

Wellness as Fairness

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Abstract I argue that distinct conditions of justice lead to diverse wellness outcomes through a series of psychosocial processes. Optimal conditions of justice, suboptimal conditions of justice, vulnerable conditions of injustice, and persisting conditions of injustice lead to thriving, coping, confronting, and suffering, respectively. The processes that mediate between optimal conditions of justice and thriving include the promotion of responsive conditions, the prevention of threats, individual pursuit, and avoidance of comparisons. The mechanisms that mediate between suboptimal conditions of justice and coping include resilience, adaptation, compensation, and downward comparisons. Critical experiences, critical consciousness, critical action, and righteous comparisons mediate between vulnerable conditions of injustice and confrontation with the system. Oppression, internalization, helplessness, and upward comparisons mediate between persisting conditions of injustice and suffering. These psychosocial processes operate within and across personal, interpersonal, organizational and community contexts. Different types of justice are hypothesized to influence well-being within each context. Intrapersonal injustice operates at the personal level, whereas distributive, procedural, relational, and developmental justice impact interpersonal well-being. At the

organizational level, distributive, procedural, relational and informational justice influence well-being. Finally, at the community level, distributive, procedural, retributive, and cultural justice support community wellness. Data from a variety of sources support the suggested connections between justice and well-being.

Keywords Justice · Wellness · Fairness · Well-being · Psychosocial processes · Context · Thriving · Coping

In his recent book *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen (2009) posed a very important question: “How adequate is the perspective of happiness in judging a person’s well-being or advantage?” (p. 270). He goes on to argue that

We could err either through not being fair to the importance of happiness, or through overestimating its importance in judging the well-being of people, or being blind to the limitations of making happiness the main—or only—basis of assessment of social justice or social welfare (Sen 2009, p. 270).

In my view, psychology is likely to err on two counts: overestimating its importance for well-being, and not paying sufficient attention to justice. Indeed, when I look at the burgeoning psychological literature on well-being, I am struck by an intuition and by a fact. The intuition is that justice must surely play a role in well-being, and the fact is that not many psychologists studying well-being share my intuition. If they do, they must be very shy, for it is very hard to find psychologists who make explicit the link between justice and subjective well-being. My job as a social scientist is to make sure that my hunch is based on evidence and not dogma. My job as a citizen is to speak up. My job as a community psychologist is to do both

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(Angelique and Culley 2007; Montero and Varas Diaz 2007; Rappaport 2011).

Where does my intuition come from? Four sources: data on societal, organizational, interpersonal, and personal signs and sources of well-being. At the societal level, existing and new databases provide rich quantitative information on measures of well-being across the world; among them, the well established World Values Survey (Inglehart et al. 2008) and the newer Gallup World Survey (Rath and Harter 2010), the Unhappy Planet Index (Abdallah et al. 2009), the Latinobarometer, the Eurobarometer, the Africabarometer (Graham 2009; Stevenson and Wolfers 2008), and others (Michaelson et al. 2009). These databases, which are being currently mined by economists, sociologists and psychologists alike offer a picture of well-being at the community, national and international levels (Deaton 2003; Diener et al. 2010; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). These findings tell me that justice must be implicated in well-being, but I don't want to jump to conclusions. After all, researchers studying subjective well-being rarely if ever invoke justice in their explanations. In most cases, culture, age, marriage, social support, unemployment, and adaptation figure prominently on the list of well-being predictors; justice, however, does not (e.g., Fredrickson 2009; Lyubomirsky 2008; Seligman 2002, 2011). This is not the case in other disciplines such as public health (Levy and Sidel 2006; Powers and Faden 2006), political economy (Sen 2009), and political philosophy (Nussbaum 2006), but in psychology and behavioral economics justice is conspicuously absent.

The second source of my hypothesis regarding the relationship between justice and well-being is the organizational development literature. In the last few years there have been several empirical studies documenting the links between justice and well-being at the workplace. Lack of justice in the workplace has been found to lead to general health problems (de Vogli et al. 2007; Elovainio et al. 2004; Kivimäki et al. 2004; Lawson et al. 2009), coronary heart disease (de Vogli et al. 2007; Fujishiro and Heaney 2009; Kivimäki et al. 2005), psychiatric problems (Elovainio et al. 2002; Kivimäki et al. 2003), psychological distress (Tepper 2001), and psychosomatic complaints (Schmitt and Dorfel 1999). In addition to its impact on individual well-being, organizational justice also predicts levels of job satisfaction and performance (Colquitt et al. 2001).

The third source is research on interpersonal relations. Studies indicate that lack of fairness and lack of respect among parents and children and between intimate partners can lead to physical and psychological problems (Hirigoyen 2000; Iwaniec et al. 2007; Jantz and McMurray 2003; Jory and Anderson 1999; Kelly et al. 2009; Olson et al. 2008). Conversely, positive social relationships and

social support, which are parts of interpersonal justice, enhance emotional and physical wellness (Buettner 2010; Cacioppo et al. 2011; Cohen 2004; Gottman et al. 2011). The fourth and final source of my argument is the personal well-being literature. It seems clear that injustice affects personal well-being negatively (Graham 2009; Marmot 2004; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006). What is notable is that people can behave unjustly not just to others, but also to themselves, causing serious physical and psychological harm. I call this phenomenon intrapersonal injustice.

These bodies of knowledge suggest a role for justice in well-being. I will argue in this paper that experiences of intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational and societal injustice can lead to deleterious physical and emotional effects at the personal level, and to detrimental outcomes at the interpersonal, organizational and community levels.

Against this backdrop, I have three specific goals for this paper: First, to argue for the role of fairness in wellness. Second, to elucidate the psychosocial processes implicated in (a) thriving under optimal conditions of justice; (b) coping under suboptimal conditions of justice; (c) confronting the system under vulnerable conditions of injustice; and (d) suffering under persisting conditions of injustice. Third, to illustrate the role of psychosocial processes in justice and well-being at intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and community levels.

Well-Being

Before we discuss the relationship between justice and well-being I need to define well-being and clarify some terminology. In this paper I use wellness and well-being interchangeably. Well-being, or wellness, has been defined in different ways by psychologists (Diener et al. 2009; Kahneman and Riis 2005; Seligman 2002, 2011; Seligman et al. 2005), philosophers (Haybron 2008), policy makers (Bok 2010; McGillivray 2007; McGillivray and Clarke 2006), economists (Layard 2005; Sen 2009), and public health specialists (Powers and Faden 2006). In my view, well-being is a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations, and communities. By *positive* I mean diverse ways in which different cultures and individuals thrive (Buettner 2010). By *simultaneous and balanced satisfaction* I mean that the needs of people and the systems with which they interact must progress concurrently and in equilibrium (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006). Deficiencies in any one component of the well-being ecology may alter the level of satisfaction in other parts. By *objective* needs I mean the satisfaction of material and

physical needs required for survival and thriving, such as food, shelter, and clothing; whereas by *subjective* needs I mean the emotional and psychological nurturance required for flourishing (Diener et al. 2009; Keyes 2007; Veenhoven 2007).

If we were to judge the well-being of Colombians in the nineties or Mexicans in the first decade of this century only through objective measures, we would predict that their satisfaction with life is terribly low. Considering the high levels of violence in these two countries during these times, it would be safe to assume that people would feel despondent and demoralized. Yet, people in both countries reported some of the highest levels of subjective well-being in the world (Inglehart et al. 2008). At this point we can claim that they were all deluding themselves or, that subjective aspects of well-being, like increased freedom, religion, tradition, social support and close family ties, compensate for the violence and poverty around them (Backman and Dixon 1992). Indeed, there is evidence that cultural factors related to faith, social networks and democratic progress compensate for poor objective conditions of poverty and crime (Buettner 2010; Inglehart 2010).

Consider now the opposite scenario in which objective conditions of prosperity improve over time, but people do not feel any happier. As Graham (2009) points out in her recent book *Happiness around the world: The paradox of happy peasants and miserable millionaires*, this situation is not uncommon. Many wealthy people feel unhappy because they are forever comparing themselves to groups of higher income and status. In short, there is evidence to consider both objective and subjective dimensions of well-being.

My definition also calls attention to the complementary nature of multiple ecological levels. Despite evidence in favor of interaction effects across spheres of life, a great deal of research on well-being is fragmented. There is little integration of findings across personal, interpersonal, organizational, community and international domains. Proponents of happiness (e.g., Fredrickson 2009; Lyubomirsky 2008; Seligman 2002) often remain too focused on the individual and what she can do to improve her lot in life, paying little attention to the environmental circumstances that afflict her, and even less to the conditions of justice or injustice. Furthermore, they often claim that external circumstances play a very small role in well-being outcomes, with the bulk of the variance explained by genetic and motivational factors (e.g., Lyubomirsky 2008; Seligman 2002). This argument faces conceptual and empirical challenges. The conceptual challenge lies in the inability to disentangle motivational factors from the environment in which the person grows up. The empirical challenge derives from studies showing that environmental changes can have very large effects on health and well-being (Inglehart and Klingemann 2000).

The proposed definition of well-being calls for a balanced satisfaction of needs across spheres of life. This means that in an ideal situation, individuals and communities would be advancing at the same time, thereby enriching each other. While it is correct that people can compensate for deficits in one domain with strengths in another (Backman and Dixon 1992), the highest levels of thriving are achieved when all spheres of life advance in tandem (Buettner 2010; Inglehart 2010).

Units of Analysis and Sources of Assessment

In studying well-being, it is useful to distinguish between units of analysis and sources of assessment. Individuals, relationships, organizations, and communities are all valid units of analysis. We can ask what the components of individual well-being are, just as we can ask what the elements of organizational well-being are.

A source of assessment refers to the place from which the information derives. I can make claims about community well-being by counting the number of child abuse cases from a database, or I can do so by asking people what they think about their neighbors. In the former case the source of assessment is a database, in the latter it is an opinion from an individual. Sources of assessment can be as varied as a person, a database, or an anthropological observation. All are valid and offer unique perspectives on a phenomenon (Veenhoven 2007).

In psychology, most research on well-being focuses on the individual as the unit of analysis, and his or her perceptions or feelings as sources of assessment. Although it is possible to estimate the well-being of a person by looking at a variety of sources of information, such as level of justice or educational opportunities enjoyed by her, most existing data on well-being derive from either cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction, or self reports on happiness (Eid and Larsen 2008; Kahneman and Riis 2005). There is a definite proclivity to concentrate on subjective well-being and ascribe primacy to what the person reports about her life. While these are defensible practices, in this paper I will argue that it is also useful to talk about well-being at multiple levels (individual, interpersonal, organizational, and communal), and that it is wise to use both objective and subjective measures of well-being. It is possible to assess the well-being of the individual in an organization, or in a community. This is common practice. What I am arguing for is that it is equally valid to assess the wellness of the organization or community independently from the experience of a person in such a system. In other words, I would like to argue that to complement persons' assessments of their own experience in a setting, it is useful to identify characteristics of the setting that are empowering, liberating, and health-giving (Maton and Brodsky 2011).

By measuring well-being with objective and subjective measures at the personal, interpersonal, organizational, and communal levels, we can obtain a richer picture of human and social well-being. Paradoxically, the exclusive focus on the individual as both the unit of analysis and the source of information precludes us from exploring how changes at multiple levels can benefit the same individual with which psychology is so concerned.

Types of Assessment

The broadest classification of well-being consists of objective and subjective well-being (Diener et al. 2009). Objective well-being is usually measured in terms of personal income, gross domestic product, and level of education. Subjective well-being, in turn, is often divided into experiential and evaluative. The former refers to spontaneous reports of feelings at a particular moment in time, whereas the latter refers to cognitive judgments about life satisfaction (Kahneman and Riis 2005; Rath and Harter 2010). The former uses the experiencing self as source of assessment, while the latter uses the remembering self. Research demonstrates that while both types of subjective well-being are correlated, they are not equivalent. Judgments of life satisfaction, for example, are more sensitive to changes in economic conditions than reports on happiness (Diener et al. 2010). Happiness, in turn, is more sensitive to changes in freedom than evaluations of life satisfaction (Inglehart 2010; Inglehart et al. 2008).

Although objective and subjective measures have usually been tested on individuals, there is no reason not to apply them to relationships, organizations, and communities. In fact, looking at these systems through objective and subjective lenses would increase our pathways for change and well-being.

Levels of Well-Being

Table 1 describes objective and subjective measures of well-being at four levels of analysis. This is an illustrative as opposed to an exhaustive list. The interpersonal category might be subdivided into family and friends. The community level can be broken down into regional, national, and international. For the sake of brevity I use only four levels. Next to each level of well-being I list actual and potential objective and subjective indicators of well-being.

Objective elements of personal well-being include health, food and clothing (Diener et al. 2009). Subjective elements include a sense of control, mastery over the environment, positive emotions, perceptions of life satisfaction and self-determination (Eid and Larsen 2008; Fredrickson 2009; Lyubomirsky 2008; Marmot 2004; Rath and Harter 2010; Seligman 2011). Objective elements of

interpersonal well-being include number of friends and relationships free of abuse (Rath and Harter 2010). Subjective elements entail emotional support in times of need (Cohen 2004; Cacioppo et al. 2011; Taylor 2011). At the organizational level objective elements encompass resources to perform a job and adequate pay (Bolman and Deal 2003); whereas subjective components include a positive working climate and feelings of engagement (Harter et al. 2003; Sisodia et al. 2007). Finally, at the community level, some objective elements of well-being include economic equality, a clean environment, low levels of crime, high levels of education and low unemployment (Commission on social determinants of health 2008; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Subjective components include a sense of community, respect for cultural diversity, inclusive neighborhoods, social capital, and freedom to express political opinions (Block 2008; Fowers and Davidov 2006; Kagan et al. 2011; McKnight and Block 2010).

As can be seen in Table 1, there are six key domains of wellness in each one of the four spheres of life. For the individual to thrive, all spheres of life must support each one of the six domains of wellness: economic, physical, occupational, psychological, community and interpersonal. At the community and organizational levels, economic prosperity, health promotion, effective and meaningful functioning, freedom, equality, and inclusion must prevail for the person to flourish. I found extensive support in the literature at each of the four ecological levels for this hexadimensional taxonomy of well-being. Research on personal (Diener et al. 2009; Eid and Larsen 2008; Keyes 2007; Lyubomirsky 2008; Marmot 2004; Powers and Faden 2006; Rath and Harter 2010; Seligman 2011), interpersonal (Cacioppo et al. 2011; Cohen 2004; Gottman et al. 2011), organizational (Bolman and Deal 2003; Sisodia et al. 2007), and communal well-being (Commission on social determinants of health 2008; Graham 2009; Inglehart et al. 2008; Wilkinson and Pickett 2009) invoke these six dimensions as vital for the flourishing of persons and systems.

Justice

In philosophy and the social sciences, justice can be divided into two main types and several specific subtypes. The two main types are distributive and procedural justice (Miller 1999; Tornblom and Vermunt 2007). Subtypes include, *inter alia*, relational, informational, developmental, retributive, and cultural justice. I will argue that the various subtypes of justice derive from the two main types and pertain to specific conditions or relationships. It is useful to understand the uniqueness of main and specific subtypes of justice.

Table 1 Objective and subjective indicators of well-being

Level of well-being	Objective indicators	Subjective indicators
Personal	Economic	Economic
	Money for food, shelter, clothing, medical care; savings for retirement	Feeling financially secure, relative deprivation, pressure of spend, enjoyment derived from purchases or experiences
	Physical	Physical
	Symptoms of pain, biochemical markers of health and disease, disability, longevity, functional assessment	Feelings of vitality, energy, self evaluations of health
	Occupational	Occupational
	Access to resources to do job, clear job description, communication channels, praise received, assets recognized, instances of conflict, absenteeism	Feeling appreciated and engaged, positive assessment of working climate, meaning making, positive working relationship with boss
	Psychological	Psychological
	Laughing, smiling, crying, sleeping, symptoms of anger, depression	Life satisfaction evaluations, reports of feelings, perceived self efficacy, mastery, sense of control, spirituality, flow, meaning, growth, engagement
	Community	Community
	Access to education and services, social capital, volunteering, clean air, safety	Sense of community, feeling accepted, respected, safe, pride in community
Interpersonal	Interpersonal	Interpersonal
	Number of friends, number of conflicts, fun activities with peers	Feeling supported, heard, valued, appreciated, treated with respect and dignity
Interpersonal	Economic resources	Economic resources
	Money for food, shelter, recreation, family and conjugal needs	Mutual understanding on financial matters, mutual support in resisting consumerism
	Health	Health
	Relationships that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity	Stress free and supportive relationships that offer emotional nurturance
	Function and meaning	Function and meaning
	Opportunities to practice and develop strengths, pursue meaning, and desired roles in relationships	Feeling valued for one's role and contribution to relationship and family. Meaning making in relationship
	Control and growth	Control and growth
	Exercising voice and choice in important matters and having opportunities for growth in relationship	Feeling heard, maintaining clear boundaries, sense of growth as person and unit, feeling free to make decisions
	Equality and respect	Equality and respect
	Fair sharing of obligations and privileges	Feeling valued and respected, not taken for granted, free of gender stereotypes about roles
Support and celebration	Support and celebration	Support and celebration
	Opportunities to hear each other and rituals to celebrate each other's accomplishments and milestones in life	Feeling appreciated and affirmed, not just in times of need, but also in times of achievements
Organizational	Economic resources	Economic resources
	Sufficient human, physical, economic and organizational resources to fulfill role	Information and common understanding of existing resources and their use
	Health orientation	Health orientation
Availability of policies, resources and opportunities to exercise, to eat well, to sleep, to prevent exposure to toxic substances, to foster occupational health and safety	Culture of health promotion, feeling that one's health is valued, feeling heard when health related concerns are raised	

Table 1 Objective and subjective indicators of well-being

Level of well-being	Objective indicators	Subjective indicators
	Function, reflection, and meaning Policies and procedures for effective functioning and communication. Opportunities to acquire information and learn skills to fulfill role. Built-in opportunities to reflect and make meaning of one's role	Function, reflection, and meaning Feeling fulfilled in one's role, having a sense of contribution to common good, perceiving one's role as meaningful
	Control, mastery, and growth Opportunities to express opinions, to exercise control, and to build and display strengths and passions	Control, mastery, and growth Feeling that reward is in line with effort, and that control is in line with demands. Satisfaction with competency level
	Equality and respect Policies, procedures and practices that respect all individuals equally. Systems in place to promote fairness	Equality and respect Being treated with fairness and respect. Perceiving supervisor as fair and equitable
	Participation and celebration Opportunities to seek input from employees, avenues for engagement in work and product design. Celebration of accomplishments	Participation and celebration Feeling engaged and involved in work. Feeling valued and celebrated for unique contributions
Communal	Economic resources Employment opportunities, safety net, policies to promote research, development, and investments	Economic resources Feeling hopeful about economic future, feelings related to unemployment, perceptions of economic opportunities
	Health promotion Access to high quality health care. Policies and programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Prevention of epidemics and exposure to toxic substances. Public awareness campaigns	Health promotion Stress related to access to health care and poor health services. Awareness of health policies and health information. Perceptions of fairness in health system. Knowledge of health promotion information
	Function Proper functioning of government services, such as policing, zoning, and education. Timely delivery of services. Integrity and corruption	Function Perceptions about government efficiency, corruption and transparency
	Freedom Democratic elections and institutions, freedom of expression, movement, and association	Freedom Feeling safe and protected. Fear of reprisals by criminals, such as organized crime
	Equality Protections for minorities, equality before the law, affirmative action policies	Equality Feeling respected by other citizens and government officials, perceptions of fairness in dealings with authorities and businesses
	Participation and inclusion Opportunities to participate in public affairs, such as referenda, and presence of services for various minorities	Participation and inclusion Feelings of inclusion, belonging and sense of community

Main Types of Justice

Academic language and common parlance often refer to social justice in general terms, without making subtle distinctions. I believe that precision is important. I believe that what is commonly called social justice is really distributive justice. Distributive justice refers to the fair and equitable allocation of burdens and privileges, rights and responsibilities, and pains and gains in society. The most synoptic definition of distributive justice is *to each his or her due* (Miller 1999). Following Aristotle, Sandel (2009) recently argued that “justice means giving people what they deserve, giving each person his or her due” (p. 187).

This is a useful definition that encapsulates the essence of justice: each person should receive what is due him or her, in a fair and equitable manner. The thorniest issue in justice is how to ascertain what is due a person. Different schools of thought lean either towards the merit or need criteria. The merit criterion implies that people should be rewarded based on effort and capacity. The need criterion calls for a distribution of resources based on what individuals require to survive and to thrive. These two criteria are not irreconcilable however. If we introduce context into the picture we can see that in certain cases *need* ought to take precedence, while in others *merit* should be preferred (Corning 2011).

Imagine a situation in which two people grow up in identical circumstances. They go to the same schools, enjoy similar privileges, grow up in the same protective environment, have supportive parents and teachers, and happen to have identical IQs. Let's call them John and Josh. While they share many similarities, there is an important difference: John works very hard while Josh plays with friends and spends a lot of time on Facebook. When the time comes to receive a scholarship, or get a job, it turns out that John is naturally more deserving because he worked harder and got better grades and experiences. In this case Josh cannot blame the environment or poor academic abilities because he had the same advantages John had. Most people would not have a problem invoking the merit or equity criterion in this instance (Corning 2011; Facione et al. 1978; Miller 1999; Sandel 2009). But what about a situation in which Jane and Jill happen to grow up in very different circumstances? While Jane and Jill were equally talented when they were born, and had identical IQs, Jane grew up in great privilege and Jill in great disadvantage. Jane benefited from every private lesson that was offered in the city, such as music, chess, ballet, and foreign languages, while Jill was stuck in a one bedroom apartment, with no heating in winter, watching TV for hours. Jane went to the best private school in town, while Jill attended the local inner city school. Jane's parents were rich; Jill's single mom was working three jobs to pay rent in a dilapidated one bedroom apartment. Jill worked as hard as Jane, but when time came to apply to college or get jobs, Jane was offered admission into the best colleges in the country with a generous scholarship. Jill was not as fortunate. In this case, one might argue that Jill should have been entitled to a scholarship. After all, she worked just as hard as Jane and did all she could to get a scholarship. Need, we can argue, should be the preferred criterion (Corning 2011; Facione et al. 1978; Miller 1999). Unfortunately, many institutions ignore the contextual nature of justice and apply dogmatically the merit criterion in all circumstances (Facione et al. 1978; Fiske 2011). Yes, it is true that Jane achieved higher grades than Jill, but Jill did not have the opportunities, support and privileges Jane did.

The merit criterion is highly congruent with the American dream and the idea that anyone can overcome negative circumstances. This is a nice inspiring dream that becomes a reality only for a very small percentage of the population. Surely there are enough stories of success to perpetuate the mythology, but for every story of success like Oprah or Michael Jordan there are hundreds of thousands of Jills who really wanted to go to college and overcome adversity but could not.

John, Josh, Jane and Jill help us see the contextual nature of distributive justice. Under conditions of relative equality, it would be fair to accord advantage to those who

work harder or who have higher capacities: the equity criterion. However, under conditions of inequality it would be fair to accord preference to need over merit. While we live in a context of high inequality, most social institutions continue to privilege merit over need, thus perpetuating injustice (Barry 2005; Fleischacker 2004; Ehrenreich 2009; Lareau and Conley 2008; Lakoff 2006; Schwalbe 2008).

As important as distributive justice is, procedural justice is no less consequential for well-being. Procedural justice refers to fair, transparent, informative, respectful, and, I would argue, participatory decision making processes (Miller 1999; Tornblom and Vermunt 2007). Decisions affecting individuals ought to follow due process and they should be impartial. This type of justice is very important in organizations that hire, promote, and fire people. Similarly, in the legal system, procedural justice is paramount to make sure that all parties have a fair hearing. My definition, however, broadens the scope of procedural justice from its usual legal connotation of due process, towards an appreciation for a fair and inclusive process in all interactions, not just in the legal system. In community psychology, we are very sensitive to the importance of good processes (Kagan et al. 2011; Kelly 2006; Maton and Brodsky 2011). When I work with organizations I often tell them that a good process is a good outcome. Why, they ask? My answer: because a good process builds trust, respect, control, and empowerment, which are precious resources for individuals and systems alike (Kelly 2006; Wolff 2010).

Both distributive and procedural types of justice play a role in personal, interpersonal, organizational, and community well-being. Whereas distributive justice is concerned with outcomes, procedural justice is concerned with process (Tyler and Belliveau 1995). People's dignity and self-respect are highly dependent on both types of justice. As we shall see, human sensibilities to fairness in outcomes, and processes, affect well-being significantly.

Both types of justice concern objective and subjective resources. An objective outcome of distributive and procedural justice might be a scholarship, a job offer, a tax credit, or free health care. A subjective outcome might be respect, dignity, and appreciation for cultural diversity; psychological goods of great import to well-being. In summary, processes and outcomes of justice concern objective as much as subjective goods.

The two types of justice (distributive and procedural) and the two types of resources (subjective and objective) are enacted in multiple contexts; from the micro spheres of the person and relationships, to the meso and macro spheres of institutions and nations. We can talk of self-respect and mutual respect, as an example of subjective personal and interpersonal good; and we can talk about free health care to all as an objective resource at the social level.

Paralleling my definition of well-being, my approach to justice is also ecological. I believe that groups, organizations, communities and nations should be part of the scope of distributive and procedural justice. Thus, it is not sufficient to think about *his or her due* in the definition of distributive justice. We need to include *their due*, in the case of other human or animal groups, or *its due* in the case of institutions, nations, and the planet. We owe respect to people, animals, communities, and the earth. This leads us to specific subtypes of justice.

Subtypes of Justice

Specific conditions or relationships call for particular types of justice. The relationship between people calls for relational justice. The relation among different groups calls for cultural justice (Kymlica 2008). At each level of analysis, from the personal to the communal, unique types of justice play significant roles. In all cases, however, we are talking about the exchange of a good or obligation (subtype of distributive justice) or the process by which the allocation is made (subtype of procedural justice). All subtypes of justice try to answer either *what* or *how* questions.

Intrapersonal Justice

Human beings are in a constant relationship with themselves. Our cognitions talk to each other. Our cognitions impact our emotions, and vice versa. Our behaviors influence our thinking and feeling. Different parts interact to promote either wellness or suffering. At the personal level, I argue that we can be fair or unfair to ourselves in what we give ourselves (i.e., intrapersonal distributive injustice) and how we treat ourselves (intrapersonal procedural injustice). Psychological injustice, for instance, is committed when we unfairly put ourselves down, and when our thoughts tell us we are unworthy of love and affection. Our thoughts, behaviors and feelings, in turn, can lead to physical injustice. Anorexia nervosa and self-injurious behavior are examples of physical intrapersonal injustice: we cause ourselves unnecessary pain and suffering.

While these conditions may be framed in medical or psychopathological terms, I believe it is important to introduce the language of responsibility into the discourse. There is evidence that individuals and groups relinquish control over their lives and expect professionals to treat them, giving up in the process opportunities to exercise control over their behavior and challenges (McKnight and Block 2010; Powers and Faden 2006). I do not mean to supplant psychological treatment with moral advice, but rather to complement evidence-based practices with notions of personal empowerment, control, and responsibility for one's well-being (Doherty 1995).

Interpersonal Justice

Distributive and procedural types of justice figure prominently in relationships (Brighthouse and Swift 2008). Whereas the former concerns the sharing of goods and responsibilities, such as money and chores; the latter concerns the decision making process leading to distributions. In addition to distributive and procedural justice, relational and developmental justice are also integral parts of relationships. Relational or interpersonal justice is about treating others with dignity and respect (Colquitt et al. 2001; Folger et al. 1995; Hatfield et al. 2008; Tyler and Belliveau 1995). Developmental justice, in turn, is about expecting from others, such as our children, or elderly parents, behavior that is consistent with their maturational stage. Expecting children to assume adult responsibilities they are not ready for is a form of developmental injustice. It is imposing roles for which individuals do not have the requisite cognitive, emotional, or behavioral skills (Chess and Thomas 1999). A secondary form of developmental injustice, closely tied to relational injustice, is abusing power based on superior physical, psychological, or economic resources (Prilleltensky, Nelson, and Peirson 2001a, b).

Organizational Justice

Several authors have documented various forms of justice within organizations (Greenberg and Colquitt 2005; Sheppard et al. 1992). In addition to the three types of justice documented in the relational context—distributive, procedural, and relational—researchers claim that informational justice adds significant value to our understanding of institutional life (Colquitt 2001). The transparency of decision making processes and the flow of communication make informational justice a distinct feature of organizations. Employees express a need to know the status of the organization, and without that knowledge their sense of inclusion and participation is diminished. Communication is vital to feel informed and to evaluate the fairness of distributive and procedural decisions.

It stands to reason that as human interactions grow in complexity, the need for information grows as well. Within families there are enough informal opportunities to exchange information among few people. But in large organizations, the absence of information leads to alienation, exclusion, and marginalization.

Community Justice

Based on international comparisons on community well-being, there seem to be four dominant types of justice that predict levels of satisfaction at the macro sphere:

distributive, procedural, cultural, and retributive. Two other important types of justice dealing with nature and non-human animals, environmental and species justice, respectively are crucial but outside the scope of this paper, which deals with interactions among human beings.

Distribution of services and economic resources is of primary concern in societies. The most obvious goods and services communities expect are safety, education, and health, regardless of ability to pay (Sandel 2009; Sen 2009). Yet, these three social goods are perennially maldistributed, with low income neighborhoods suffering from more crime, poorly resourced schools, and limited access to poorly resourced health care (Barry 2005).

At the community and social levels, procedural justice ensures that all citizens are treated fairly by all social systems, including the law, schools, housing, and the like. With disproportionately more minorities incarcerated and targeted for racial profiling than Whites and Caucasians, the aspiration of procedural justice remains highly elusive in the United States (Barry 2005; Repucci et al. 2011).

Retributive justice is aligned with procedural justice and calls for people who commit a crime to bear responsibility for their actions. When criminals go unpunished due to corruption, it erodes faith in the penal and legal system. Countries with high levels of corruption suffer enormously. Lack of trust is usually the main casualty of corrupt systems, leading to diminished social capital (Ruhl 2011).

With the exception of intrapersonal justice, where there is a single person involved, relational justice is a feature of all other ecological levels. The way we treat each other in families, workplaces, parks, and government offices has an enduring impact on our well-being. Minorities are often treated with less respect and more suspicions than non-minority members. At the community level, I call this cultural justice. If relational justice is about how we treat each other in one-to-one interactions, cultural justice is about how entire groups treat each other: how heterosexuals treat homosexuals, how men treat women, how Whites treat Blacks, and how locals treat immigrants (Barry 2005; Nussbaum 2006; Sandel 2009; Sen 2009). Some minority groups have been traditionally disenfranchised. In this sense cultural justice incorporates both political and relational justice at the community level (Kymlica 2008).

Wellness as Fairness

Distributive and procedural justice support fair and equitable access to the objective and subjective components of well-being at the personal, interpersonal, organizational, and community levels. Distributive justice is about what is due me as a person in my life, relationships, and interactions with organizations and social systems. Similarly, it is

about what is due organizations, communities, and nations. In the end, justice is about balancing what is due me with what is due other people, institutions and communities (Sheppard et al. 1992). Procedural justice, in turn, is about how these distributions are performed. Whereas distributive justice is about the *what*, procedural justice is about the *how*. It is possible to provide resources to poor people in ways that may uphold distributive justice but violate procedural justice (Miller 1999; Tyler and Belliveau 1995). If material help is offered with disdain it may fulfill one kind of justice, but not another. In fact, there are many cases in society in which an entity treats another with disrespect, despite provision of basic needs. There are parents who provide material goods for their children but maltreat them emotionally; depriving them of respect, confidence, and dignity. Justice is not just about material resources but about subjective processes as well. Following Rawls (2001) and other moral philosophers (Rescher 2002; Sandel 2009), I claim that fairness is synonymous with justice. Fundamentally, justice is about the fair and equitable distribution of resources, and about the fair and equitable treatment of other human beings.

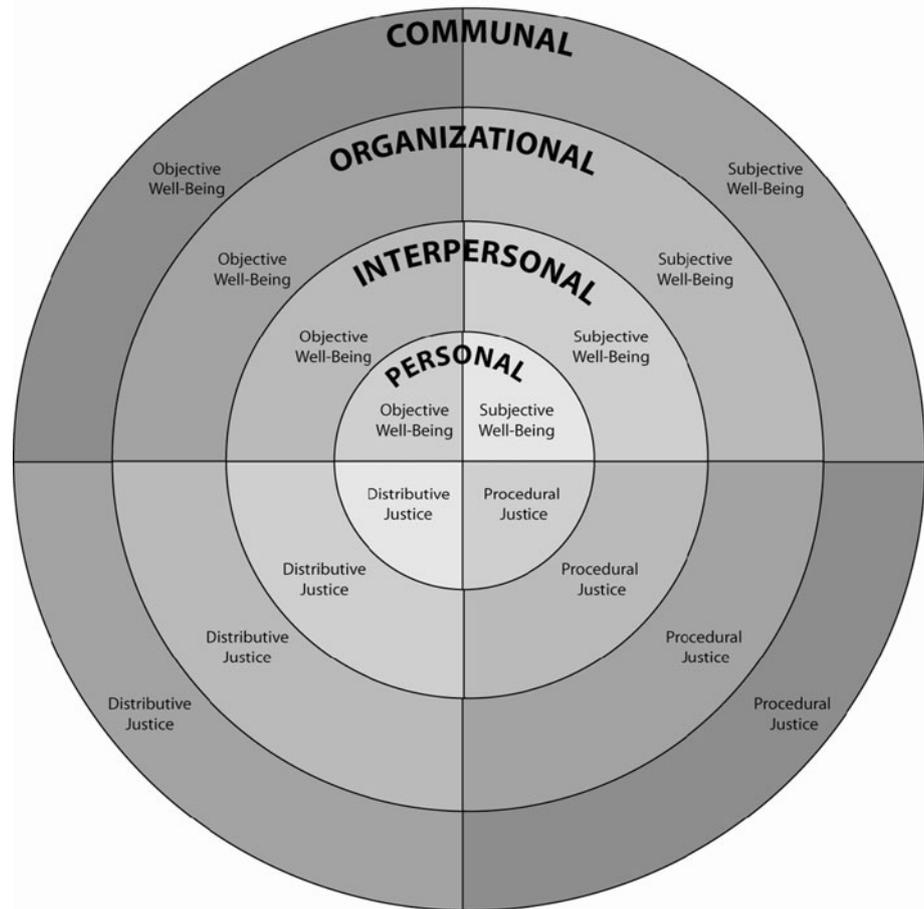
We can deduce then that distributive justice and procedural justice are complementary in nature and mutually supportive of objective and subjective aspects of well-being. It is not just about what is given but also about how it is given. Human beings are extremely protective of their dignity; it is soul food. This is why processes of justice and subjective elements of well-being are so crucial. Wounds to the soul may be as harmful as wounds to the body.

Graphically, we might depict the supportive role of distributive and procedural justice in objective and subjective well-being in a sphere with justice at the bottom and well-being at the top. Each ecological level, from the person to the social system, is represented by its own sphere. The relationship among the various ecological levels is represented in Fig. 1 by concentric spheres, going from the person at the center to the social system at the perimeter, with interpersonal and organizational dimensions in between.

Figure 1 illustrates how types of justice influence levels of well-being within and across ecological levels. Although persons are embedded in relationships, organizations, and systems, they are not passive actors. On the contrary, the vector of influence goes both ways, from the inner to the outer circles and vice versa. The presence of either type of justice, at any level, influences well-being at all the levels. Acts of justice at the communal level can be felt at all levels. Similarly, acts of either procedural or distributive justice at the interpersonal level can have positive or negative well-being effects at any of the other three levels.

In concrete terms, this means that components of personal, interpersonal, organizational, and community well-being depend heavily on distributive and procedural

Fig. 1 Main types of justice and well-being across levels of analysis



justice. Subjective elements of personal well-being, such as positive emotions, are hard to nurture in the absence of objective recreational opportunities, educational and financial resources, which are, in turn, subject to distributive justice.

Figure 2 offers a more comprehensive picture of subtypes of justice and the specific kinds of wellness within each ecological sphere. Although these are not exhaustive series of types of justice and wellness, research would support the claim that it is very comprehensive. Starting with the outer ring, there is considerable evidence that people in communities that respect most types of justice enjoy higher levels of equality, economic prosperity, social capital, freedom, participation, tolerance and diversity (Inglehart 2010; Inglehart et al. 2008). Similarly, organizations that respect distributive, procedural, relational and informational justice achieve higher levels of well-being for their employees, not to mention higher performance (Colquitt et al. 2001; Sisodia et al. 2007). The same logic applies to the interpersonal and personal domains: the higher the level of justice, the higher the level of wellness (Commission on social determinants of health 2008; Marmot 2004; Sen 2009). This is the foundation of my conceptualization of wellness as fairness.

Psychosocial Processes in Wellness as Fairness

To make the link between fairness and wellness more explicit, it is necessary to understand the psychosocial processes that mediate between different conditions of justice and wellness outcomes. I would argue that better or worse conditions of justice lead to positive or negative states through a variety of mechanisms. Figure 3 depicts two continua: one of justice and one of well-being. From right to left, conditions of justice and wellness improve across both continua. Each one of the four points at the bottom is connected to a point at the top through a series of psychological and social dynamics. Different conditions of justice predispose different conditions of wellness. This is not to say that people cannot activate their agency to transform conditions of injustice to conditions of justice and improved wellness. People can move from right to left, from suffering to thriving. Conditions of justice predispose, but do not fatalistically determine wellness outcomes forever. Through a combination of collective agency and changing social and political circumstances, people move from oppression to liberation and thriving.

Persisting conditions of injustice differ from vulnerable conditions of injustice in that the former are durable and

Fig. 2 An ecological model of justice and well-being

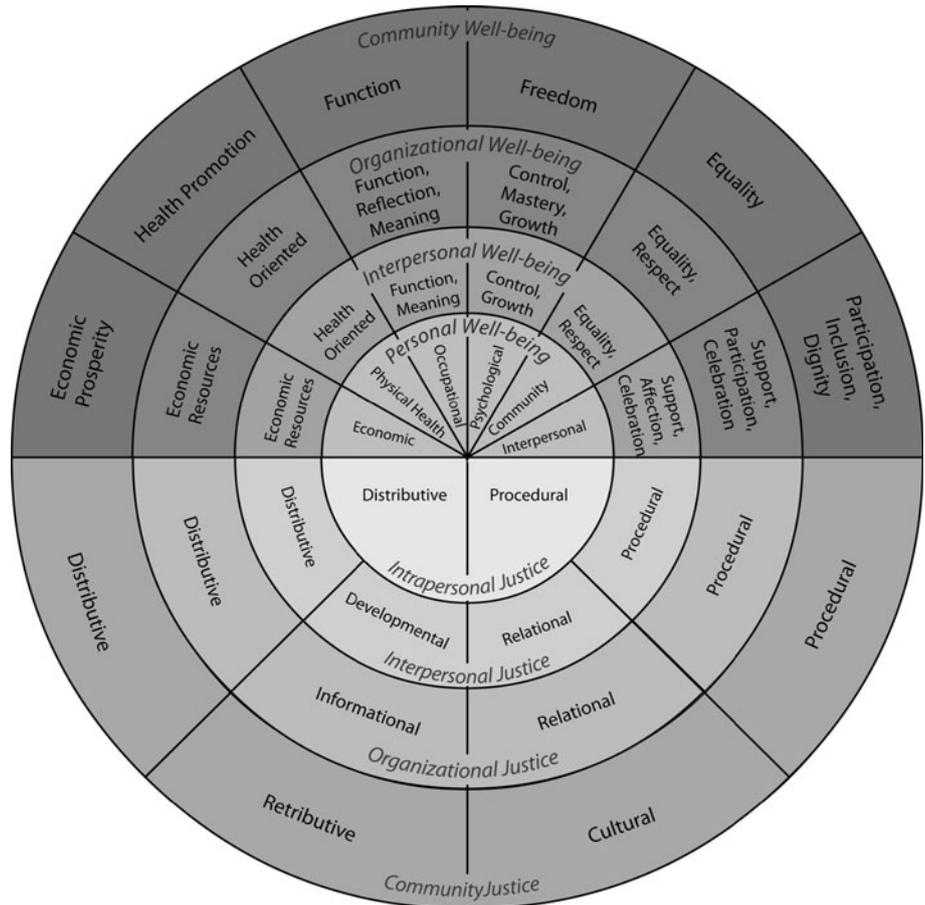
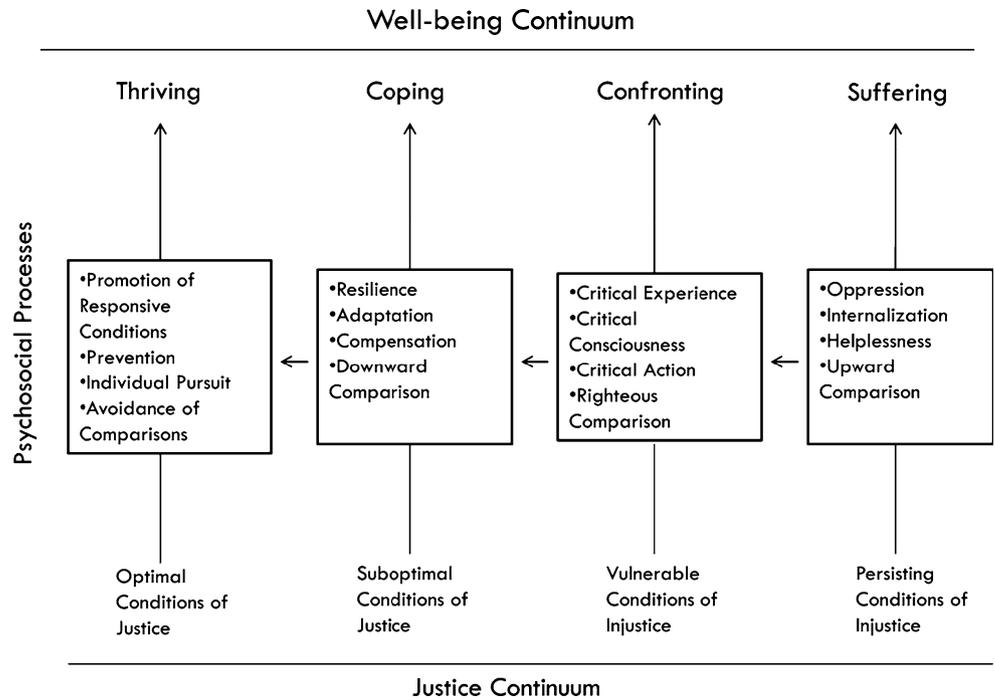


Fig. 3 Psychosocial processes mediating between conditions of justice and well-being states



hard to change, whereas the latter show signs of weaknesses. In recent memory we witnessed dictatorships in the Arab world crumble under pressure of their own citizens. These are regimes that can no longer operate with impunity or total domination. Throughout history many societies have transitioned to democracy when the regime showed signs of weakness. South Africa and several Latin American countries offer contemporary examples (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003; Yen 2007). The left half of the bottom continuum represents societies where justice predominates.

Optimal Conditions of Justice Promote Thriving

Optimal is defined as a setting in which most types of justice prevail. A setting may be a family, group, organization, community or nation. By thriving I mean (a) the process of striving to achieve full potential, and (b) the state of being fulfilled (Buettner 2010). In the case of individuals, thriving refers to engagement in life expanding activities, meaning making, spiritual elevation, and full satisfaction with life (Seligman 2011; Seligman et al. 2005). Although the literature usually refers to the thriving of individuals through flow experiences and other mechanisms, I claim that teams, groups, families, organizations and communities can also be said to thrive, flourish or languish. There is a reciprocally deterministic relationship between thriving individuals and flourishing systems (Buettner 2008, 2010; Gladwell 2008; Keyes 2007; McKnight and Block 2010; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006). Individuals simultaneously create, and are created by, psychosocial conditions.

Based on existing research, there seem to be four main processes for the flourishing of individuals and systems: promotion of responsive conditions, prevention of threat to responsive conditions, individual pursuit and avoidance of comparisons. I will examine each one in turn.

Promotion of Responsive Conditions

The first question we need to address is responsive to what? Individuals are very diverse creatures born with different temperament, abilities, preferences, and needs. For them to thrive, objective and subjective conditions must be responsive to their unique needs and developmental phase. Responsive parents adapt to children with physical disabilities and to children with low levels of activity. Other responsive parents modify their behavior to meet the needs of children who are more active and who require more interaction. Thomas and Chess (1999) developed the concept of *goodness of fit* to describe the optimal adaptation of parents to the child's needs. In community psychology we refer to this as the *person-environment fit* (Kagan et al. 2011; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2010).

Expecting all kids to perform certain functions at the same time neglects their unique developmental profile. Changes in expectations must be made to accommodate the rate of growth and level of abilities. The more responsive the conditions surrounding a person, the higher the chances that she will thrive because we minimize clash of expectations.

Responsive conditions ensure the fulfillment of basic needs in the sense that Winnicott (1965) talked about a "good enough parent": one who provides a secure environment for the child. As the child becomes an adult, the family of origin plays a diminishing role and other environments assume increasing influence. Work, school, and financial systems begin to shape people's behavior. In all cases, however, the conditions surrounding the person exert considerable influence on her opportunities to thrive.

Caring parents, teachers, friends and employers gently push children, students, peers and employees to engage in health-enhancing and thriving behaviors. As Thaler and Sunstein (2008) demonstrate in their book *Nudge*, environmental cues can help people behave in ways that are more consonant with their personal and collective well-being. A nudge is a gentle push towards eating right, being kind to others, saving money, voting, volunteering, and even joining a social movement. Their book illustrates the power of choice architecture. By constructing the physical and cultural environment in certain ways, people are primed to engage in positive or negative behaviors. By eliminating junk food from the house, and by arranging colorful plates of vegetables and fruits in interesting forms, kids are more likely to choose healthy snacks. By choosing to save a certain amount of dollars from your salary by automatic deductions, you are creating a default that helps you save for the future. By rearranging the environment, people can be nudged to engage in prosocial and wellness enhancing behavior. In Stockholm's Odenplan metro station, the authorities encouraged people to use the stairs as opposed to the elevator by painting the stairs like a piano keyboard with sounds. When pedestrians step on the stairs they create interesting sounds (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lXh2n0aPyw&feature=related>). This is a great example of nudging people to use stairs instead of the escalator by making it fun and entertaining. Thaler and Sunstein argue that information, peer pressure, and priming, "can be easily enlisted by private and public nudgers" (2008, p. 71). Of course, they can be enlisted for good or ill, as many other scientific pursuits.

Whereas the newborn is developmentally dependent on others to create a responsive environment for her growth, her ability to create supportive conditions for herself and others grows with age. As she matures, she becomes an agent of responsive conditioning for her relationships,

friends, workplace and community. She can become a positive “nudger.”

A nudge is an interesting case of procedural justice because it does not force people to choose the stairs or the broccoli. Instead, it makes the choices more appealing. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) are careful to differentiate a nudge from coercion, which diminishes people’s freedom of choice. Responsive conditions do not just tend to people’s physical and emotional needs, but also to their need for freedom and control.

The preferred outcome of responsive conditions is a caring, competent person, group, organization, or community. On the positive side of the ledger, the promotion of responsive environments creates opportunities for personal growth and self esteem, as Rutter noted (1987); and competence and empowerment, as Cowen did (1994, 2000). But the promotion of favorable contexts and attributes must be supplemented by the prevention of unfavorable circumstances.

Prevention of Threats to Responsive Conditions

It is not enough to promote positive circumstances. We also need to prevent risks that might interfere with human development. Threats to objective resources like food and shelter include poverty; threats to subjective well-being include child maltreatment and poor parenting. Well-being is advanced through both strategies: promotion and prevention.

Even in the most favorable of responsive conditions, untoward events such as disability, death and divorce cause considerable stress. In such circumstances, Rutter (1987) tells us, we need to reduce risk impact and interrupt unhealthy chain reactions stemming from stressful life events. Risk may be reduced by either altering the risk or exposure to it. In high-risk communities, parents who exercise strict parental controls manage to protect their children from exposure to drugs and violence. Young children who need hospitalization can be taken to the hospital for practice visits to soften the risk of being left by the parents in a threatening environment. The negative chain reaction of parental loss may be halted by providing the child with sustained and nurturing care by a caring family member (Rutter 1987). Promotion of responsive environments and prevention of threats to them are necessary but insufficient conditions for thriving. Not all people who enjoy beneficial circumstances in life thrive. Something else is needed.

Individual Pursuit

Whereas the previous two mechanisms fostered propitious contexts, this one promotes active engagement of the

person in life. To flourish in life, more than favorable circumstances are required: full engagement with work, paid or unpaid, in addition to meaning making activities, is required. Passive enjoyment of life’s circumstances does not lead to thriving (Seligman 2011). It may lead to hedonic happiness, but not to flourishing or eudaimonia, in the Aristotelian sense (Fowers 2011; Sandel 2009).

Despite some shortcomings, not the least of which is to ignore the impact of context, positive psychology has managed to shine a light on thriving. For people who enjoy favorable circumstances and do not suffer from material deprivations or serious injustice, positive psychology offers a set of tools to promote flow, meaning, and thriving (Fredrickson 2009; Lyubomirsky 2008; Seligman 2011).

Flourishing requires active engagement with personal behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. Engaging in certain behavioral routines, such as expressing gratitude, forgiveness, counting one’s blessing, and savoring life’s pleasures, has been found to increase subjective well-being and decrease the risk of mental illness (Keyes et al. 2010). Similarly, increasing the ratio of positive to negative emotions has been found to promote emotional and physical health. Mindfulness and positive self-talk have also increased subjective and physical wellness.

Research by Barbara Fredrickson (2009) demonstrated that positive emotions broaden and build personal resources. Feeling good fosters creativity, humor, flexibility and problem solving. Negative feelings, on the contrary, constrict one’s thinking. She found that a ratio of three positive emotions for every negative emotion brings the person closer to flourishing. More than 80% of participants in her research report a two to one ratio. Those who are depressed or suffering usually report a one to one ratio.

Fredrickson (2009) catalogs positive emotions and ways to enhance them. Joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love account for the main positive emotions leading to flourishing. Reframing adversity into opportunity, creating a coherent narrative of one’s life, savoring good moments, following passions, using strengths, counting kindness and blessings, connecting with others, and connecting with nature are all paths to flourishing.

Lyubomirsky (2008) offers a few techniques to make promotion activities more sustainable. To make positive changes last, she recommends varying the situation often to keep it fresh. If you like running, vary the route once in a while to keep it interesting. She also recommends person-activity fit. Extroverts will enjoy engaging with others, while introverts will appreciate a nature walk more. To keep flourishing activities engaging, she recommends keeping effort at moderate levels and keeping it fun.

In addition to increasing the nominator, it is important to decrease the denominator in the positive to negative

emotions ratio. Fredrickson (2009) observes that disputing negative thinking can have beneficial effects, not the least of which is to prevent negative emotions. Breaking the cycle of rumination is another useful strategy. Healthy distractions such as going for nature walks can help with negative self talk. Diffusing negative landmines is another useful way to prevent negative emotions. Trigger situations and environmental cues such as traffic, violent movies, or phone calls to your parents may incite negativity. Avoiding violent movies, listening to audio tapes in your car, and keeping your conversations with your parents focused on positive aspects of your day can avert trigger points. In line with Rutter's reduction of risk impact, I would recommend minimizing contact with negative people who gossip, put you down, and elicit the darker side of you.

Contemporary culture, media, and the devotion to commercialism can most definitely erode flourishing (Sloan 1996). The push to fulfill our lives through consumerism, competition, and immediate gratification is pernicious. Research amply demonstrates that the immediate gratification of buying a new car vanishes rather quickly. If you are going to spend money, research says, do so on experiences and not on material goods (Rath and Harter 2010). Television shows that exalt celebrity life styles while increasing our sense of relative deprivation are injurious to our mental health (Fiske 2011). The best prevention against these distorted constructions of love and life is to limit exposure.

Avoidance of Comparisons

Research shows that people make judgments about their own lives by comparing their lot in life with that of others. This mechanism involves upward and downward comparisons. When people compare themselves with others whose wealth, fame, or status is in some way inferior, they tend to feel better about themselves. However, when they compare themselves to others whose status is superior, they tend to feel worse about their life (Fiske 2011). This phenomenon helps explain why, despite gains in economic capacity, many people do not report higher levels of subjective well-being (Inglehart 2010; Inglehart et al. 2008). If people continue to compare themselves to others who are also proportionally doing better, the sentiment of relative deprivation prevents them from enjoying to the fullest their economic gains. If everyone is going up at the same time, but inequality continues, or worse, is accentuated, relative deprivation is exacerbated. This is in part how the Easterlin paradox in behavioral economics is being explained. The Easterlin paradox, named after the economist who proposed it, claims that in spite of greater economic power, people in different countries do not report higher levels of subjective well-being. Using data from multiple sources,

Graham (2009) argues that in some cases, not all, it is true that people do not report higher levels of subjective well-being due to upward comparisons. The upward comparisons result in feelings of relative deprivation. Hence, it is possible to advance financially in absolute terms without feeling better because inequality continues to remind you that, relatively speaking, you are not as well off as your neighbor, or as successful as a new cultural norm might dictate. This psychosocial phenomenon reminds us that objective well-being, which can be improved through economic prosperity, is not sufficient to improve our subjective well-being, especially in countries with developed economies.

To maximize the benefits of living in optimal conditions of justice, I would argue that we need to avoid comparing our fate to others (Lyubomirsky 2008). Fiske (2011) has documented the ill effects of comparing ourselves to others. In her words, we either envy up or scorn down. In either case, the result is to divide human beings and to erode solidarity. As much as it is ingrained in our social nature to compare ourselves to others, a proclivity intensified by consumerism and competition, we should try to contain the impulse. As Graham (2009) has amply documented, some people who are very well off feel that there is never enough to keep them happy because there is always a neighbor who has more than they do.

The glorification of economic success and bodily beautification that infiltrates households through TV, magazines, and the internet, makes it hard to protect ourselves and our young from fantasies of fame, wealth, and beauty, on one hand; or from self-deprecating thoughts about our inability to reach these levels of cultural adulation on the other. Counter culture is very much needed to mitigate hegemonic notions of happiness and success with more realistic and genuine ideas of what constitutes a life worth living.

In synthesis, the experience of thriving is fostered by the promotion of responsive conditions and flourishing behaviors and by the prevention of threats to them. We have seen that both objective and subjective aspects of well-being are important, and that favorable conditions are necessary but insufficient conditions for thriving. Behavioral engagement, meaning making and the active pursuit of positive emotions, built on fertile soil, enhance the chances of a thriving life. Avoiding comparisons can help us achieve authentic happiness of the self-determined variety as opposed to the commercially crafted type.

Suboptimal Conditions of Justice Engender Coping

Under suboptimal conditions, people experience either a lack of resources (objective and/or subjective), or an assault on their system caused by stressful events such as

death, sudden unemployment, illness, or abuse. Systems as a whole can also be afflicted by lack of resources or traumatic events, such as an accident. These are all events that perturb the responsive conditions described in the previous section. Here I will describe four psychosocial processes that people and groups use to cope with adversity: resilience, adaptation, comparison, and compensation.

Resilience

In coping with adversity, individuals enlist personal and social resources. The former entails being socially skilled, feeling competent, possessing problem-solving skills, and planning for the future. The latter include support from friends and caregivers, mentoring relationships, and identification with positive role models (Prilleltensky et al. 2001b; Sandler 2001; Tebes and Irish 2000). Ultimately, the ability to cope successfully with stressful life events and transitions depends on the balance of power between protective and risk factors. The interactions among stressors, environmental risk factors, social supports, opportunities for positive relationships, and personal resources are varied and complex.

Although it is tempting to focus on the personality attributes and skills of resilient individuals, as current efforts to enhance the resiliency of soldiers demonstrate (e.g., Reivich et al. 2011), we should remember that (a) groups also develop resilience (Cacioppo et al. 2011), and (b) there is much in the environment that can be changed to foster resilience in the face of adversity. Harris et al. (1986) studied girls who lost their mothers before age eleven. When compared to children who did not lose a parent, they discovered that these girls were more likely to develop depression later in life, but only if they did not have adequate care after the loss. Shinn and Toohey reviewed studies in which poor children who moved to affluent suburbs did much better in school and life than children who remained in inner city schools (2003). No attempts were made to change the children individually. The powerful effects of a high achieving and well endowed school accounted for the positive long term effects on the children who attended better resourced schools.

Adaptation

Extensive research demonstrates that people adapt to positive and negative developments in their lives (Graham 2009; Lyubomirsky 2008, 2011). People who win the lottery experience a transitory elevation of subjective well-being, to return to baseline levels after a few months, and people who become disabled experience a decline in well-being, also to return to baseline after a few months. While this is a wide phenomenon, it is not universal. Research

also shows that some people do not return to baseline levels. Unemployment, for example, affects subjective and objective well-being negatively, and many people do not return to baseline levels (Lyubomirsky 2011). Still, there is considerable evidence that many people are remarkably adaptive and get used to new or existing challenging realities.

Under suboptimal conditions, the process of adaptation has both beneficial and problematic outcomes. Healthful effects include feeling fine despite a negative turn of events or a permanent threatening environment. People who become disabled as a result of accidents maintain in the long term a relatively salutary level of subjective well-being. People who grow up in violent environments, such as Mexico or Colombia, are able to report fairly high levels of subjective well-being and life satisfaction; in fact, some of the highest in Latin America (Graham 2009; Inglehart 2010; Inglehart et al. 2008). We can hardly blame people for trying to feel good despite uncontrollable negative events, such as random violence and unemployment (Sen 2009).

There is no question that adaptation can help people survive in toxic environments, but also there is no doubt that adaptation can lead to negative consequences. Some of them include the very adaptation to intolerable conditions, such as an abusive husband, a corrupt government, a polluted environment, or a violent neighborhood (Sen 2009).

Compensation

Related to adaptation, people find ways to extract meaning of a negative event, such as spirituality when struck by an illness or death of a child. Alternatively, people compensate for uncontrollable events with controllable ones, such as perseverance, meaning making, family support, community solidarity, and social capital (Backman and Dixon 1992; Keyes 2009; Lyubomirsky 2011).

Research on poor communities shows that many members experience relatively high levels of subjective well-being despite low levels of objective well-being (Keyes 2009). Bonds of solidarity and affection compensate for physical hardships. As in the case of adaptation, there are many positive effects flowing from compensation, not the least of which is finding meaning in relationships and in the simple things in life. But also as in the case of adaptation, there are negative outcomes such as getting used to oppression and exploitation. In both cases of adaptation and compensation, we see the silver lining and the dark side of psychosocial dynamics (Sen 2009).

Downward Comparisons

As Fiske (2011) has observed, comparisons, either upward or downward ultimately divide people and tend to

exacerbate differences. However, there is also research indicating that comparing ourselves with people whose lot in life is not as good as ours makes us feel good about our own situation (Fiske 2011). As comparing machines that we human beings are, feeling that we are relatively lucky in life makes our plight more bearable (Graham 2009). From a descriptive point of view, I agree with Fiske that downward comparison is what people do to help themselves. From a prescriptive point of view, I think that we should monitor carefully the consequences of such comparisons. Looking down scornfully on people who have less, and blaming them for their misfortune erodes the character of the person doing the comparing.

In summary, under suboptimal conditions of justice, in which people are relatively deprived of either subjective or objective goods, individuals and groups enlist diverse mechanisms to cope with adversity. Mechanisms include resilience, adaptation, compensation and downward comparisons.

Vulnerable Conditions of Injustice Enable Confrontation with the System

Faced with unacceptable conditions such as injustice or rejection, some people will adjust and make the most of it through adaptation and compensation, while others will rebel. Based on personal, organizational, and community transformation research, I distill three main psychosocial mechanisms for challenging injustice, suffering and languishing: critical experiences, critical consciousness, and critical action (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006).

Critical Experiences

These are events that leave a strong impression, that question your assumptions about what is just and good, and that rattle your cage. These may be critical incidents in your life or critical moments in history, such as the pulling down of the Berlin Wall. Although separated by time and context, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. shared similar critical experiences. Both experienced racism and discrimination, both were assaulted and taunted, and both knew poverty and injustice up close. Coming into contact with the suffering of their respective people, and with the people who oppressed them, were formative events in their lives. Feeling the pain of your people becomes your own suffering.

Critical experiences lead to revelations that something is profoundly wrong with your personal, family, work or community life (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006). All of a sudden, you question the status quo. What seemed normal yesterday seems unacceptable today. This realization may be the result of one major critical experience,

such as an incident of domestic abuse, or of accumulated stressors over time. There may be one critical experience of great qualitative proportions, or many small incidents that over time lead to a qualitative difference in how people assess their life (Streker 2011).

Critical experiences are necessary but not sufficient conditions for change. After all, many people live in unacceptable relationships and social conditions without challenging them for a long time. Critical experiences must be complemented by critical consciousness and critical action.

Critical Consciousness

This phenomenon consists of two components: a critique of social conditions leading to suffering and languishing; and a realization that people can change these conditions (Freire 1970, 1973; Mustakova-Possardt 2003). Gandhi and King condemned colonization, exclusion, and discrimination as the outcome of oppressive policies and practices. They realized that these were not natural or predetermined, but rather the product of injustice.

People come to critical consciousness in various ways. Critical experiences may be the most direct, but not the only way. Coming into contact with groups who suffer discrimination, or just studying their plight might be enough to foster critical consciousness. To sustain this critical stance, people must come together to support each other and learn from each other.

The second element of critical consciousness is the notion that people can make a difference. In either your personal or community life, you can change things, you can challenge injustice, you can leave an abusive relationship, you don't have to suffer passively. Both elements of critical consciousness, critique and awareness of capacity to change, synergize with critical experiences to foster action.

Critical Action

This type of action is different than most in that it marks a departure from business as usual. Critical action is the culmination of a process of questioning injustice, suffering and languishing as immutable states. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) worked with poor peasants to elucidate the connections among injustice and poverty. Through participatory and experiential learning, peasants developed critical consciousness that led to meaningful social action.

Critical action is transformative and not merely ameliorative. While the latter suggests changes within the system, the former implies changes to the system. After months of trying to work out conflict resolution with an abusive husband, the woman decides to end the

relationship. This is a change to the system (Streker 2011). Her previous attempts to make it work were within the system. Feeble last minute attempts by Mubarak to save his regime in Egypt in the spring of 2011 were ameliorative in nature. His people wanted transformative change.

Righteous Comparisons

While the research literature enumerates only downward and upward comparisons as the main types of social comparison, I wish to introduce the notion of righteous comparisons. While it is generally advisable not to compare ourselves to others, as Fiske observed (2011), there are circumstances in which comparisons are valid and justified. I call *righteous comparison* the realization that while others are enjoying freedom of choice and political liberties, you and your people suffer injustice. This is a righteous type of comparison that says: If freedom, liberty, self-determination, and justice are good for other groups and nations, why is it that my people do not enjoy it? After all, justice is about the fair and equitable allocation of resources and obligations, and about the fairness of the processes involved in the distribution of goods and burdens. When people begin to make comparisons and evaluate their fate relative to others who enjoy more freedom and democratic participation, they have the right to compare and demand an improvement in their lives. The contagious uprising in Arab dictatorships in the spring of 2011 is an example of righteous comparisons that started in Tunisia.

In summary, unjust but vulnerable states or systems engender confrontation with the apparatus of oppression through critical experiences, critical consciousness and critical action. Righteous comparisons may trigger transforming thoughts, sentiments, and behaviors.

Persisting Conditions of Injustice Perpetuate Suffering

The human capacity for coping, adjusting and surviving notwithstanding, under persisting conditions of injustice people do indeed suffer. Although some individuals rise above adversity, even under severe circumstances, it would be unjust to either expect or pretend that most people escape injustice unscathed. Four principal mechanisms account for the suffering.

Oppression and Internalization

Oppression results from asymmetric power relations shaped by domination and subordination. The external oppression and deprivation of objective and subjective goods is often accompanied by stratagems to implant in subordinate groups self-deprecating views about themselves (Prilleltensky and

Gonick 1996). Most unfortunately, these psychological manipulations often succeed and oppressed groups internalize perceptions of inferiority. Oppression curtails self-determination, suppresses voice, and perpetuates injustice. The foregoing discussion suggests that there are two kinds of oppression: political and psychological. Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) defined political oppression as the creation of material, legal, military, economic, and other social barriers to the fulfilment of self-determination, justice, and democratic participation, resulting from the actual use of power by dominating agents to advance their own interests at the expense of persons or groups in positions of relative powerlessness. They conceptualized psychological oppression as the internalized view of self as negative and undeserving of resources or participation in societal affairs. This negative perception, they claimed, was the result of affective, behavioral, cognitive, linguistic and cultural mechanisms designed to solidify political domination.

Helplessness

Faced with repeated failure to overcome injustice, groups can develop helplessness, or the sentiment that there is no point in trying further. This leads to desperation, complacency and stress (Mikulincer 1994; Seligman 2011). Dominating regimes and despots use physical and psychological force to exert and extend their dominion, inducing a feeling of helplessness in subordinates. Helplessness is often accompanied by hopelessness. The combination of the two can be fatal for the soul and lethal for the body.

Upward Comparisons

Situated at the bottom of the social ladder, coping with oppression and repression, people naturally compare themselves to others whose lot in life is better. As a result they sink deeper into feelings of misfortune (Fiske 2011). However, as we have seen in South Africa, Latin America, and more recently in Northern Africa, persisting conditions of oppression do eventually show signs of weakness (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003). This is when upward comparisons, which are not really very healthy, turn into righteous comparisons and create the impulse for social change. Our job is always to accelerate conditions that will promote justice, and just or righteous comparisons.

In synthesis, persisting conditions of injustice lead to suffering through political and psychological dynamics of oppression, helplessness and upward comparisons. Signs of democratization are spreading throughout the world, making us timidly hopeful that persisting conditions of injustice will be abolished for one and all.

Conclusion

Wellness as fairness is an approach to well-being that transcends medical and psychological definitions. While acknowledging the role of biological and psychosocial determinants of health, wellness as fairness introduces the notion of justice as an umbrella under which various resources—objective, subjective, medical, social, economic, psychological, and cultural—are deployed to promote individual, interpersonal, organizational and community well-being. In thinking about determinants of health and wellness as resources, there is a direct connection with distributive justice, which, after all, is about the fair and equitable distribution of resources. By placing justice squarely in the center of wellness, I am saying that psychosocial determinants of health are not naturally distributed among people, but rather given to power dynamics, political disputes, and ethical considerations. The tendency to remain medical and psychological in conceptualizing health goes along with the tendency to individualize wellness: the problematic site is the individual who is unwell, not the conditions surrounding her. Wellness as fairness offers an alternative theorization that links wellness to types and conditions of justice. Two main types of justice, distributive and procedural, and several subtypes such as developmental, relational, informational, and cultural, were found to impact well-being significantly. Each type of justice meets either an objective or subjective need at specific ecological levels. I believe that invoking specific types of justice in various spheres of life adds precision to the language of community psychologists and social agents of change. Justice is a vast terrain.

In addition to refining types of wellness, this approach outlines four conditions of justice that lead to differential wellness outcomes: optimal conditions of justice, suboptimal conditions of justice, vulnerable conditions of injustice, and persisting conditions of injustice. These circumstances lead, respectively, to thriving, coping, confronting and suffering. Various psychosocial mechanisms mediate between the unique conditions of justice and their corresponding outcomes.

Wellness as fairness also makes clear that subjective evaluations of well-being are only one way of assessment. While the happiness of Colombians and Mexicans is a cause of celebration, they know only too well that they will be much better off when violence and poverty are reduced in their country. My emphasis on objective conditions of wellness balances the current focus on subjective evaluations of happiness.

Defining wellness in terms of justice reminds us that we, agents of change, can alter configurations of injustice. For all that medicine and psychology have to offer, we must prevent the medicalization of wellness. There are fairness

issues to be dealt with at every level of human experience, from the intrapersonal to the global. If we are to do justice to our profession, to our history, and to the people we serve, we better put justice back into wellness, right where it belongs (Reich et al. 2007).

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