousness, gratitude, hope, zest, and curiosity (Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park, & Seligman, 2007). Future research might focus on the relationship between signature character strengths and Signature Well-being.

Living in alignment with Signature Well-being provides a more *authentic* balance to the elements of well-being at the individual level and may therefore contribute to higher well-being. Sagiv, Roccas, and Hazan (2004) discuss the need for environmental congruence, or the pursuit of an environment that is supportive of one’s authentic self. As a study of Signature Well-being advances, this would need to be examined. Questions about how one can best align their environment and other exterior conditions with the Signature Well-being profile should be examined.

To conclude, as a mother of two young children, it is my hope that I provide them with an environment that supports their best selves. Prior to the concept of Signature Well-being, I

thought my role was to maximize resources – like opportunities to achieve and have positive relationships – for my children. While those things are important, I am thrilled to expand the focus of my parenting philosophy to also incorporate asking more questions directed at understanding where my children’s motivation, energy, values and interests lie and surround them with those tools that help them thrive in a way that is authentic to them. The concept of Signature Well-being has the potential help other parents, not only raise children to be happy, but enable them to follow their bliss and to flourish.

Implications of Signature Well-Being...What Next?

Signature Well-being offers a new perspective on individual well-being. It provides specificity in measurement. Signature Well-being can be added to various models of well-being to add precision and it may have a measure of its own. Positive interventions can be better directed to maintain the balance of one’s Signature Well-being and therefore enhance subjective well-being. Rather than arbitrarily increasing the elements of well-being, individuals may primarily focus on the element(s) that feel authentic, energizing and intuitive (VIA Institute on Character, 2013). This *signature* element will likely also positively impact the other elements of well-being, in the way that character strengths are interrelated and tend to work in concert with one another (Park, 2009). As in Amy’s case, volleyball was the vehicle for positive relationships but also increased her physical well-being, meaning and engagement. The application of Signature Well-being has many potential benefits for institutions as well. Organizations may help engage their employees through understanding each person’s Signature Well-being. Schools may provide a more tailored approach based on a child’s Signature Well-being. So where do we go from here?

Moving forward, more research and investigation into the concept of Signature Well-being is necessary. For instance, a theory needs to be fleshed out and an operational definition and assessment should to be developed. Research may begin by answering some of the following questions. Can all of the elements of well-being fit the role of *Signature* Well-being? Are there disadvantages to identifying or re-balancing one's Signature Well-being? Are there developmental correlates to Signature Well-being? Do certain Signature Well-being configurations predict who may experience post-traumatic growth? Can understanding a child's Signature Well-being influence their learning? Can tuning into Signature Well-being increase grit? However, this is just the beginning – much can be learned about people and well-being generally from greater study of Signature Well-being.

Conclusion

This paper has laid the foundation for the argument that Signature Well-being is a concept that it should be taken seriously by the field of positive psychology. I have presented several existing models of well-being and listed the operational definitions for some of the elements, which may be assimilated into a future model of Signature Well-being. I also provided a selection of existing concepts and research from within positive psychology that support individual differentiation as a factor in well-being research and application—these precedents provide me with reasonable confidence in the idea of Signature Well-being. I further discussed the way forward, suggesting that since there is not yet a universal operationalization of well-being, Signature Well-being may provide a layer of specificity to existing well-being measures.

To this point, the scientific study of well-being has been predominantly wrapped up in a more *zoomed out* approach. Signature Well-being offers a *zoomed in* look at what it is that

individually contributes to well-being. These two perspectives are mutually beneficial and together provide a more complete picture of well-being. My hope is that research in this area will help people pursue well-being in a manner that is more authentic to them and is therefore more sustainable.

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