CHAPTER 1

Thriving as the Synergy of Wellness, Fairness, and Worthiness

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While most definitions of happiness (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryff, 1989), flourishing (Seligman, 2011), and thriving (Brown et al., 2017; Carver, 1998; Kleine et al., 2019; Seppälä et al., 2020) acknowledge the role of interpersonal relations, there is not much discussion of other contextual factors, such as experiences of fairness and equality, let alone the role of power or capitalism. And yet injustice (Prilleltensky, 2012), inequality (Payne, 2017), power differentials (Ponsford et al., 2021; Prilleltensky, 2008), exclusion (Riva & Eck, 2016), neoliberal ideologies (Adams et al., 2019), and capitalism (Kasser at al., 2007) play a considerable role in our ability to live life to the fullest.

Thriving has usually been defined in terms of the strengths that individuals exhibit in coping with developmental tasks (Brown et al., 2017; Bundick et al., 2010). To give external factors their due, we aim to expand the definition of thriving. We propose here that *thriving is a positive state of affairs in individuals, relationships, and settings (families, workplaces, communities, nations, planet), consisting of interacting conditions of fairness, experiences of worthiness, and outcomes of wellness. This positive state of affairs is the result of mutually reinforcing processes among fairness, wellness, and worthiness. Furthermore, thriving is one pole of a continuum, at the other end of which there is suffering. The more we, as a society, get closer to the thriving end of the continuum, the higher the common good of the whole. Ideally, the path towards thriving and the common good entails a balance among hedonia (joy and pleasure), eudaimonia (meaning and significance), and koinonia (community and sharing)* (Tuominen, 2015).

This definition is in line with ecological models of thriving, which consider the bidirectional relationship between individual and contextual assets throughout the lifespan (Benson & Scales, 2009; Bundick et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2003). Representative of the ecological tradition in

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thriving is the definition advanced by Bundick et al. (2010, p. 891): "Thriving refers to a dynamic and purposeful process of individual ←→ context interactions over time, through which the person and his/her environment are mutually enhanced." The authors further argue:

> The final component of the definition that highlights *mutual enhancement* implies that these interactions are beneficial for both the context (i.e., the individual contributes to his or her surroundings) and the individual (i.e., the environment in which one is embedded has a positive influence on one's development). (p. 891)

Similarly, King and Mangan have recently argued that thriving is "a dynamic process that emphasizes an ever-optimizing goodness of fit between one's context and one's strengths and leads not only to individual thriving but positive contributions to beyond the self" (2023, p. 479). This book is based on the premise that more work is required to understand how to create thriving contexts and what are their defining features. We believe that scholarly efforts are still focused on how to make sure people – not necessarily contexts – thrive. In a review of the literature, Brown and colleagues (2017) concluded that "human thriving was defined as the joint experience of development and success, which can be realized through effective holistic functioning and observed through the experience of a high-level of well-being and a perceived high-level of performance" (p. 174). This definition is emblematic of the person-centered approach to the study of thriving. Similar formulations of thriving have been provided by Schreiner (2013) and Seppälä et al. (2020).

Our conceptualization of thriving refers not just to individual people but to collectives and to settings. Thus, when we talk about how *people* thrive in this book, we refer to people in the singular and in the plural. We mean a single person, a dyad, a trio, a group, a workplace, a community, a nation, or indeed the entire planet. Instead of creating a dichotomy between the individual and the community, we refer to people as encompassing the unique lives of each one of us, the relational bonds that tie us together, and the communities and settings we are a part of.

Our definition of thriving acknowledges the primordial role of *situational fairness*, the *phenomenology of worthiness*, and the myriad *forms of wellness*. In other words, thriving consists of context + experiences + outcomes. Existing conceptualizations of thriving focus especially on the last two and tend to neglect the first, which, as we shall see, is crucial (Brown et al., 2017; Kleine et al., 2019). We will argue that the key context impacting our ability to thrive as individuals and collectives is one of fairness. Similarly, we will claim

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that key experiences have to do with mattering and a sense of worth, both of which have to do with feeling valued and opportunities to add value. The more we participate in civic affairs and the more we intentionally cooperate in the workplace, the better our experiences of mattering. Finally, we will make the point that wellness exists in multiple forms, and for people to thrive, they should consider diversifying their investments in happiness and the good life.

In this chapter, we define each of the components of thriving, review the relationship between each pair (wellness and fairness, wellness and worthiness, and fairness and worthiness), propose an interactional model where the three factors coexist in a state of reciprocal determinism, conceptualize how settings thrive, and describe the practice of thriving across ecological levels.

Wellness

People thrive when they achieve a certain and sustainable level of satisfaction in different domains of wellness (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Although various models exist, we use here the I COPPE because it's one of the most contextual frameworks. I COPPE stands for interpersonal, communal, occupational, physical, psychological, and economic (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Consequently, we define wellness as a positive and sustainable state of affairs in the I COPPE domains of life.

There is evidence that people need to achieve at least a minimal level of satisfaction in all of these domains to experience a purposeful and pleasurable life, both of which are required for thriving (Corning, 2011; Dolan, 2014; Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Our philosophy is in line with the capabilities approach proposed by Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011), and with multiple definitions of happiness, which include several factors, such as Seligman's (2011) PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishments), Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination (autonomy, relatedness, and competence), and Ryff's (1989) theory of well-being (self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, control over one's own environment, purpose in life, and the feeling of continuous personal growth). The distinguishing factor between these models and I COPPE is that the latter is very explicit about contextual factors such as economic, community, and occupational conditions.

All these domains must pass a minimum threshold for people to have a good life (Corning, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011). Studies also show that the presence of one domain enhances the satisfaction of others. For example,

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physical improves psychological well-being. Community well-being also improves our emotional wellness (Prilleltensky, 2016; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). When a threshold is not met, however, people risk scarcity, which imposes a bandwidth tax on individuals (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013). This means that scarcity dominates our attention in one particular area of need and takes attention away from others. For example, if people suffer economic deprivation, their focus is going to be on paying the bills and not on a healthy diet. This is the bandwidth tax in action. Excessive focus on financial needs not only creates stress, but it also undermines other actions that can potentially reduce stress, such as exercise and communing with friends. This is why, as a society, we must strive to meet everyone's basic needs (Sandbu, 2020).

This brings us to an important additional component of wellness, which is its subjective and objective components. We advocate for a conception of wellness in which both objective and subjective needs must be met. In the case of scarcity noted earlier, financial resources constitute an objective good. Feeling financially secure is a subjective state. When it comes to community well-being, for instance, neighborhood safety is an objective good, whereas a sense of community is a subjective state.

In summary, wellness consists of complementary components, captured in the acronym I COPPE. All components must pass a certain threshold. When they do, the chances of wellness increase. When they don't, there is a risk of scarcity, in which excessive focus on one domain takes away from much-needed attention to others. As a result, it is essential to strive for a diversified and balanced investment approach to well-being, where the satisfaction of objective and subjective needs in all domains is met (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). In working with individuals and communities, it is important to assess the overall state of I COPPE well-being in order to chart a course of action. People may go to the doctor for physical, or to a therapist for emotional, pain, but the source of their suffering may be related to another aspect of well-being, such as loneliness, bullying at work, or discrimination in the community. Given that all these domains are always interacting, a comprehensive assessment of people's well-being is called for before preventive or reactive interventions may be put in place.

Worthiness

Few experiences rival in importance our sense of worth. Our feeling of worthiness, or that we matter in the world, derives from two complementary phenomena: *feeling valued* and *adding value*. Whereas the former refers

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to being appreciated, recognized, and seen, the latter refers to making a contribution or a difference in the world (Brooks, 2023; Flett, 2018; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). We can feel valued by, and add value to, self and others. Although we can nourish our worthiness with self-compassion (Neff & Germer, 2017), self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), there is a limit to how much we can matter without appreciation from, and contributions to, others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). Worthiness is a relational concept par excellence. We get a sense of our worth vis-à-vis our interactions with others. Since we are comparing machines (Payne, 2017), we are forever assessing whether we matter, how much, to whom, and in what context (Brooks, 2023; Cohen, 2022; Waldinger & Schulz, 2023).

A sense of mattering, or worthiness, is related to multiple outcomes, such as overall health (Case & Deaton, 2020), psychological well-being (Flett, 2018), depression, and aggression (Elliott, 2009). There is even compelling evidence that the less people feel that they matter, the higher the level of suicidal ideation and drug intake (Elliott, 2009), extremist views (Sandel, 2020), and xenophobia (Fukuyama, 2018). Some people respond to lack of mattering by internalizing shame, others by externalizing aggression. The scarcity of worthiness results from innumerable experiences in the family, at school, work, and the community. Marginalization, subtle or blatant, creates a wedge among people at best and a sense of insignificance at worst (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Nothing feels more degrading than the sense that you are insignificant; that other people ignore you; that they can do without you; and that if you vanished, nobody would notice. No assault on your dignity is greater than the message that you do not matter and that your presence means nothing to others (Cohen, 2022). In a perceptive passage written in 1890, the great American psychologist William James wrote,

> If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met "cut us dead," and acted as if we were nonexisting things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all. (James, 1890, pp. 293–294)

Scores of studies have gone on to document the deleterious consequences of ostracism, exclusion, and marginalization (Cohen, 2022; Riva & Eck, 2016; Williams, 2007) on overall well-being and sense of dignity.

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Four decades before James' poignant statement, another great observer of human behavior, Charlotte Brontë, wrote about the opposite experience. Following many trials and tribulations, heartbroken, sick, and penniless, Jane Eyre arrived at a new town. There, she found recognition and love from the community and her students. As a teacher, Jane Eyre gained respect and appreciation:

> I felt I became a favourite in the neighbourhood. Whenever I went out, I heard on all sides cordial salutations, and was welcomed with friendly smiles. To live amidst general regard . . . is like sitting in sunshine, calm and sweet; serene inward feelings bud and bloom under the ray. At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection. (Brontë, 1847, p. 236)

These vivid portrayals of worthiness and its absence convey the weight of mattering, dignity, and respect on our soul.

The experience of *feeling valued* captures many aspects essential to thriving, such as being loved, nurtured, cared for, respected, appreciated, recognized, seen, and heard (Biglan, 2015; Brooks, 2023). The sense of *adding value* is no less consequential, for it encompasses autonomy, agency, freedom, self-determination, participation, competence, self-efficacy, mastery, learning, skill-building, helping, making a difference, caring for others, and being relevant in the world (Bandura, 2001; Cohen, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Feeling valued and *adding value* are not only crucial for thriving, but also complementary, for it is hard to add value if our efforts are not valued. These two elements of worthiness can engage in either a vicious or virtuous cycle. The more we feel valued, the more likely we are to add value, engendering a virtuous cycle (Crocker et al., 2017). And the less we feel valued, the less likely we are to venture a contribution, thus inhibiting the possibility of positive experiences (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

Since our confidence to take risks and embrace our agency is shaped early in life, it is incumbent upon parents, teachers, and authority figures to help us develop a sense of mattering (Biglan, 2015; Flett, 2018; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). But mattering is shaped not only by our loved ones; it is also affected by the culture, social media, and the regnant sociopolitical ideologies (Adams et al., 2019; Kasser et al., 2007; Teo, 2018).

Amidst discourses of meritocracy, many people feel like they don't matter. If they don't happen to succeed by neoliberal standards, they retreat in shame (Case & Deaton, 2020; Payne, 2017). Nothing is more appealing to

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neoliberal ideology than the notion that if you work hard enough, success is within reach. Although this myth has been debunked, people still want to believe that through sheer effort and ingenuity anyone can overcome adversity and achieve happiness (Adams et al., 2019; Cohen, 2022; Sandel, 2020). The reason meritocracy is problematic, however, is because it assumes that motivation relies solely on the willpower of the individual, and it ignores the fact that not all of us have been taught or trained to exercise willpower, nor do we have the cultural resources to do so. Effort, motivation, grit, and perseverance are cultivated, not turned on and off like a faucet. Motivation is always interacting with opportunities. You can invest great dedication, but if you don't have enough resources, or if your school is underfunded and your parents are unable to enrich your education through extracurricular activities, motivation alone will take you only so far.

Americans, for example, sneer at oligarchic privilege. What they don't fully realize is that they have replaced one kind of privilege for another. It used to be that the desired demographic and the right family name would open doors for you in society. Now, instead of family pedigree, people rely on educational pedigree. Unfortunately, elite colleges remain incredibly insular; only a tiny fraction of their student body comes from the lower socioeconomic quintile (Tough, 2019). As a result of the myth of meritocracy, those who cannot climb the ladder of success end up blaming themselves. After all, as the American dream goes, if you work hard enough, you can make it. If you don't make it, the corollary goes, you are either incompetent or lazy, and you don't matter (Payne, 2017; Sandel, 2020).

Millions of people without college degrees walk around with a sense of shame, exacerbated by the rhetoric of rising, that if you work hard enough, you can make it. The sense of failure many people carry within them has led to deaths of despair, by suicide or addictions (Case & Deaton, 2020). People with less education feel that they matter less in society. At the same time, many others walk around with a sense of hubris that they made it not because of their last name but because of their intellectual prowess, when in fact the two are highly correlated (Sandel, 2020). Family privilege begets educational privilege. We can counteract this by promoting social fairness and not just the virtues of cognitive fitness. We can also recognize the dignity of any type of work and not just the kind that comes with higher degrees. We must make sure everyone feels that their contributions to the common good are valued. We must stop dismissing, however unknowingly, people with lesser levels of education (Putnam, 2015, 2021).

To illustrate the contextual pressures that undermine mattering in our culture we created Table 1.1. As may be seen, there are stressors associated

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Table 1.1 *Contextual pressures and their effects on worthiness*

Domains of life	Contextual pressures	Effects on worthiness
Interpersonal	Isolation, social comparisons	Never lovable enough
Communal	Culture of competition, perfection, success, exclusion	Never popular enough
Occupational	Unrealistic expectations to be the best and achieve fame	Never smart enough
Psychological	Pressure to excel and make it	Never good enough
Physical	Culture of bodily perfection	Never attractive enough
Economic	Expectation to be wealthy	Never successful enough

with each one of the I COPPE domains of life. Each of the contextual pressures results in erosion of our worthiness. We readily acknowledge that these pressures are culture-specific and there may very well be societies where neoliberal narratives are not as prevalent, but in North America, for example, they still reign supreme (Case & Deaton, 2020; Giridharadas, 2018; Payne, 2017; Sandel, 2020).

Worthiness interacts with wellness in many other ways. With a plus sign, Table 1.2 represents positive experiences that strengthen our sense of worthiness in the I COPPE areas. With a minus sign, we show negative experiences that diminish it.

In a capitalist society, where competition is normalized and our sense of worth is influenced by consumerism and comparisons on social media, the negative signs in Table 1.2 are very prevalent and hard to escape (Adams et al., 2019; Giridharadas, 2018; Kasser at al., 2007). To ensure that the pluses surpass the minuses, you have to swim against the tide. You have to create a mini counterculture among family, friends, and coworkers. This is no easy feat, considering the enormous pressures to fit in with the neoliberal ideology of self-made people (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). The cultural aspects of worthiness highlight the subjective aspects of fairness and not just objective distributions. We explore next various conceptions of fairness and how they impact wellness and worthiness.

Fairness

For us, fairness is the practice of justice. While they are often treated as synonyms, we regard justice as a principle that gets translated into action through the practice of fairness (Fenton, 2021; Rawls, 2001). Therefore, to

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Table 1.2 *Positive and negative experiences of worthiness across I COPPE domains*

Domains of life	Feeling valued (+) or devalued (−)	Adding value (+) or feeling helpless (−)
Interpersonal	+Perceived support −Interpersonal rejection	+Helpful to others −Isolated and lonely
Communal	+Sense of belonging −Exclusion	+Engaged −Disengaged
Occupational	+Respected −Competition and comparison	+Team leader −Uninvolved
Psychological	+Positive self-regard −Lack of self-compassion	+Mastery and self-efficacy −Lack of control
Physical	+Positive body image −Negative body image	+Looking after well-being −Helpless about well-being
Economic	+High SES −Lack of resources	+Confidence in employment −Fear of failure

formulate fair practices, we need to understand conceptions of justice. In *The Republic*, Plato (2012) asserted that justice involves giving each person his or her due. In our view, "due" must encompass subjective and objective elements.

Subjective aspects entail respect and a sense of worth. Each person should be treated with dignity (Miller, 2001). These are foundational for a sense of personal worth. People deserve to feel valued by the mere fact that they are human beings. Similarly, they should be given an opportunity to add value. Dignity, respect, worthiness, mattering – these are all subjective goods human beings are entitled to. Objective goods entail food, clothing, housing, health care, and access to free education, among others.

Since the original conception of justice entailed distribution of goods, a major focus over the ages has been on distributive justice. The central question that has occupied philosophers and politicians has been on what basis to distribute social goods (Sandel, 2010). Although various criteria have been advanced, most of them revolve around two: need and merit, where the latter is often subdivided into merit due to effort or talent. In other words, getting a resource – such as a pay raise or a scholarship – due to merit means that you either worked hard for it (effort) or that you are very smart (talent). Societies differ vastly on how they distribute social goods. Many countries offer health care for free to the entire population. They regard this as a fundamental human need that should not be tied to

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any form of merit. The United States, for example, a notorious outlier when it comes to the provision of health care, does not regard it as a universal human need and imposes numerous obstacles on citizens to get it. As a result, millions of people go without proper medical attention (Marmot, 2015; Sandbu, 2020).

We propose that once everybody's basic needs have been met, then it is justified to divide some goods on the basis of effort. Everyone should start life with the same basic privileges, such as high-quality education, free health care, maternity and paternity leave, unemployment insurance, and a robust safety net. In such a scenario, where all children attend similarly resourced schools, and come from well-supported families, then it is acceptable to reward with scholarships those who work really hard and/or benefit from natural talents. The problem is that such a scenario is quite utopian in many countries. The pretense exists that all kids receive high-quality education and that their health care needs are covered, but in actual fact that is not the case (Marmot, 2015; Tough, 2019). Owing to poor levels of education and histories of marginalization and oppression, many families are not able to provide an enriching educational environment for their children (Biglan, 2015). As a result, kids arrive at school with vastly different levels of preparation for learning. As noted above, the myth of meritocracy – that everyone can achieve success if they work hard enough – only reinforces the sense of failure in those who are unable to go to college or get ahead in life (Tough, 2019).

Throughout their schooling, many kids learn that they are not smart enough, capable enough, or disciplined enough to advance in life. That message, that they are not smart enough, accompanies many kids for life (Tough, 2019). That message is unfair because it forces kids to internalize a social failure.

People do not object to others getting a bigger piece of the pie, provided that the playing field is level and that everyone has a decent chance of progress (Gollwitzer & van Prooijen, 2016; Lind, 2020). For that, everyone must have their basic needs met. In the absence of that, privileging merit over need is unjustified.

Over the years, thinkers identified a second type of justice, having to do with process, and not distribution (Gollwitzer & van Prooijen, 2016; Lind, 2020). *Procedural* justice refers to the ability of people to participate in decisions affecting their lives. This is often referred to as having *voice and choice*. If someone at work is about to change a procedure that is going to affect my well-being, I deserve to be consulted. Extrapolated to the political level, citizens have a right to participate in the democratic process of electing officials and having a say in policies affecting their communities.

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But procedural justice pertains not just to work or politics but also to relationships, families, and schools, for in all these arenas, we deserve to have a say over decisions big and small, from where we vacation to how we spend the family's money to who controls the remote control (Dette-Hagenmeyer & Reichle, 2016; Kawamura & Brown, 2010).

Numerous studies demonstrate that human beings are exceedingly sensitive to procedural and distributive injustice (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016; Sun, 2013). We feel offended and aggrieved when fairness in processes or distributions is violated. Our dignity is eroded when we are the subject of unfair treatment (Fenton, 2021). To uphold fairness, societies develop rules and regulations to make sure that those who set policies are impartial (Corning, 2011). At the time of this writing in 2022, the winter Olympics are taking place in Beijing, and accusations of unfair advantage due to drug use are again casting doubt over the fairness of the games. If you are interviewing for a job, you want to make sure that there is not an unfair advantage to some candidates due to the color of their skin, gender, last name, or some other unearned advantage.

When fairness violations occur, there is a need to invoke *corrective* or *restorative* justice (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016). The need to correct an injustice has given rise to policies such as affirmative action and reparations. After the holocaust, Germany compensated Jews and the state of Israel for the atrocities committed against the Jewish people during the Second World War. In the United States, there is a debate concerning reparations for slavery. Truth and Reconciliation committees, of the kind that helped South Africa heal after apartheid, are a form of corrective and restorative justice where victims and perpetrators confront one another and find a way to move forward and end the violence. In many work and educational settings, there are restorative justice efforts to address fairness violations (Hicks, 2011, 2018).

Although here we have briefly reviewed only distributive, procedural, and corrective fairness, there are other types, such as informational justice at work and developmental justice in families. For now, suffice it to know that fairness supports our sense of worthiness, and violations of it erode both wellness and worthiness. In the next section, we explore in more depth and specificity the relationships among fairness, wellness, and worthiness.

Connections among Wellness, Fairness, and Worthiness

From the foregoing discussion, we can ascertain that wellness, fairness, and worthiness are essential for thriving. Each one of them offers a unique contribution to our ability to thrive and flourish. Conditions of fairness

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enable us to feel treated with respect. Experiences of worthiness make us feel valued, and outcomes of wellness bring satisfaction to our lives. We believe that each one of these three pillars offers something uniquely human and precious. But above and beyond their individual contributions to a thriving life, it is their synergy that potentiates thriving in individuals and societies. To understand their synergy, we need to review first their dyadic influences (see Table 1.3).

The Relationship between Fairness and Wellness

As early as 1986, community psychologist George Albee linked "barriers to a just world" (p. 894) to causes of illness and distress, prefiguring a burgeoning interest in the relationship between justice and well-being. Today, arguments connecting wellness and fairness can be found across the social sciences. Key to most are two surprisingly simple ideas. First, as we reviewed above, humans are wired for fairness; second, fairness helps stabilize beneficial social structures.

Theorists have elaborated upon these ideas in different, yet complementary, ways (Scarpa et al., 2021). Community psychologists contend that justice fosters well-being by promoting health, improving relationships, and preventing social comparison and status-based harm (Prilleltensky, 2012, 2013). Some researchers suggest that justice supports wellness by retrenching democracy and trust in institutions (Heimburg et al., 2021), while others believe that justice fosters flourishing by facilitating cooperation and upholding beneficial norms and practices (Fowers et al., 2021).

These arguments are supported by evidence that, at all levels, people suffer under conditions of injustice (see Table 1.3). When individuals experience discrimination, they are more likely to report loneliness, depression, and heart disease (Mays et al., 2007; Priest et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2019). Repeated experiences of perceived unfairness have also been linked to reduced mental health and health functioning, increased depression, and greater drug use (De Vogli et al., 2007; Resnicow et al., 2021). Unfairness, it turns out, is a serious source of measurable harm comparable to pollution or violence.

The connection between wellness and fairness extends beyond our personal lives to the workplace. Research has documented reliable relationships between unfair treatment and burnout, diminished health, and lower job satisfaction (Daniels et al., 2017). Workplace studies have also found links between organizational justice and employee satisfaction (Lawson et al., 2009; O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019; Strom et al., 2014),

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Table 1.3 *Empirical studies linking mattering, fairness, and well-being*

Study	Discipline	Method	Sample	N/K	Predictor	Outcome/response	Outcome
Fairness and wellness							
Mays et al., 2007	Public health/ psychology	Literature review	Unsystematic	N/A	Racism; discrimination	Health (numerous outcomes)	"Social unfairness works to harm individual health" (p. 214).
Williams et al., 2012	Public health/ psychology	Multiple regression	Probability: South Africa + USA, multi-race	6,082	Perceived discrimination	Mastery; self-esteem	Perceived unfairness negatively impacts psychological mastery and self-esteem.
Williams et al., 2019	Public health	Literature review	Unsystematic	N/A	Cultural racism, structural/ institutional racism, segregation, discrimination	Health	Racism negatively impacts health outcomes in myriad ways.
Priest et al., 2014	Public health	Systematic review	Systematic review, youth, and children	153 papers	Racism	Mental health, physical health, well-being, QOL, objective measures	Racial discrimination is a critical determinant of youth well-being.
Resnicow et al., 2021	Public health	Bivariate correlations	Multimodal, diverse US sample	2,214	Perceived unfairness; everyday discrimination	Mental health, physical health symptoms, substance use	Unfairness was significantly related to worse mental health. Unfairness and discrimination related to depression and high blood pressure.
Daniels et al., 2017	Public health	Systematic review	Intervention studies	8 papers	Organizational justice	Well-being	Strong epidemiological links between occupational justice and well-being, insufficient evidence of intervention success.

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Table 1.3 (*cont.*)

Study	Discipline	Method	Sample	N/K	Predictor	Outcome/response	Outcome
Lawson et al., 2009	Public health	Hierarchical regression	Austrian "state-based police"	1,764	Procedural justice, distributive justice	Job satisfaction	Organizational justice, including distributive and procedural justice interaction, predicted job satisfaction.
Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010	Public health	Multiple	Multiple	N/A	Income and wealth inequality	Education, life expectancy, crime, mental health, violence	Inequality associated with numerous well-being outcomes.
di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020	Community psychology	Multilevel multinomial logistic regression	Large sample from 28 EU countries	169,038; 28 countries	Social Justice Index	Country-level life satisfaction	Social justice significantly contributes to life satisfaction at the national level.
Rambotti, 2015	Sociology	OLS regression models	Wilkinson & Pickett data set from Equality Trust	20 countries	Inequality Poverty	Life expectancy, health, and social problems index	Poverty and inequality interact in complex and context-dependent ways to produce negative well-being outcomes.
Subramanian & Kawachi, 2006	Public health	Cross sectional multilevel modeling	Pooled US census data	201, 221	State-level income inequality	Self-reported health	State-level income equality and self-reported health inversely associated after controlling for individual demographic factors including SES.
Reis et al., 2000	Social psychology	Hierarchical linear modeling	Students from an introductory psychology class	76	Self-determination, connectedness, autonomy, competence, relatedness	Well-being	Daily engagement in self-determination-related activities influences well-being.

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Sharma & Kumra, 2020	Management	SEM	IT professionals in India	344	Organizational justice	Employee engagement, mental health	Workplace spirituality and organizational justice strongly predict employee engagement and mental health.
Lawson et al., 2009	Public health	Hierarchical regression	Members of Australian state-based police	587	Organizational justice	Employee well-being, job satisfaction	OJ predicts job satisfaction above and beyond control variables including job control and support at work.
Strom et al., 2014	Management	Hierarchical regression	Online US-based respondents	357	Procedural justice, transactional leadership	Engagement	Low leader fairness compromises workplace sense of self, reducing engagement.
Dueñas & Gloria, 2017	Education	Hierarchical regression	Latin@ undergraduates	236	Belonging	Mattering	Belonging predicted mattering.
Kawamura & Brown, 2010	Sociology	Logistic regression	Primarily White middle-class US wives	489	Mattering to romantic partner	Perceived (interpersonal) fairness	Mattering is positively related to fairness in division of household labor.
Lachance-Grezela, 2012	Clinical-community psychology	Hierarchical regression	Canadian mothers with young children	141	Gender role Traditionalism, Mattering to romantic partner	Perceived fairness	Mattering moderates the relationship between gender ideology and fairness in assessing housework distribution.
van Prooijen, 2009	Social psychology	Experimental/ ANOVA	3 Studies: university students, then public employees	90, 90, 161	Procedural justice judgments	Autonomy	Procedural justice regulates basic autonomy needs.
van Prooijen et al., 2004	Social psychology	Experimental/ ANOVA	Dutch students	142 + 124	Group belonging	Procedural justice judgements	Inclusion influences reactions to experiences of procedural justice/ injustice.
Valcke et al., 2020	Social psychology	Experimental/ ANOVA	African American + Hispanic US respondents	570	Procedural fairness climate	Belonging	Procedural fairness increases belonging.

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Table 1.3 (*cont.*)

Study	Discipline	Method	Sample	N/K	Predictor	Outcome/response	Outcome
Butler, 2017	Sociology	Qualitative: interviews, observations	Low-income Australian children and families	172	Social and cultural fairness narratives	Belonging	Children deploy various "facework" strategies to maintain dignity and belonging under conditions of unfairness.
De Vogli et al., 2007	Public health policy	Prospective cohort study	8,298 London civil servants		Unfairness, sociodemographic	Heart disease; health functioning	Low-grade employment is associated with unfairness. Unfairness predicts coronary events, poor physical and mental health functioning after controlling for numerous known correlates.
Geiger-Brown et al., 2004	Workplace health and safety	Qualitative analysis of free-form comments	Nurses, nurse administrators, and nurse educators/ researchers	1428	Work demands, injustice/ unfairness, nurse personal responses to work environments	Nursing retention and well-being	Nurses often experience injustice and unfairness, influencing diminished well-being and intent to leave.
Heffernan & Dundon, 2016	Business	Cross-level regression	Irish employees and managers, large corporate employers	187	High performance work system (HPWS); organizational justice, procedural justice, interactional justice as mediators	Job satisfaction, affective commitment, work pressure	Organizational justice buffers negative against effects of HPWS.
Worthiness and Wellness							
Zeeb & Joffe, 2021	Social psychology	Qualitative: Grid elaboration method	UK city residents	96	N/A	N/A	People are motivated to interact with strangers in order to matter (e.g., be recognized, be of assistance).

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Elliot et al, 2005	Social psychology	Logistic regression	Youths aged 11–18, diverse, telephone survey	2,004	Mattering to parents	Suicidal ideation	Mattering strongly influenced suicidal ideation through self-esteem and depression.
Costin & Vignoles, 2020	Social psychology	Structural equation modeling; cross-lagged longitudinal panel	International opt-in respondents, mostly female; community sample	314	Existential mattering	Meaning in life	Mattering may produce meaning in life, defined in terms of coherence and purpose.
Wight et al., 2015	Public health	Sequential OLS regression	Older gay men	312	Internalized gay ageism	Depression	Mattering partially mediates the effect of internalized gay ageism on depressive symptoms.
Hayashi							
Taylor et al, 2019	Public health	Poisson regression	Probability sample of Black, White TN men and women	1026	Age	Allostatic load	Mattering conditioned the relationship between age and allostatic load.
Reece et al, 2021	Positive psychology	Multi-phase survey validation	Largely White, US-based	600-700	Organizational mattering	Various occupational well-being measures	Organizational mattering related to job satisfaction, role level, and intent to leave.
Demir et., 2012	Positive psychology	Structural equation modeling	Midwestern US college students	212	Mattering to others	Happiness	Mattering to others mediates between relationship quality and happiness.
Froidevaux et al., 2016	Occupational psychology	Path analysis	Near-retirement, white-collar Swiss workers from multiple organizations; retirees	161	Mattering	Life satisfaction, retirement planning	Mattering mediates the relationship between social support at work and life satisfaction for older workers, and between general social support and positive affect for retirees.

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Table 1.3 (*cont.*)

Study	Discipline	Method	Sample	N/K	Predictor	Outcome/response	Outcome
Huerta & Fishman, 2014	Education	Qualitative	10 Latino males from six colleges	35	Mattering	Academic success and adjustment	Mentoring programs may improve graduation rates by boosting mattering.
Palmer & Maramba, 2012	Education	Grounded theory-informed qualitative	Four students-affairs practitioners at an East Coast HBCU	4	Mattering	Persistence, academic success	Creating a sense of mattering linked to persistence academic success.
Dixon Rayle & Chung, 2007	Counseling	Multiple regression	First-year college students	533	Social support, mattering to college, mattering to friends	Academic stress	Mattering to college significantly predicted academic stress.
Murphey et al., 2004	Public health	Logistic regression	CDC Youth risk behavior survey: US adolescents	30,916	community Volunteering, valued by community	12 risk factors	Volunteering to the community increased frequent exercise; valued by community, reduced planned suicide.
Olcón et al., 2016	Social work	Logistic regression	Texas high school students	3181	Mattering to community	Suicidal ideation, suicide attempts	Mattering to the community decreased the odds of suicidal ideation by 34% attempting suicide by 20%.
Turner et al., 2004	Sociology	Multiple regression	Miami middle school students	7,386	Mattering	Depressive symptoms	Mattering buffered against depressive symptoms in all race/ethnicity groups.
Dixon, 2007	Gerontology	Multiple regression	Older US adults in retirement communities	167	Mattering to others	Depression and overall wellness	Mattering was negatively related to depression and related to overall wellness.

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Matera et al., 2021	Health psychology	Multiple regression	Italian people living with HIV and with disabilities	100	Metastereotypes	Mattering, well-being	Improved metastereotypes predicted improved mattering and well-being; mattering predicted well-being.
Flett et al., 2020	Health psychology	Regression	Canadian university students	247	Mattering	Depressive symptoms, insecure attachment	Mattering associated with depression even after controlling for insecure attachment, self-criticism, and rumination.
Flett et al., 2022	Health psychology	Regression and correlation	Canadian university students	253 + 166	Anti-mattering	Depression, loneliness, negative affect, social anxiety	Anti-mattering uniquely predicts variance in outcomes above and beyond mattering and other factors.

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employee well-being (Greenberg, 2011; Heffernan & Dundon, 2016), and community engagement outside of work (Milliken et al., 2015). More detailed research into specialized environments such as schools (Gini et al., 2018) and hospitals (Geiger-Brown et al., 2004; Parola et al., 2022) confirms that when we work in an unfair environment, our well-being suffers. Worse, unfair conditions can drive essential workers out of professions like nursing and surgery, harming society at large (Arora et al., 2013; Labrague & de Los Santos, 2021; Mengstie, 2020).

Indeed, the relationship between fairness and wellness can be detected at the national level. Researchers have uncovered evidence that increased social justice is correlated with higher life satisfaction (Di Martino & Prilleltensky, 2020), while inequality is related to negative mental health outcomes and increased violence across entire countries (Rambotti, 2015; Subramanian & Kawachi, 2006; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

The Relationship between Worthiness and Wellness

Like fairness, people need worthiness and the experiences which produce it. *Feeling valued* is derived from fundamental needs including belonging and secure attachment, while *adding value* is drawn from autonomy, self-determination, and self-efficacy (Prilleltensky, 2020). The importance of these needs to wellness is supported by a growing scientific literature on worthiness across the lifespan. For young children, attachment is a basic relational need whose fulfillment is reflected in experiences of worthiness (Charles & Alexander, 2014; Flett et al., 2020; Prilleltensky, 2020). For adolescents, evidence suggests mattering to the community helps protect against suicide (Murphey et al., 2004; Olcoń et al., 2017). In college, worthiness creates belonging and remediates marginalization (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Schlossberg, 1989). For adults, the quest for worthiness inspires connection with others (Zeeb & Joffe, 2021), while attaining it buffers against stress (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Turner et al., 2004), improves workplace engagement and job success (Epstein et al., 2020; Flett & Zangeneh, 2020; Reece et al., 2021), and improves the transition to retirement communities (Froidevaux et al., 2016). Worthiness also protects one's health in later life by moderating the relationship between allostatic load and age (Taylor et al., 2019).

Just as worthiness produces benefits, its absence is actively harmful. Anti-mattering, or a pronounced feeling of negative worthiness, has been uniquely associated with social anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Flett et al., 2022). In fact, the need for worthiness is so great, researchers

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argue, that its absence propels individuals to extreme behaviors ranging from bullying to political violence (Kruglanski et al., 2022). The strength of this connection is further attested to by research closely connecting mattering, significance, and belonging to suicidal ideation and behavior (Drabenstott, 2019; Elliott et al., 2005).

As will be detailed in Chapter 4, worthiness also has special relevance for the wellness of marginalized communities. It is a protective factor against internalized ageism and stigma in the LGBTQ+ community (Hayashi, 2019; Miller et al., 2021; Wight et al., 2015) and a contributor to persistence and belonging for minoritized students (Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Worthiness also has great relevance for marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, the denial of worthiness may be one of the key signs of marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989). In an interview about the experience of young Black men in the United States, Gregory C. Ellison clearly articulates the deleterious effect of a lifetime of being denied worthiness in a racist society:

> I know what it feels like to be in a classroom and to have your hand up in the air and people ignore you, or to have someone change the conversation as if you never uttered a word . . . those are demeaning and dehumanizing feelings that over time take a toll on one's self and how you see your future. (Hanna, 2021, para. 10)

The picture is clear. Individuals with sufficient worthiness experience bolstered well-being, and those without it suffer. As will be reviewed throughout this book, salutary settings – from universities to communities – are therefore characterized by their ability to provide worthiness for diverse members.

The Relationship between Fairness and Worthiness

Although the relationship between fairness and worthiness has been the subject of only a few research studies (e.g., García-Ramírez et al., 2020; Kawamura & Brown, 2010; Lachance-Grzela, 2012; Scarpa et al., 2021), there are good reasons to expect a connection. Numerous goods require fairness and reflect the experience of worthiness. Take, for example, dignity. As community psychologists Miller and Keys write, "To recognize someone's dignity is to recognize his or her *[sic]* worth as a human being independent of his or her status or role in society" (2001, p. 332). In other words, dignity is largely about recognition or *feeling valued* (Byers, 2016; Misztal, 2013). At the same time, dignity requires fair treatment which honors one's inherent worth (Hicks, 2011). In fact, the connection between fairness and dignity is

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so strong that it has been central to numerous influential theories of justice and human rights (e.g., Fraser, 2010; Honneth, 2001).

Another important psychosocial good, self-determination, further illustrates the close relationship between fairness and worthiness. Although self-determination may conjure images of rugged independence, it also has a strong relational element derived from one's connection to others (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Research has shown that when fairness is compromised, people feel excluded and devalued, compromising the relational quality that is central to self-determination (Blader & Tyler, 2003; van Prooijen et al., 2004). At the group level, the ability of communities and nations to exercise their self-determination has long been considered an essential aspect of international justice (Murphy, 2014). This point is reinforced by theorists who have linked corrective justice to worthiness in discussions of the mattering of the dispossessed (Morill & Tuck, 2016), whose dignity and self-determination are violated.

Emerging empirical research on belonging and inclusion corroborates these insights. Among the many reasons people seek to belong, one is to avoid a feeling of insignificance (Fromm, 1994; Zeeb & Joffe, 2021) – in other words, belonging helps us feel worthy. Researchers have also connected procedural fairness to an increased sense of group identification, need to belong, realized belonging, and inclusion (MacCoun, 2005; Valcke et al., 2020), confirming that people need fairness to belong. Adding worthiness-focused components has also shown promise as a way to include participants from marginalized groups in health-related interventions (Matera et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2021), positioning worthiness as an important link between efforts to improve social justice and realized well-being gains (Scarpa et al., 2021). Taken together, the research is beginning to paint a clear picture whereby experiences of fairness help people belong, thereby reinforcing their sense of worthiness.

Thriving as the Synergy of Wellness, Fairness, and Worthiness

Whereas wellness, fairness, and worthiness have been invoked as separate parts of thriving, it is their synergy that accounts for thriving in individuals and settings. Based on emerging empirical evidence (Di Martino et al., 2022; Scarpa et al., 2021), we argue that worthiness is a very important mediator between experiences of fairness and outcomes of wellness. According to Figure 1.1, the more we benefit from intrapersonal, interpersonal, occupational, and communal fairness, the more likely we are to experience worthiness. The reason for that is that conditions of distributive, procedural, and

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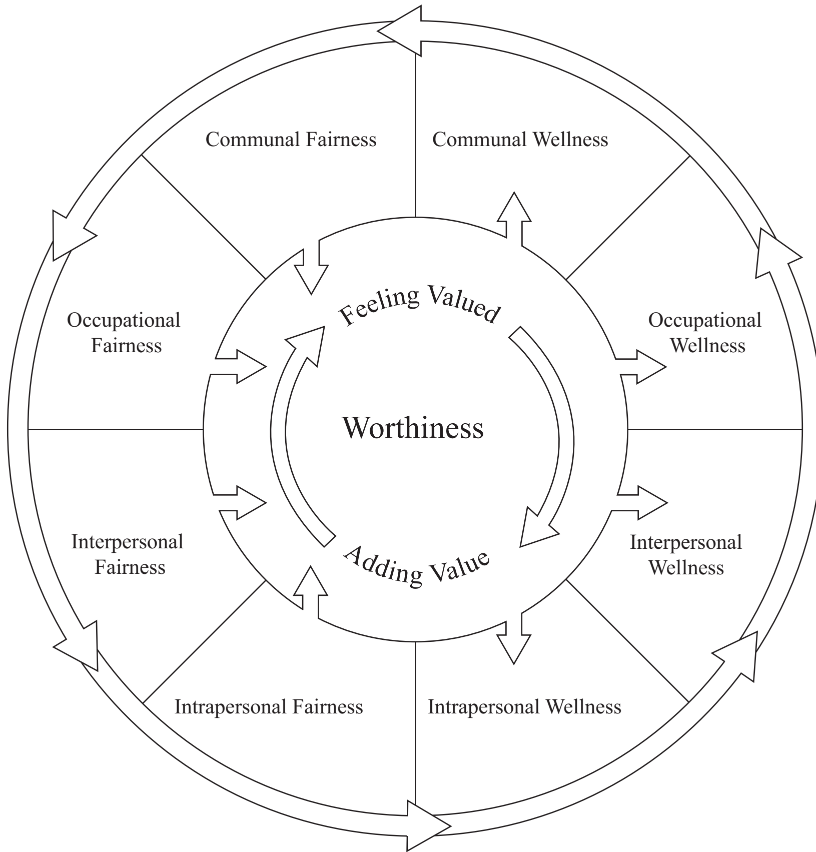

Figure 1.1 Thriving as the synergy of wellness, fairness, and worthiness (Reprinted with permission from the American Psychological Association; originally published in Prilleltensky et al., 2023).

corrective justice make us feel valued and provide opportunities for us to add value. The more we feel like we matter in the world, the more confident we are to take risks and exercise agency in various domains of wellness. Secure attachments, for instance, a great source of mattering and worthiness, enable children to explore the world (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). Feeling valued at work motivates us to take the initiative. The more we make a difference in the community, the higher our levels of personal, interpersonal, and communal wellness.

Fairness can affect wellness directly and indirectly (Scarpa et al., 2021). The direct effect is illustrated in Figure 1.1 through the outer arrows.

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The indirect impact is shown through the arrows pointing from fairness to worthiness and from worthiness to wellness.

The interactive nature of the model can be seen in the outer arrows and in the arrows going from feeling valued to adding value. Any one segment of the wheel can affect others. Interpersonal fairness can affect intrapersonal, and adding value may increase occupational wellness. Feeling devalued, in turn, can lead to poor intrapersonal wellness (Elliot, 2009; Flett, 2018; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021).

Thriving Settings

One of the distinctive features of thriving, as opposed to other conceptualizations of the good life, lies in its intrinsic social nature. Compared to an independent-self approach, which considers individuals as independent and separated from others and their contexts, the interdependent approach to thriving places people in networks and relationships. Thriving, as a consequence, is dependent on mutual connections, support, and relatedness (Frydenberg, 2006).

The social nature of thriving manifests itself in the systemic and ecological view of this construct. The very structure of this book shows how thriving can be found in multiple systems of increased complexity, from individuals, to communities, organizations, societies, up to the entire planet. The progressive structure of the chapters follows Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view of the nested ecological systems; however, systems are not only concentric; they also overlap with one another (J. W. Neal & Z. P. Neal, 2013). For reasons of simplicity and economy of our narrative, the chapters present thriving in each system separately, but that should not distract the readers from considering that all those systems are interconnected and form a complex picture where changes in one system have the potential to affect all others. Families are connected with the school system and the neighborhood; individuals, communities, and societies are related to the state of the planet. Systems are also made up of settings, which are the places where human and nonhuman components of a system must interact to make the system thrive.

In line with our vision of the common good, this means that a system is thriving if other interconnected systems are concomitantly thriving. For instance, it takes the integrated contribution of several systems (i.e., individuals, communities, environment) to make societies thrive (Huppert & Willoughby, 2010). Within those systems, it is necessary for several human settings to thrive, such as cities (Bettencourt & Gonzales, 2016), businesses (Latorre, 2020), nonhuman settings, and infrastructures (Schooling et al., 2021).

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However, it is also possible that a system might thrive despite others or even because other systems are suffering. Such is the case when a group of individuals relies on the exploitation and suffering of another group. While that is empirically possible, it is morally illegitimate. This scenario may benefit one group but at the expense of another.

For us, complete and ethical thriving can only be produced in a *we culture* that values fraternity and solidarity as opposed to a *me culture* that relies on personal gain and self-interest (Prilleltensky, 2020). In that respect, our vision of thriving includes not only hedonia (enjoyment and pleasure) and eudaimonia (meaning through fulfillment of one's potential) but also koinonia, which is the common good that derives from taking responsibility for other fellow humans (Riordan, 2010; Tuominen, 2015).

The Practice of Thriving

Thriving can be practiced at multiple levels, from the individual person to the global stage. Operating in the synergic nexus among wellness, fairness, and worthiness, practices of thriving can be initiated and nurtured in three domains of life: personal, communal, and professional.

First, thriving can be promoted by individuals who wish to live well and with dignity. Research has shown that there are evidence-based actions to promote personal well-being (Aked et al., 2008; Grenville-Cleave et al., 2021; Nes, 2021). For example, the 2008 Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project in the United Kingdom aimed to identify the most important drivers of well-being to foster mental health and well-being (Aked et al., 2008). Based on comprehensive reviews of existing research, they identified five pathways to promote well-being: *connect with others*, *be active* (physically, socially), *take notice* (mindfulness and awareness), *learn* (practice new skills and learn across the lifespan), and *give* (acts of kindness and helping others) (Mackay et al., 2019). According to these five pathways, what contributes to a person's own well-being also contributes positively to the well-being of others. In light with koinonia, thriving entails taking relational responsibility for the welfare and well-being of other people (Heimburg & Ness, 2021; McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

Second, thriving might stem from individuals as participants in specific settings, such as communities or cities. Increasingly, there has been recognition from researchers and policymakers that thriving happens where people live their everyday lives, where they are born, play, learn, work, and enjoy leisure activities and age (Grenville-Cleave et al., 2021; Heimburg et al., 2022).

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Accordingly, there has been a sustained call to reorient public health and health promotion toward enabling asset-based community development (ABCD). This would nurture communities based on their potential strengths and assets (relational, organizational, physical, cultural, natural) in neighborhoods and local communities (Russell & McKnight, 2022).

A vital part of thriving is to be considered valuable as a citizen. Thriving as a citizen derives from social resources such as connections and the social capital offered by those connections (Harper et al., 2017). Building on the work of Michael Rowe (2015) and colleagues (Clayton et al., 2020), citizenship is embodied in the rights, responsibilities, relationships, roles, and resources associated with being a full member of society. This is called the 5 Rs of citizenship, which are foundational for personal well-being and community integration (Clayton et al., 2020; Rowe, 2015).

Third, thriving might be fostered by professionals. For people to be able to shape the conditions that impact their abilities to thrive, participation, active citizenship, and agency are needed (Sen, 1999). Unfortunately, many members of society are defined as "hard to reach" and are "easy to ignore" (Lightbody & Escobar, 2021). Professionals working with these communities have an obligation to empower their clients to become active participants in the political process. For professionals to promote peoples' thriving, there is a need to reorient professional mandates from having an expert role to a facilitator role and to focus on co-creating the conditions for thriving, together with citizens and communities (Heimburg et al., 2022). This would also require from professionals to work as boundary spanners and connectors in communities (Russell, 2020).

At the national level, the practice of thriving will ultimately mean fostering well-being economies. This involves maximizing conditions for thriving through the reallocation of public and private resources. This implies putting thriving at the heart of decision-making processes aimed to co-create prosperous, sustainable, and fair societies for current and future generations (WHO, 2023).

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