REVIEW PAPER

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Doing–Being and Relationship–Solitude: A Proposed Model for a Balanced Life

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Abstract

Scholars over the last several decades have theorized and presented research regarding the key components of a balanced adult life. However, attempts to integrate these components are rare. This paper offers a two-dimensional model for understanding and constructing a balanced adult life: *doing–being* and *relationship–solitude*. Thriving by active doing (mastery/accomplishment) and by relationships (collaboration/engagement in positive relationships) comprise two major elements within the common models of well-being (e.g., self-determination theory and the flourish/PERMA theoretical model). However, to live a balanced life, these two socially desirable modes of existence—doing and relationships—must be complemented by *being* and *solitude*, respectively, each commanding a markedly lower profile in the literature. The two dimensions are described, followed by a presentation of the four modes generated from these two dimensions: *solitary doing, communal doing, solitary being*, and *communal being*. The benefits of each mode are presented and implications of the proposed model are discussed.

Keywords Life balance · Doing and being · Relationship and solitude · Well-being

1 Introduction

A satisfying and fulfilling life can be attained in various ways. Numerous psychological theories specify the elements of a valued life, with all referring to expressing self-abilities (*doing*) and establishing good relationships (*relationship*) as key components. Some emphasize the importance of seeking a balance between these two components. However, most theories, as well as current trends, ignore the complements of these two components (*being* and *solitude* as the two complements of *doing* and *relationship,* respectively), as well as the necessary balance between the complements of each component. Moreover, the balance between these four components has also been neglected.

This paper proposes two key dimensions that comprise a matrix of four life states. The first dimension of the proposed model is *doing–being*. By suggesting this dimension, it is important to emphasize that action-oriented behaviors and competency-oriented behaviors,

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aimed at achieving agency and pursuing goals, though highly valued and rewarded in modern Western life, do not encompass the entirety of positive and fulfilling human experiences. The second dimension of the proposed model is *relationship–solitude*. In putting forward this dimension, it is important to stress that the relational component—important for achieving social support and sense of belonging—is necessary but insufficient for achieving the positive and fulfilling human experience. Thus, according to this model, thriving through doing and through relationships must be complemented and balanced by the experience of thriving through being and through solitude as one strives to live a fulfilling life. Note that doing cannot exist without being, and vice versa; likewise, relationships cannot exist without solitude, and vice versa. Doing and being should be conceptualized as coexisting in constant dialogue with one another, just as do solitude and relationships. Thus, it would be mistaken to consider doing and being, or relationships and solitude, as inverse states.

This paper's central argument is that the full and satisfying life is a nexus of four varieties of daily life modes, reflecting four kinds of individual needs and capacities to satisfy these needs, which, only in harmony and balance, comprise the healthy adult life. Specifically, my implication is that, seemingly paradoxically, individuals can be in a *being* mode or in a *doing* mode, both with *others* as well as with *themselves*. Thus, the *balanced* life is defined here as a life reflecting satisfaction or fulfillment in four important kinds of routine situations. Conversely, the *imbalanced* life is defined here as a life reflecting general dissatisfaction or lack of fulfillment derived from excessively focused kinds of routine situations (e.g., *doing* situations, *relational* situations), ultimately leading to certain deleterious, unwanted outcomes. Substantial theoretical and empirical accounts have been promulgated supporting the key elements of this model.

2 Theoretical and Empirical Support for the Importance of Balancing *Doing* and *Relating*

Rogers's theoretical and clinical framework, updated in his book, *A Way of Being* (1980), conceptualized two modes of being: outward-directed and inward-directed:

> I like my life best when it faces outward most of the time. I prize the times when I am inward-looking—searching to know myself, meditating, and thinking. But this must be balanced by doing things—interacting with people, producing something, whether a book or a piece of carpentry (Rogers 1980, pp. 44–45).

Rogers distinguished the outward from the inward, the interpersonal from the intrapersonal, and the non-relational part of life from its relational part. He equated the two forms of outward experiences: *outward by doing* things and *outward by interacting* with other people, using the two terms interchangeably. In the present paper, I suggest that these two forms of outward experiences are not equivalent, with each needing to be addressed discretely, both conceptually and practically. In his autobiographical chapter, Rogers concluded that he could not live in a continuous encounter with other people. He explained that encounters with other people must be balanced by times of being alone. However, Rogers mentioned only one form of aloneness experience: inward-looking—searching to know one's self, meditating, and thinking. In the present paper, a second, seemingly paradoxical, form of aloneness experience is proposed: aloneness while actively doing in the external world. The balance Rogers sought—between being alone and being with others—is as important

as the balance between active aloneness and reflective *inward-looking* aloneness, and as the balance between active being with others and communal reflective/*inward-looking* with others.

Alternatively, balancing these two dimensions can be achieved through agency and communion, constructs first identified by Bakan (1966) as two fundamental modes of human existence. *Agency* comprises characteristics aimed at pursuing personal goals and manifesting skills and accomplishments. *Communion*, in contrast, is a construct relating to forming and maintaining social connections. Agency is characterized by independence and separation from others through competence, intellectual qualities, or dominance, while communion reflects affiliation with a broader community through conversations, friendships, nurturance, social qualities, and intimacy. The integration of agency and communion has been viewed as the quintessence of mature adult moral development (Frimer et al. 2011).

Bakan's theoretical propositions regarding the importance of balancing the two tendencies and the dangers of immoderate behaviors were empirically highlighted by Helgeson and Fritz (1999). They found that an imbalance, whether reflecting an immoderately high tendency to achieve agency or an immoderately high tendency toward communion. They explained that individuals with unmitigated agency tend to resist investing in relationships, while those characterized by communion tend to subjugate their own needs to the needs of others and are reliant on others for esteem.

A parallel distinction to Bakan's agency and communion formulation can be identified in a reflection traditionally attributed to Freud. Freud's famous response to the question regarding the core of psychological health and meaningful life was, "Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness" (Erikson 1963, pp. 264–265; Elms 2001). Freud saw love as representing the human need to be in relationships with others and to build meaningful attachments and interpersonal intimacy. Freud saw work as a need of people to be engaged in a purposeful and meaningful activity, applying strengths, skills, and talents in order to express themselves and create something. Thus, the importance in life of engaging in both *love* and *work* comprises yet another prescription of balance of these two dimensions—relating and doing.

A look at the theoretical development in social gerontology further reinforces the centrality and connection between these two dimensions (Zaidi and Howse 2017). Disengagement theory, one of the first theories of aging, postulates a view of old age as a time of life when people step back from various commitments and social roles. In response to disengagement theory, several frameworks were developed to reflect and incorporate other more positive experiences of life in older age. These include *activity theory*, *successful aging*, and *productive aging*. The idea of these theories is affirming the desirability of older people remaining as participants in society by being active and productive. The assumption behind these theories is that activity and productivity encompass the means of social connectedness and belongingness.

Thus, Bakan, Rogers, Freud, and others, albeit in different ways and adopting different terminology, recognized two dimensions that need to be balanced in order to live a healthy life. The first (doing, agency, work) concerns self-efficacy, manifested in actions and accomplishments, and the second (relating, communion, love) involves other people, manifested in relationships. Although, the proposed model subscribes to the theoretical assumptions of Bakan, Rogers, Freud, and others, I would like to stress the importance of the often neglected respective complements of the two dimensions to which they refer: *being* (in contrast to doing) and *solitude* (in contrast to relating). Moreover, the model presented in this paper recognizes two types of agency that need to be balanced: self-agency

and relational-agency. Many sociological studies of agency have stressed its relational nature, challenging the notion that agency can be attained by an individual alone (see Burkitt 2016). This model also recognizes two types of communion that need to be balanced: *communal doing* and *communal being*.

The proposed model subscribes to the ontological meta-theoretical assumptions of complex systems models. A complex system is constructed by means of a large number of non-linear interactions and cannot be separated from its environment (Cilliers, 2005). Both of these characteristics—complexity and contextualization—have relevance to the proposed model of the balanced life, as humans can be viewed as complex living systems. While the essential components of the proposed theoretical model will be presented herein simply and separately, the dynamic nature of the rich interactions within these elements and with the external social environment, the abundance of direct and indirect feedback paths, and the constant flux of the human complex system should be acknowledged and considered upon seeking to understand, explore, and implement this model.

2.1 Doing–Being

This section discusses how the dynamic balance between doing–being is central for healthy living. The concept of doing includes purposeful, goal-oriented activities. The capacity for doing provides structure, grants an affirmation of competence, and enhances feelings of self-worth through a sense of being valued and proficient. The concept of being includes reflection, introspection or meditation, self-(re)discovering, savoring the moment, and appreciating nature, art, or music in a contemplative manner (Hammell 1998). The capacity for being was emphasized by the existential psychologist, Emmy van Deurzen (van Deurzen 2009): "Our capacity for being and our own preoccupation with it, is what makes life our own. It is only when we begin to reflect on our life that we begin to get an inkling of what is at stake" (p. 230).

However, being must be fulfilled by doing, as what we are at any given moment is never sufficient, and it is always fluid. As human beings, unlike objects, we are in a continual process of becoming (van Deurzen 2010). By means of exploration, relinquishing what we are and what we possess, we constantly advance toward the future. In van Deurzen's words: "This also means that we are, more than any-thing, our capacity for the realization of our ownmost possibility" (van Deurzen 2009, p. 230).

Doing represents an attempt to modify a situation or achieve something, rather than letting it stand (Wilcock 1998):

> People spend their lives almost constantly engaged in purposeful *doing*, even when free of obligations or necessity…Human evolution has been filled with ongoing and progressive doings, which, apart from enabling the species to survive, has stimulated, entertained, and excited some people and bored, stressed, alienated, or depressed others according to what was done (Wilcock 1998, p. 3).

According to Wilcock (1998), being is concerned with the *self* and the *essence* of the person. Being is self-discovery, thinking, reflecting, and simply existing. Being is about being true to ourselves, to our nature, to our essence, and to what is distinctive about us; this is what we bring to others as part of our relationships and to what we do (Wilcock 1998).

Wilcock (1998) proposed that people require a dynamic *balance* between being and doing in their lives. Exaggerating the doing side at the expense of the being side jeopardizes one of the most important aspects of who we are, causing us to risk never getting

in touch with that deeper part of ourselves that can offer us fulfillment and peace. What individuals do creates and shapes the societies they live in, for good or for bad. However, *over*doing may be deleterious to health and well-being (Leijten et al. 2015).

Imbalance is reflected in the investigation of doing in comparison with being in the well-being literature itself (Doble and Santha 2008). This is manifested in the vast research on the many types of doing, such as behaviors performed at work and at school, but a rather constrained examination of being as a human condition. While research on the construct of being has been rather limited, the mindfulness literature, as a related field, can shed some light on the potential benefits of engaging in this state. Bishop et al. (2004) operationally defined *mindfulness* as the self-regulation of attention in the present moment, with a curious, open, and accepting orientation toward an experience. A meta-analysis (Sedlmeier et al. 2012) examined 163 studies of mindfulness and its effects on outcomes, such as anxiety, concentration, and well-being, concluding that mindfulness bears holistic positive effects.

While doing can be an auxiliary of being, it cannot substitute for it. An individual engaged in doing can accomplish certain objectives as a manner of self-expression. Doing may enhance the explanation of being, such that individuals may define their being-role through the activities they do (Ennals et al. 2016).

Doing is much easier to conceptualize than is being, as doing can be quantified, such as the grade we are awarded and the money we earn. All productive activities are aspects of doing (Lee 2010). Acknowledging the challenge of defining being as used in the current paper, it would appear that being is about stopping the movement toward change and suspending the struggle. Being denotes getting in touch with the deeper part of ourselves, the inner realm that can help define who we are and what we value rather than what we do; being is concerned with the *self* and the *essence* of the person. Finding the time to discover and nurture this inner realm poses a considerable challenge, given modern Western conditioning to attach supreme importance to doing things and pursuing accomplishments, for these comprise the criteria by which we will be judged and rewarded by others (or so we have been led to believe), thus becoming our *default* mode.

Adopting a humanistic approach of viewing the world, Maslow (1968) described being as the contemplation and enjoyment of the inner life, antithetical to taking action in the world, more of a kind of action produces stillness and cessation of muscular activities. Within his theory of human motivation, needs, and self-actualization (see Maslow et al. 1970; Maslow 1971), Maslow developed a theoretical psychology of peak experiences, which in essence, are forms of exceptional human experience. Maslow distinguished between two kinds of cognitions: D(oing)–cognition and B(eing)–cognition. According to Maslow, pure states of being are not a passive, nirvana-like condition; rather, they can be dynamic, accounting for the facts of movement, direction, and growth. He argued that growth within exploring, manipulating, experiencing, being interested, choosing, delighting, and enjoying. All these experienced states, while perceived as attitudes of pure being, essentially lead to *becoming*, though in a fortuitously, unplanned, and unanticipated manner (Maslow 1968).

Decades after Maslow introduced the dynamism and vitality of these states of being and their importance to personal growth, empirical support has emerged from the field of neuroscience. Neuroscientists have long thought that the brain's circuits (oxygen delivered to the brain by flowing blood and oxygen consumed by the brain) are disconnected when a person is at rest. However, recent studies facilitated by neuroimaging technologies (positron-emission tomography and functional MRI) have revealed quite remarkably that a great deal of meaningful activity transpires in the brain even when a person is resting or doing

nothing at all (Raichle 2010). The exact role of this persistent level of background activity, known as the brain's *default mode network* (DMN), is still being explored. However, it appears that during periods of *doing nothing*—or *just being*—brain areas are messaging, consuming energy at a rate of about 20 times greater than when responding consciously to an outside stimulus. Raichle (2010) suggested that "DMN may orchestrate the way the brain organizes memories and various systems that need preparation for future events" (p. 44), and thus appears to have a critical role in planning future actions. Findings regarding brain activity thus indicate that doing/being are not dichotomous states, but are complementary of each other and require balance between them to attain mental well-being. Moreover, these findings emphasize the importance of *being* situations for *doing* situations, and vice versa. *Doing* situations have us fixate on a single goal-centered track, while *being* situations facilitate responsiveness to the richness and complexity of our memories, plans, and of each moment.

To attain a better understanding of doing and being, two elements common to all cultural and religious traditions, it is useful to examine how various Eastern and Western traditions address them. Kluckhohn (1953), in her seminal paper, *Dominant and Variant Value Orientations*, identified five value orientations, one of which is *being-doing* orientations, where being orientation refers to being self-defined by relationships, and doing orientation defines the self by actions accomplished by the self, producing measurable outcomes. Features of doing-oriented cultures are manifested in the American culture's high regard for achievement, visible accomplishments, and measurement of achievement.

Unlike results-oriented societies, cultures such as the Chinese are instances of *being* orientations. For instance, a central tenet in Taoism, paradoxical to Western ears, is action by inaction, passive achievement, doing nothing, and effortlessness. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu taught that straining against life and striving for wealth, honor, and gain are counterproductive to seeking the Tao (the *way* or *path*); thus, the more one strives for achievement and change, the less one will succeed. In this sense, the Taoist doctrine can be understood as a way to master circumstances by understanding their nature or principle (being), and then shaping one's actions (doing) in accordance with these (Majka 2017). Thus, success comes only when one relaxes and relinquishes the need to actively control or manipulate actions or outcomes.

2.2 Relationship–Solitude

This section discusses how the dynamic balance between relationship and solitude is central for healthy living. Recent years have seen a dramatic growth in the scientific study of close relationships as a central component of well-being. A large body of empirical work supports the view that deep and meaningful close relationships play a vital role in human flourishing. These studies have shown that people who are more socially integrated and who experience more supportive and rewarding relationships achieve better mental health, higher levels of subjective well-being, lower rates of morbidity and mortality, and higher levels of physical health (for reviews, see Brissette et al. 2000; Cohen 2004; Cohen and Wills 1985; Uchino 2009; Uchino et al. 1996).

The scientific literature has begun to recognize the capacity to thrive in solitude, along with other benefits of solitude, as an opportunity for self-appraisal, healing, and emotional renewal (Suedfeld 1982).

> As human beings, we are social by nature. An isolated person, with few means of natural defense, would not survive for long 'in the wild.' Not surprisingly, then, we

seek and enjoy the company of others, and we may go to great lengths to avoid being alone. But too much sociality can be oppressive. We need time alone as a relief from social stressors, an opportunity for reflection and insight, and a chance for personal, spiritual, and creative development (Long et al. 2003, p. 582).

Solitude theory is a general term used in the theoretical (e.g., Suedfeld 1982) and empirical (e.g., Larson and Lee 1996) literature, which treat an individual's inclination for solitude as a distinct personality construct, separate from tendencies toward attachment, sociability, loneliness, neuroticism, and social anxiety. Only a few calls for integration of the relatively new field of solitude with well-grounded psychological theories have been heard. For example, Detrixhe et al. (2014) suggested "an integrative mode that acknowledges a paradox and a developmental dialectic at play between solitude and relatedness, the product of which is a state of health requiring experiences of both" (p. 310). They argued that a positive experience of solitude is only possible when one is securely attached, and secure attachment requires the potential for aloneness. The seeming incompatibility between solitude theory and interpersonal and relational views may be derived from a particular definition of solitude seeking, one that emphasizes physical separation from others. Wachtel (2008) discussed the activation of *internal presences* in solitude: "The 'one-body' situation of being alone is not a 'one-person' situation in a theoretical sense… even when we are alone, we are orienting ourselves with regard to other people" (p. 63). To understand solitude, we need to also understand relationships (Wachtel 2008), and the reverse is also true: "to understand what it means to be together we must also understand what it means to be alone" (Detrixhe et al. 2014, p. 327).

Though solitude typically denotes aloneness, many individuals experience feelings of companionship in a state of solitude, as has been demonstrated by key Western thinkers; for example, Thoreau (1854): "I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls" (p. 206), and Milton (1667), "Solitude sometimes is best society" (p. 529). The relational nature of solitude was highlighted some decades ago by theorists from different psychological approaches. According to Fromm (1941), intimate connections with parents and friends (*primary ties*) may foster freedom and solo exploration. Fromm viewed distancing oneself from others as an opportunity for an individual to exercise new-found powers, labeling it *growing aloneness*, even if awareness of one's solitary position in the world could potentially trigger anxiety and feelings of powerlessness. According to Winnicott (1958), who considered the ability to prosper in solitude to be an essential marker in early development progress and an indicator of adult mental health, comfortable separation from others is enabled only by an internalized positive relatedness to important caregivers. Maslow et al. (1970) found that positive experiences of solitude are common among self-actualized individuals. Along with their episodes of solitude, these individuals also demonstrated strong interpersonal bonds and expressed great warmth to their friends and families. Maslow argued that solitude-seeking behavior does not necessarily indicate interpersonal maladjustment or misanthropy; rather, these individuals value their alone time, actively seeking it out.

More recently, Knafo (2012) claimed that the self cannot exist without another; thus, solitude or relationship cannot be viewed as opposing states. Knafo emphasized that solitude and encounter are in continuous dialogue with one another. "When we are alone, we are still with others; and when with others, we are still alone" (p. 84). Averill and Sundararajan (2014) eschewed the perception that the self cannot be relational without community. They offered a theoretical model for interpreting various solitude experiences, based on the assumption that we are never completely alone, at least not when solitude

is authentic. They stressed the centrality of choice for authentic solitude, in contrast to a sense of abandonment or unwanted isolation that characterize pseudo-solitude. Authentic solitude, according to Averill and Sundararajan (2014), reflects three interrelated dimensions: the enlightenment/authentic self-dimension (relating to creativity, self-discovery, and self-enrichment), the independence/freedom dimension (relating to independence from social concerns and obligations), and the communion/ideal community dimension (relating to intimacy, community, and spirituality).

Spirituality is one of the more popular outcomes associated with voluntary solitude, such that when individuals are liberated from social and other constraints, they are free to focus on and explore their spiritual quests and concerns (Long and Averill 2003). Many faiths report spiritual experiences in solitude, including major figures like Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, and Buddha, who reported divine communication in solitude (e.g., Suedfeld 1982). Spirituality is also closely related to feelings of connectedness to others and to the world, highlighting the social nature of solitude. It is noteworthy that upon examining various types of solitude, spiritual solitude was most frequently experienced when in nature, the most popular setting for intentional solitude (Long et al. 2003). Lambert et al. (2013) found spiritual experiences to be more prevalent in solitude than in social settings.

Scholars have speculated regarding the processes that make daily solitude (e.g., prayer, meditation) constructive. Winnicott (1958) highlighted the positive emotional potential of solitary experience. He theorized that the fully mature adult is endowed with the potential to engage in solitude for the purpose of quelling anxiety caused by stress and has the capacity to use time alone to re-establish emotional homeostasis. Fiske (1980) argued that freedom from distraction along with focused attention, possible when a person is alone, provide a unique opportunity to examine and clarify one's current stressors and life situation. Koch (1994) argued that one's consciousness in solitude is not limited to self-focus or inward direction.

Empirical research has supported the idea that voluntary solitude is associated with well-being. Comfort in being alone was found to be related to lower depression, fewer physical symptoms, and greater life satisfaction (Larson and Lee 1996). In one experience-sampling method study following fifth to ninth graders for 1 week, moderate amounts of time spent alone were significantly linked to fewer parent-reported behavioral problems, higher teacher-rated adjustment, lower depression scores, and even higher grade point averages (Larson 1997). Another study found higher levels of concentration among teenagers during times spent by themselves, followed by a boost in cheerfulness and alertness following 2 h of solitude (Larson 1999). Among adults, comfort in spending time alone was found to correlate with less sadness, fewer undesirable physical symptoms, and greater life satisfaction (Larson and Lee 1996), as well as less frequent feelings of boredom and loneliness (Burger 1995). Cole and Hall (2010) examined the solitude experience of hikers seeking privacy in nature across a variety of factors, such as the length of the chosen trail. They found that some of the benefits achieved by voluntary solitude included taking the opportunity to work through one's problems, promoting a sense of self-discovery, and propounding new ideas. Staats and Hartig (2004) found solitude to be a desirable setting for attention restoration.

Coplan and Bowker (2014) reviewed the costs and benefits of solitude, generally suggesting that solitude can generate both negative and positive outcomes. They cited studies reporting negative effects of solitude on children: slower socialization, applying less effort when working alone rather than in a group, and social isolation that disrupts functioning at clinical levels. However, the distinctions between loneliness and solitude, and the desirability of loneliness at certain moments, must be considered (Coplan and Bowker 2014).

Two differing approaches address the relationship between solitude and creativity. One approach, expressed in Cain's (2012) popular book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking,* focuses on the solitude aspect of creativity, arguing that solitude may actually be more conducive to creativity than are committees and group work, currently the popular choice in work organizations. Cain cited profiles of well-known creative thinkers, indicating that creative people tend to be introverts and presented findings that open-space offices decrease motivation, causing stress, contention, and even aggression. Cain concluded that "introverts prefer to work independently, and solitude can be a catalyst to innovation" (p. 74). Long and Averill (2003) viewed solitude as a facilitator of creativity by stimulating imaginative involvement in multiple realities and by *trying on* alternative identities, leading, perhaps, to self-transformation. Solitude enables an individual to *loosen cognitive structures* in favor of breaking down and recreating reality, allowing individuals to imagine different ways of doing things and new ways of being. Individuals who are never alone are also never alone with their thoughts, thus depriving them of an opportunity for the quiet reflection from which great ideas are born. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found that adolescents who could not tolerate being alone often failed to develop their creative talents, being that such development is usually reliant on solitary activities, such as writing or practicing a musical instrument.

More empirical support for the association of solitude with creativity was recently provided by Bowker et al. (2017). In their study, unsociable emerging adults reported less anxiety and psychosocial difficulties and more creativity, compared with shy and avoidant individuals. They concluded that unsociable emerging adults appear to experience little anxiety and psychosocial difficulties, perhaps because they engage in *just enough* peer interaction, enabling them to spend their time in solitude constructively, unlike shy and avoidant individuals, who may be too distracted by their negative cognitions and distress.

Expressing an alternative approach, one of the leading scholars on creativity, Keith Sawyer, in his 2007 book, *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration,* shows how to be more creative in collaborative group settings and how to change organizations for the better through teamwork. His central theme is that creativity is the result of group contributions and that it can be stimulated by providing an atmosphere that enhances interaction among collaborators. According to Sawyer, research has found collaboration as the key to creativity. Although brainstorming groups have been found to generate fewer ideas than the same number of solitary people working alone, groups usually outperform solo workers when the problems are complex, or if they are visual or spatial (Sawyer 2007).

Solitude and relationships have been addressed through religious and cultural perspectives. The religious perspective of solitude was reviewed by Barbour (2014), surveying various attitudes to solitude in the Bible and in Christian traditions, as well as in other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Islam, Chinese Taoist tradition, and Sanskrit texts. Barbour concluded that religious wisdom regarding solitude involves understanding both the spiritual value of experiencing aloneness and the dangers when solitary pursuits are severed from the relationships, social activities, and contexts that bestow solitude with much of its meaning and value. For example, in the creation account, God creates woman because "it is not good that the man be alone" (Genesis 2:18); thus, a prophet's solitude is acceptable due to its transient nature, rather than signifying a long-term social isolation. Barbour (2014) concluded that the idea of religious solitude is an oxymoron, because if religion is understood as a matter of self-transcendence or commitment to a religious community, then solitude seems the antithesis of genuine spiritual development. He sought to resolve the contradiction by claiming that the purpose of solitude, a necessary condition of meditative awareness or full concentration on something beyond the self, is to practice

a certain kind of focus that cannot be achieved when distracted by the presence of others. Solitude at its best is not oriented toward escaping the world, but rather toward a different kind of participation in it, facilitated by temporary disengagement from ordinary social interactions. Solitude is a return to the self, to what is most important in one's life, enabling an encounter with sources of meaning and truth beyond oneself.

Cultures differ in the form and meaning of social behavior, interpersonal relationships, and time spent alone. Collectivistic cultures are likely to view solitude as undesirable and even dangerous (Long and Averill 2003), perhaps because the term *solitude* is often used interchangeably with terms such as *loneliness* and *social isolation*, which are all popularly viewed as negative experiences (Cramer and Lake 1998). However, research has shown that solitude is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the feeling of loneliness (Suedfeld 1982; Long and Averill 2003). Furthermore, individuals seeking solitude are not necessarily withdrawn or antisocial; rather, they pursue solitary activities because of a specific desire for solitude (Leary et al. 2003).

Despite the importance of the cultural context, there is little empirical evidence concerning whether and how different cultures value solitude differently. The cultural perspective of solitude was first explored by Wang (2006), who conducted two studies examining the nature and benefits of solitude in American and Chinese cultures. Based on informal interviews for a pilot study, Wang identified 20 types of solitude experiences. In her first study, American and Chinese university students rated how common and desirable was each type of solitude. While the two cultures' responses were mostly similar, the Chinese students rated enlightenment (relating to creativity, self-discovery, and self-enrichment) as more desirable than did the American students, and American students viewed freedom (relating to independence from social concerns and obligations) as more desirable than did the Chinese students. In Wang's second study, participants were asked to write a short story and answer a set of questions regarding various ambiguous pictures of solitude. Here again, the Chinese students rated enlightenment as the type of solitude more desirable to them than did the American students. This cultural difference was mediated by the endorsement of a culture-specific value—the doctrine of Shendu in Confucianism. Wang concluded that the need for solitude is likely universal, though not a unitary phenomenon. She concluded that solitude serves various functions, and that different cultures may value different aspects of the solitude experience.

Recent empirical findings have extended the literature by exploring cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward solitude (Maes et al. 2016). The aim of Maes et al.'s (2016) study was to reveal traditional views on solitude in collectivistic cultures. They found that Belgian adolescents showed greater negative and less positive attitudes toward being alone than did Chinese adolescents. This finding is in line with previous findings (Suedfeld 1982) indicating that in the West, being alone is perceived as an undesirable state. However, replication of these results is needed, as this is the first study to examine positive and negative attitudes toward being alone from a cross-cultural perspective.

3 Four States: Solitary Being, Communal Being, Solitary Doing, and Communal Doing

The current section juxtaposes the two dimensions proposed in the previous sections: being-doing and solitude-community. Thus, the four states derived from these two dimensions will be reviewed.

3.1 Solitary Being

The space associated with solitary being is probably the most common of the images of solitude, such as the lonely search for a spiritual epiphany in the woods. For example, Jewish mystical texts often advocate the benefits of physical seclusion, such as Rabbi Nathan of Breslov's counsel to his son, "Do not lose even one single day by forgoing solitary meditation, and ponder on your purpose in life every day…" (Hallamish 1999).

Although meditation and mindfulness are not aimed at achieving immediate instrumental results, mindfulness has been reported to yield a wide array of positive effects in everyday life. Baccarani et al. (2013) demonstrated that practicing mindfulness for 4 weeks enhanced well-being, self-control, general health and vitality, and diminished anxiety and depression. Negative associations between mindfulness and depression and anxiety have been reported in a variety of studies from various perspectives (Desrosiers et al. 2013a, b; Van Dam et al. 2014). Additional reported associations between mindfulness and positive outcomes have included subjective well-being, positive affect, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, optimism, self-regulation, self-compassion, positive relationships, vitality, creativity, health, longevity, and a range of cognitive skills (Brown and Kasser 2005; Brown and Ryan 2003; Baer et al. 2004; Brown et al. 2007; Carson et al. 2004).

In addition to mindfulness, some types of solitude also seem to capture the essence of *solitary being*. For example, solitude characterized by self-transformation (Long and Averill 2003) occurs when an individual has an understanding of the self and is aware of changes occurring within. Storr (1989) suggested that by being separated from our customary social and physical contexts, or by reducing our frequent experience of them, solitude can facilitate self-examination and reconceptualization, as well as ease adjustment to change. Also Koch (1994) noted how solitude facilitates self-attunement and reflection. Empirical studies have shown that individuals often gain a new understanding of themselves and their priorities from solitude, using solitude for contemplation of internal and external concerns (Long 2000; Long et al. 2003).

One aspect of being alone, of course, is manifested in *loneliness*, often incurring deleterious effects to mental health, though this perspective does not capture the essence of solitary being as described above. Studies on loneliness and isolation span a wide array of issues, ranging from adverse effects of loneliness on child and adolescent development (e.g., Stickley et al. 2016), to its role in various pathologies (e.g., Ebesutani et al. 2015), and to its generally harmful nature (Weiss 1973). Hence, it would be reasonable to assume that for solitary being, as for any of the other reviewed states, negative outcomes could ensue if practiced in an extreme and unbalanced manner.

3.2 Communal Being

Laroche et al. (2014) proposed a framework of *communal being*, suggesting that there is more to this shared experience than that of simply occupying the same physical space or joining others in a shared activity. This perspective is explored through embodiment in time, defined as the relational experience of living within a specific period of time, in which the individual's internal and external experiences are reshaped by being cognizant of those involved. Each individual's experience is no longer an exclusive relational phenomenon between the self and the outside, but rather a dynamic experience in which the awareness of the other shapes both one's own and the other's living experience.

Therefore, in its most basic form, communal being reflects a coordinated experience of the embodied perspectives that emerge from mutual relational dynamics and their co-regulation, both occurring at the neural, cognitive, and behavioral levels. Zahavi (2014) suggested that these mutual experiences extend beyond behavioral and cognitive manifestations, proposing a framework in which emotions may become interdependent entities as well.

Communal being, then, represents a space in which an individual may engage in *being*, sharing that experience with others. In group meditation, for instance, individuals often engage in a state of being while in a group. Therefore, at its very basic level, meditation can be conducted together, transforming *being* into a communal experience. Moreover, communal being through mindfulness, in joint participation of both teacher and students, may in itself be largely responsible for the program's positive outcomes, as participants feel the group's support and the closeness they experience with individuals who they may even be unable to name (McCown 2016). This seemingly surreal experience of the power of the group can be viewed as evolutionary, and as noted, may occur initially at a neural level, ultimately resulting in our unspoken knowledge of other's feelings, intentions, etc. (McCown 2016; Laroche et al. 2014).

Communal being is also reflected in the relational component of solitude, as suggested by Koch (1994) and then by Long and Averill (2003). Koch (1994) indicated that one's consciousness in solitude is not limited to self-focus or inward direction. He described outer-directed solitude experiences as *engaged disengagement*, with introjected significant others. Long and Averill (2003) viewed one of the benefits of outward-directed solitude states as possible feelings of increased intimacy with others.

3.3 Solitary Doing

Solitary doing refers to engaging in doing activities alone. Solitary doing can originate from a desire to spend time alone or from an absence of desire to spend time with others, an indication that individuals may elect to engage in everyday activities on their own and enjoy the experience (Leary et al. 2003). Research addressing the benefits of engaging in solitary doing is scarce and inconclusive, as it lacks a clear conception of how to evaluate the outcomes of such activities. For example, engaging in solitary activities was shown not to be associated with well-being when examined through everyday activities (Roeters et al. 2014), but was positively associated with well-being when examined through autonomous solitude (Chua and Koestner 2008). Other indications of positive effects of solitary doing may be inferred from work-related studies. A recent study investigated the effects of the presence of other individuals on the performance of x-ray security personnel (Yu and Wu 2015). It was found that the mere presence of another individual accelerated the workers' responses for simple tasks, but slowed them down during more complex ones, suggesting that solitary work may be more beneficial during complex and challenging tasks.

Outcomes of the growing prevalence of teamwork in the workplace has been recently studied empirically (Morice et al. 2015). Performance among students studying alone was compared with that of students studying with peers. While those studying with peers reported greater satisfaction from the learning process, objective outcomes of the two groups were similar. Other studies comparing the benefits of team versus individual work have also found that teamwork sustains team members' positive mood, while working alone sustains better performance (Park and Hinsz 2015).

3.4 Communal Doing

Classic research in social psychology has amply demonstrated that people think, feel, and act qualitatively differently when being with others than when alone (e.g., Asch 1956). Findings from flow research illustrate the benefits of *communal doing*, or doing together, showing that solitary flow, while enjoyable, may not be as pleasurable as social flow.

Early research regarding flow characterized it as an individual phenomenon, because *flow* is an intrinsically rewarding, highly absorbing state, in which individuals lose a sense of time and the awareness of self (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 2014). However, later investigators noted that flow in a social context may comprise a qualitatively different phenomenon than that experienced in isolation, and that some of the most enjoyable flow experiences can transpire in the course of social interaction (e.g., Froh et al. 1993). In highly interdependent situations, people may serve as agents of flow for each other. This form of social flow is mutual and reciprocal, a form that is likely to be qualitatively different from solitary flow. In circumstances involving the mere presence of others and in some co-active social situations, a form of solitary flow can be expected, because the unit of performance is the individual. However, when the unit of performance is a group, especially a team needing to accomplish tasks requiring interdependence and cooperation, social flow would be more likely to manifest itself.

Walker (2010) found social flow to be a greater source of pleasure than was solitary flow. In both of Walker's experiments, participants playing simple, individual paddleball games reported and expressed more joy performing with others than they did playing alone. Walker concluded simply that "doing it together is better than doing it alone" (p. 3).

4 Summary and Suggestions for Further Exploration

The search for the formula to a balanced life has been shown to be pervasive in numerous cultures, philosophies, and academic theory. In their review of the theoretical and empirical literature on meaning, Martela and Steger (2016) concluded that "in order to live in the world as reflective beings, humans seem to need three things: they need to comprehend the world around them, they need to find direction for their actions, and they need to find worth in their lives" (p. 541). According to Martela and Steger, coherence, purpose, and significance in life may be achieved through reflection on all of the individual's past, present, and future activities and relationships. Martela and Steger's "three things" appear to correspond directly to key components of the suggested model: *being*, *doing*, and *relating*.

Schlegel and colleagues' work on true self-concept and meaning in life has accorded empirical support to the contribution of (authentic) being—termed *true self*—to the sense of meaning in life. More importantly, their findings illuminate the unique characteristics of the *being* states that are essential to the sense of meaning in life: being authentic and with true self-knowledge (Schlegel et al. 2009).

Various theories and studies of well-being have identified two key features of how to live a good life and to achieve the best that is within us: seeking people and seeking attainable goals (or achievements). Many studies support the importance of these two elements as antecedents of longevity, physical and mental health, positive emotions, and sense of meaning. However, these two key features have corresponding complementary aspects: states of solitude and states of being. These secondary features have been largely neglected

by the academic community, leaving key elements of well-being under-studied and thus, not fully understood. This paper provides a new conceptual framework for human day-to-day existence and experience. It shows that all four types of existential modes (*solitary doing, communal doing, solitary being*, and *communal being*) and the balance between them in everyday life are essential for human health and flourishing. The model's key message is that individuals not only need to be engaged in doing (active) states and in communal (relational) situations, but they can also achieve growth as a consequence of experiencing both *being* situations and *solitude* situations. What comes to mind is that these two modes—being and solitude—perhaps stigmatized by their inferior popular image, can be perceived as under-used muscles that have the potential of facilitating a stronger, more complete life.

Examining each of these four existential modes separately, as well as the balance between the two concomitant modes of each dimension, in addition to the balanced life in its integrated form, can comprise a major contribution to fostering fuller and more satisfying lives. Integrating these four existential modes in research and practice may have wide-ranging implications for individuals at work, with family, and with themselves.

This theoretical model requires a confirmatory research program involving a variety of studies conducted in diverse contexts with diverse populations in diverse cultures and faiths. To do so, and in order to better understand the theoretical construct of the balanced life presented in this paper in terms of a metric, a possible research track can be suggested. While there is growing interest in developing a conceptual understanding of balance in everyday life, most studies have focused on balancing different life domains, such as work and non-work (i.e., family/relationships, leisure, and self-maintenance) domains.

Critically, in the current model, the desired balance is not between life domains, but between four existential situations reflected in two basic dimensions, implicitly or explicitly suggested by most psychological and cultural traditions: doing/being and relationship/solitude. Each of the four states may appear in each one of the life domains. As the concept of the balanced life continues to be methodologically operationalized in a variety of ways, it seems appropriate at this initial stage to implement and examine the model in all the metric approaches that are acknowledged in the literature. Among possible research questions, five measurable domains can be suggested: (1) Regarding time allocation, how much time does an individual spend each day, week, or month in each state? What is the optimal allocation for attaining personal well-being, and what are the moderators of the (individual's or group's) optimal allocations. (2) Regarding the subjective experience of balance, how do individuals express their perception of the pleasurable aspects of their desirable state or states? What words to they choose to describe their desirable or undesirable states? How do individuals assess and compare their experiences of different states, both qualitatively and quantitatively? (3) Regarding the use of personal abilities, how do individuals perceive developing and exercising their physical, mental, social, and spiritual capacities? Are the four states apportioned for the individual in ways that are satisfying and health-promoting? (4) Regarding desires and obligations, how do individuals perceive the balance between desired activities (reflected internal values, interests, and goals) and activities that individuals feel compelled to carry out in order to accommodate external demands and commitments? (5) Can an 'unbalanced' person benefit from training (e.g., therapeutic interventions) to acquire life tools for achieving and maintaining an optimal sense of balance and fulfillment?

Given the novelty of the model, future qualitative studies are needed to deepen our understanding of the ways individuals subjectively interpret daily existential experiences. Qualitative studies with different age groups might be conducted to explore differences in

themes and balance experiences expressed at different life stages. Future research on the proposed model may focus on exploring within- and between-individual variability in the contributions of each existential mode to various components of the good life.

Future research may also identify the moderated personal and contextual variables which increase or decrease the impact of *solitary doing, communal doing, solitary being*, and *communal being* on feelings and performance at work and in other life domains. For example, solitude can be either potentially positive or negative, depending on situational and personal factors that have yet to be identified and explored. Within-individual effects on the daily or moment level can be explored by diary studies or experience-sampling studies, or by longitudinal studies with multiple time measurements for the exploration of cumulative effects. Longitudinal designs can also be used in between-subject studies to identify desirable or undesirable, immediate, or longer-term effects that *solitary doing, communal doing, solitary being*, and *communal being* may have on different individuals. For instance, does the individual's optimal balance shift through various life stages? Is there a role for gender in determining an individual's personal balance formula? Similarly, how do personal traits, such as introversion and extroversion, affect the individual's desired states? Important theoretical and empirical question for future consideration is whether individuals might differ in their threshold for satisfying each of the four existential modes.

This model has practical implications in counseling and psychotherapy as well as at school or at the workplace. Teaching and helping children, young and older adults, and employees to enjoy various states of daily life, and developing the capacity to transition smoothly between states in accordance with personal preferences and contextual circumstances, may help individuals live fuller and more meaningful lives.

5 Limitations

The proposed model subscribes to the meta-theoretical assumptions of complex systems models. In his discussion of the limits and boundaries of building theoretical representations of complex systems, Cilliers (2005) argued that in constructing representations of open systems, we are forced to exclude some features, and since the effects of these omissions are non-linear, we cannot predict their magnitude. According to Cilliers (2005), the argument that the boundaries of complex systems cannot be identified finally and completely, is not an argument eschewing the construction of reasonable representations, but rather an argument that the inescapable limitations of the representations should be acknowledged. This limitation has relevance to the proposed model of the balanced life.

A further limitation is that the conventionally published discourse relating to this theoretical model has been promulgated in the West, albeit with many elements inspired by Eastern thought. While the relevance of this model to the West has been presented in the current paper, a corresponding discourse and exploration in other parts of the globe would help determine the extent of its universal generalizability.

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