POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH:
FALSE PROMISE OR TRUE BREAKTHROUGH?

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ABSTRACT

The emerging field of positive psychology has pledged to improve the mental health of American adolescents. Yet, without a principle-based conceptual foundation to guide its study of optimal youth functioning, positive psychology will ultimately fail to keep its promise. This paper suggests that the principles of Mind, Thought and Consciousness can provide positive psychology with a clearer understanding of optimal psychological functioning, serve as a unifying conceptual framework to guide its proposed mission, and lead to a true breakthrough in adolescent mental health. It first describes how the logic of these principles accounts for all subjective human experience. It then demonstrates how optimal mental health is generated, and how it can be maintained irrespective of present or past circumstances. Finally, it discusses how several contemporary models of positive psychology (i.e., Csikszentmihalyi’s flow, Seligman’s learned optimism, Goleman’s emotional intelligence, and Buss’s evolutionary perspective) can be simplified and clarified using the logic of the above three principles.

While president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman (1998), called for a Manhattan Project for the social sciences. Seligman’s vision was that the social sciences look beyond human weakness, damage, and remediation to reclaim one of its fundamental missions: the understanding and facilitation of human strength and virtue. In response to Seligman’s call and similar pleas by others (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1999; Goleman, 1992; Myers, 1992), positive psychology emerged as a long-overdue alternative to the field’s traditional focus on pathology and dysfunction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Its proposed mission was the scientific study of human strength, resilience, and optimal human functioning.

The promise of positive psychology for American adolescents is apparent to anyone who has had contact with a cross-section of these youth. In such a group, one encounters a surprising number of youngsters who are bored, unmotivated, and pessimistic about their future.

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ADOLESCENCE, Vol. 39, No. 154, Summer 2004
Libra Publishers, Inc., 3089C Clairemont Dr., PMB 383, San Diego, CA 92117
This malaise was strikingly illustrated by Larson and Richards’ (1991) random sampling of self-reports on 16,000 moments in the daily experience of a representative sample of white, working- and middle-class adolescents, a group that seemingly had everything going for them. These youth reported being bored for 27% (4,300) of these random moments. What particularly surprised the researchers, however, was that honor students were as likely as those involved in delinquent activities to be among those reporting high rates of boredom, in many cases for more than 50% of random moments. According to Larson (2000): “Many do their schoolwork, comply with their parents, hang out with their friends, and get through the day, but are not invested in paths into the future that excite them or feel like they originate from within. . . . They communicated an ennui of being trapped in the present, waiting for someone to prove to them that life is worth living” (p. 120).

Positive psychology promises to get adolescents’ internal fires lit, to help them develop the complex skills and dispositions necessary to take charge of their lives, to become socially competent, compassionate and psychologically vigorous adults. Yet, without causal principles that accurately explain optimal adolescent psychological functioning, any explanation of “the good life” for these youth is as possible and as feasible as any other. Only principles will bring discipline to the proposed mission of positive psychology and provide a consistent standard upon which to judge the truth and integrity of its findings and propositions. Without a unifying principle-based conceptual foundation, positive psychology (like traditional psychology) will inevitably splinter into ever-increasing numbers of separate and often competing theories, practices, and areas of specialization, each with its own research agenda based on its own set of variables. Thus, the efforts of positive psychology to evolve all will be done separately and simultaneously, rather than systematically and in concert. If this occurs, positive psychology will inevitably fail to keep its promise to our young people.

HEALTH REALIZATION MODEL

The purpose of this paper is to offer a principle-based model of optimal adolescent mental health that can serve as a unifying conceptual framework to help guide positive psychology as it seeks to achieve its proposed mission. This model has been previously known in the literature as Psychology of Mind (POM), and Neo-Cognitive Psychology (NCP). Presently, it is commonly referred to as Health Realization

Research leading to the discovery of the principles behind HR began as part of a National Institute of Mental Health demonstration grant on primary prevention at the University of Oregon (1974–1979). This discovery was greatly facilitated by the deep personal experience of these principles by theosopher Sidney Banks (1983, 1989, 1998, 2001). In the early 1970s, Banks proposed that a deeper understanding of human experience could be achieved by looking beyond the realm of form in which psychology restricted its domain of inquiry. Banks asserted that there were spiritual processes that operated to create form and offered the principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought to represent these processes. Banks viewed these principles as an inseparable, interrelated trinity that provided a connection between the formless life force and the world of form. This view of the life experience as a dynamic, continuous merging of the formless life force and form is consistent with current perspectives in both quantum physics and neurophysiology (Mustakova-Possardt, 2002; Talbot, 1991).

While reflecting on these principles, it is helpful for readers to step back from the logical positivist perspective which may have them view these ideas as metaphysical and beyond proof, and consider instead the value of these constructs in terms of a possible deeper convergent explanatory power. Today, many social scientists (e.g., Fox & Prilletensky, 1997) are questioning the validity and consequences of insisting on objective methods, and dismissing the approaches of philosophy and religion as too subjective. More and more scholars are suggesting that the insistence on conventional research methods which objectify behavior prevent us from pursuing issues of profound human importance such as those associated with religion, spirituality, and human meaning (e.g., Maslow, 1971; Sorokin, 1959). Mustakova-Possardt puts it this way (2002).

... it may be possible by redefining and realigning these concepts, to frame a conceptual model that could enable psychology to illuminate new relationships across Mind, Consciousness, and Thought while simultaneously exploring important aspects of human experience and well-being that have been ignored because of their complexity and nature. This, of course, has been the continual argument of many of psychology's most important historical figures in psychodynamic (e.g., Carl Jung), humanistic (e.g., Rollo May), and transpersonal (e.g., Abraham Maslow) psy-
chology. And, in addition, it has been the argument of major thinkers in theology (e.g., Paul Tillich), physics (e.g., Fritjof Capra), and philosophy (e.g., Søren Kierkegaard). While none have offered a model that integrates these concepts, all have recognized their importance for human behavior, and especially for understanding the more complex concerns of existence, meaning, and purpose. (p. 4)

THE PRINCIPLE OF MIND

At the formless level, HR defines Mind as the purest life force, the source or energy of life itself, the universal, creative intelligence within and behind life, humans, and the natural world. Historically, Mind has been referred to by many different names, including divine ground, spirit, absolute, universal intelligence, and God. On the level of form, this life force is continually manifested in, and flows through "personal mind," the individual mind of living things. Banks (1998) stated: "The Universal Mind, or the Impersonal Mind, is constant and unchangeable. The personal mind is in a perpetual state of change. All humans have the inner ability to synchronize their personal mind with Impersonal Mind to bring harmony into their lives. . . . Universal Mind and personal mind are not two minds thinking differently, but two ways of using the same mind." pp. 31–34

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

At the formless level, Consciousness provides the spiritual connection with Mind. It is the neutral energy of Mind that allows people to be aware, to be cognizant of the moment in a sensate and knowing way. At the realm of form, consciousness transforms thought, or mental activity, into subjective experience through the physical senses. As people's thinking agency generates mental images, these images appear real to them as they merge with the faculty of consciousness and register as sensory experience. Put another way, HR proposes that consciousness is the ongoing sensory experience of thought as reality. Also, the faculty of consciousness allows people to recognize the fact that they are continually creating their moment-to-moment experience form the inside-out. Finally, consciousness embodies the human ability to survey life from a compassionate, impersonal or objective stance; a perspective that HR calls wisdom or common sense.

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At the formless level, Thought is the creative agent, the capacity to give form to formless life energy—the link between the source and the form one’s experience is taking in the moment. On the level of form, HR defines thought as the mental imaging ability of human beings, continuous moment to moment thinking; the continuous creation of life experience via mental activity. Thus, HR views thought and consciousness as two sides of the same process of experiencing life—consciousness allowing the recognition of form, form being the product of thought.

In sum, according to HR, all human experience is produced by the Mind-powered combustion of Thought and Consciousness, and is the only experience of which human beings are capable. Thus, each person’s mental life is the moment-to-moment product of his/her thinking transformed into experience by his/her consciousness. Furthermore, according to HR, all behavior unfolds in perfect synchronization with the moment-to-moment thought plus consciousness reality that occurs for each individual.

INNATE MENTAL HEALTH

HR proposes the existence of innate mental health conceptualized as the natural alignment of personal mind with Mind. Put another way, HR asserts that at birth, personal mind is uncontaminated by conditioned ideas and thus, is one with Mind. According to HR, whenever personal mind is quiet or clear, it automatically aligns with Mind and instantly receives a continuous stream of intelligent free-flowing thinking that is unfailingly responsive to the moment. HR proposes that this generic free-flowing thinking process is the sole source of optimal psychological health which includes natural well-being, self-esteem, and common sense. Regardless of current mental status or prior socialization, HR asserts that all youth have the same built-in capacity for mental health, and will exhibit its attributes to the degree that their personal minds are in sync with Mind, allowing free-flowing thinking to surface. According to Mustakova-Possardt (2002):

Mental health is the innate capacity of every youth to return into alignment with Mind from a clear mind, and manifest fresh understanding and creative responsiveness in the moment. Three-Principle Understanding proposes that mental health is an innate “intrinsic, natural state of well-being or wisdom arising from pure consciousness and ac-
cessed via a clean mind, or from realizing the infinite capacity for form-
less creation of new experience by a thought” (J. Pransky, 2000). In every
moment, when individual mind is spontaneously or intentionally aligned
with Mind, and focused away from its intensely personal memory-based
world, innate mental health bubbles up, and is characterized by a natu-
ral and effortless flow of thought... as the experience of peace, content-
ment, larger perspective on immediate reality, detachment, and a
general generous, loving, and deeply moral view of life. (p. 11)

HR proposes that the natural design for young people is to live pre-
dominantly in the experience of psychological health produced by free-
flowing thinking. For most adolescents, however, this does not occur
because most youth not only underutilize this generic thinking pro-
cess—most do not even know it exists. What most adolescents have
been taught to view as the preeminent, if not exclusive, thinking pro-
cess, is analytical or processing thinking. Unlike free-flowing thinking,
analytical thinking is learned, deliberate, restricted to memory, and
always, and only, useful when applying known variables to a known
formula (e.g., solving a math problem). Being memory bound, however,
processing thinking limits youth to what they already know, giving
them no opportunity for original thought. Also, analytical thinking
produces conditioned emotions, which are always superficial, fleeting,
externally contingent, inherently less satisfying, and often painful
(e.g., anger, anxiety, boredom). In contrast, free-flowing thinking is
natural and effortless, providing youth with fresh perspectives, and
producing deep, human feelings (e.g., contentment, exhilaration) that
are inherently satisfying, unconditional, shared by humanity, and that
span age, gender, and culture. Pransky (1997) compares the natural
feeling of exhilaration with the learned feeling of excitement which
many youth crave and often achieve through risk-taking:

Although some (learned) emotions, such as excitement, might appear to
be positive, no emotions are as desirable and pleasurable as natural
human feelings. The emotion of excitement as a “positive” experience in
comparison with other learned emotions pales in comparison to the natu-
ral feeling of exhilaration, for example. Excitement has a component of
frenetic energy that needs to be maintained, exhilaration points to the
inspiration of contentment and actually has a calming effect in the mo-
ment. (p. 74)

Processing thinking, when used appropriately, is essential for suc-
cessful cultural adaptation. Unfortunately, very early on, most young
people learn to either overuse or misuse this thinking mode. Because
it takes effort, chronic processing, even for worthwhile tasks (e.g.,
studying for exams), produces fatigue, exaggerated mood swings, and
excessive emotionality. Common habits of misusing processing thinking include worrying, self-conscious thinking, thinking perfectionistically, judging or fault-finding, obsessive thinking, cynical thinking, and angry thinking. Processing thinking is also misused by most adolescents to create artificial self-images or egos by erroneously thinking that their worth is connected to external conditions, possessions, looks, and behavior.

Since the particular thoughts of a youth determine her/his feelings, habitually proposing painful thoughts or memories (e.g., sexual abuse) results in chronic psychological pain. The more painful the thoughts processed, the more painful the experience. Thus, according to HR, the misuse of processing thinking not only produces stress and distress, it obstructs the source of free-flowing thinking (i.e., the alignment of personal mind with Mind), and the experience of innate mental health. In the words of Pransky (1997):

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\ldots \text{in the HR model, the overuse or misuse of processing thinking is seen as the sole cause of all mental dysfunction. Mental illness is defined in this model as losing one's psychological bearings by drifting away from one's innate, free-flowing thinking process. Mental health is seen as returning to free-flowing thinking and regaining one's emotional bearing. The degree of mental dysfunction is seen as how far a youth has moved away from his innate healthy thought process. (p. 407)}
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Simply put, according to HR, in moments of mental health, a youth's thinking takes on a balanced movement back and forth between a spontaneous reliance on the intelligence and wisdom of free-flowing thinking, and the occasional implementation of analysis when appropriate, without getting stuck in the processing mode.

**APPLYING HEALTH REALIZATION PRINCIPLES TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

When viewed through the logic of the three principles behind HR, a fundamentally different view emerges of virtually all contemporary models of positive psychology. The main reason for this fact is that each positive model is based on the same faulty assumption—*that the absence of psychological well-being in adolescents is due to certain missing external factors*. Thus, each positive model proposes the need to put some missing item(s) back into youth from the outside in. Even the pioneering models of positive psychology are grounded in this missing external factor perspective. For example, Maslow's (1971) self-actualization, Block and Block's (1990) ego-resiliency, Deiner's (1984) positive emotionality, Antonovsky's (1979) salutogenic approach, Seeman's
personality integration. Deci and Ryan’s (1985) autonomy, and Scheier and Carver’s (1987) dispositional optimism all propose that external inputs such as teaching cognitive techniques, altering negative attributions, engaging in meaningful activities, satisfying lower need states, or changing attitudes and perceptual styles, can restructure adolescents’ goals, and subsequently improve the quality of their personal experience.

While shifting psychology’s emphasis back to understanding and facilitating adolescent health and resiliency is long overdue, positive psychology has unfortunately adapted the same misguided something-missing, outside-in paradigm as the dysfunction-focused “negative” psychology it is trying to transcend. To illustrate this and other problems, the following four prominent, positive psychological models will be examined through the logic of the three principles: Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1999) flow, Seligman’s (1991, 1998) learned optimism, Goleman’s (1992) emotional intelligence, and Buss’s (1999, 2000) evolutionary psychology.

The True Source of Flow

Viewed through the logic of the three principles, the true source of Csikszentmihalyi’s autotellic experience or flow is free-flowing thinking; that is, the innate, intelligent thought process that kicks in automatically when a youth’s personal mind clears and aligns with Mind. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) proposes, however, that flow requires considerably more than just a clear mind: “the flow experience . . . requires skills, concentration, and perseverance . . . it can be induced by environmental cues . . . or by focusing attention on a set of stimuli with their own rules, such as the composition of music” (p. 825). Thus, Csikszentmihalyi suggests a complex interface between specific external and internal factors in order to attain a proper balance for flow to emerge. HR advances, in contrast, that a mind that is cleared, either spontaneously or on purpose, will usher in the flow experience automatically, without effort, not withstanding external factors.

Csikszentmihalyi (1999) further states that flow is “how youth feel when they are thoroughly involved in activities that are enjoyable or meaningful . . . separate from the routines of everyday life” (p. 825). HR proposes that the experiences of joy and meaningfulness are not functions of particular activities. Rather, like all deep human feelings, they are produced solely by free-flowing thinking. Furthermore, according to HR, these natural feelings are not tied to particular pursuits. When youth access free-flowing thinking, they can experience the routines of everyday life with as much enjoyment and meaning as complex activities undertaken in the same thinking mode. I recall one
of my former psychotherapy clients, a young man about 18 years old, who had just been released from prison and was required to attend therapy as a condition of his parole. One of the first things he wanted to discuss was a confusing experience he had while in prison. His prison job was cleaning latrines and he decided to do his best. Soon he began to love this work and could not wait to get started each morning. He said he felt joyful while he worked, time passed quickly, and he often had insights about his personal life. Then he started thinking that he must be crazy for feeling joyful about cleaning toilets and became frightened at the prospect of janitorial work as his life’s calling. He was quite relieved to discover that his experience was flow, caused by free-flowing thinking, not toilet cleaning.

Csikszentmihalyi (1999) further asserts that a universal condition of flow “is that a youth feels that his or her abilities to act match the opportunities for action . . . when the challenges are in balance with skills, a youth becomes lost in the activity and flow is likely to result” (p. 825). Again, Csikszentmihalyi views flow as somehow tied to particular external conditions, abilities, and opportunities. Larson (2000), agrees, noting the experience of flow in youth involved in certain activities like sports. Larson cites one ninth grader who described feeling, “real strong and in control, like I could do anything,” and another saying, “you change, you forget everything around you.” Like Csikszentmihalyi, Larson focuses on the qualities of the activity (e.g., rules, challenge, structure, complexity) to explain the emergence of flow and envisions, “a society in which youth have a rich range of expertly staffed, structured activities to choose from regardless of their S.E.S., gender, ethnicity, social orientation, ability level, and type of interest” (pp. 180–181). While providing challenging activities for youth is commendable, activities alone do nothing to help young people realize how the principles of HR explain their psychological functioning, and how to use the gift of thought to experience flow as a way of life, not just in particular activities.

I recall another therapy client, a young woman about 18, a highly ranked competitive ice skater. She began therapy because her family was concerned that she was practicing too much, neglecting them, her schoolwork, and friends. She told me that she practiced nine or ten hours a day. When I asked her how much she truly needed to practice to keep her competitive edge, she replied about four to five hours a day. When I queried why she practiced an extra four to five hours she said, “I love to practice.” Later I discovered that when she was not practicing she tended to worry and to “think too much.” Thus, the quality of her practicing life was significantly higher than her non-
practicing time. When this client began to understand HR principles, she realized that she could bring the flow experience she had during skating to the rest of her life as well.

Csikszentmihalyi states that “during the flow experience people are not necessarily happy because they are too involved in the task to have the luxury to reflect on their subjective states” (p. 825). Is reflecting on their subjective state necessary for very young children to experience happiness? Do such children have to recognize joy to be joyful? Do youth have to reflect on their subjective state of physical well-being to live in its experience? HR asserts that when youth access free-flowing thinking, they are happy by definition (i.e., totally absorbed in the natural experience of healthy mental functioning).

Csikszentmihalyi (1999) cautions that “flow alone does not guarantee a happy life . . . it is necessary to find a flow in activities that are complex . . . activities that provide a potential for growth over the entire life span” (p. 826). Here Csikszentmihalyi ties both flow and personal growth to particular (e.g., complex) pursuits. Again, HR asserts that both flow and personal growth (e.g., having insights and changes of heart) are natural outcomes of understanding HR principles. When young people realize the power of free-flowing thinking, and trust it to guide them through life, some will be inspired to pursue complex tasks, while others will be guided to simple ones. To the extent that youth live in free-flowing thinking, however, they will experience well-being and personal growth no matter what they are drawn to, whether simple, complex, or anywhere in between.

Csikszentmihalyi also cites several supposed limits of flow. He states, for example, that youth may find flow in destructive, dysfunctional activities (e.g., violence, drug use), or become addicted to flow in functional activities (e.g., sports, watching television). While this certainly happens, HR asserts that this condition does not reflect a limit of flow. Instead, it reflects a limit in a youth’s level of understanding the principles of HR. The reason that adolescents innocently become addicted to flow in any activity (positive or negative) is their limited recognition of the connection between their thinking and their personal experience. HR proposes that an insightful understanding of its three principles is all that youth need, and that they will naturally move toward more satisfying, fulfilling, virtuous lives as this understanding deepens.

*The Unnecessary Learning of Optimism*

Seligman’s (1991) learned optimism is grounded primarily in the cognitive model of psychology. Compared to HR, Seligman and other
cognitive proponents offer a limited definition of the way people form thought. The cognitive model assumes that external events directly impact people's senses, and that thought intervenes after this point. In other words, reality is seen by cognitive theorists as being presented to youth by their senses, after which their thinking determines their reaction to reality, based on the beliefs and assumptions in each youth's schema, or characteristic explanatory style (e.g., Buchanan & Seligman, 1995). Thus, according to Seligman's view, thought determines a youth's reaction to external reality, HR provides a more inclusive definition of thought—all mental activity. Thought, in the HR model, includes perceptions, feelings, insights, mental images, and all other products of mental activity. Thus, HR views thought as not only involved in the processing of sensory input, but in informing the senses, thereby defining young people's sensory data and determining their experienced reality.

Furthermore, Seligman, like other cognitive practitioners, holds the premise that a youth's schema, or mental representation system, is the appropriate focus for therapeutic intervention. This assumption provides a considerable workload for youngsters wanting to improve their mental health through learned optimism. First, a youth must process painful emotional reactions to outside events to determine whether or not they are responsive to "external reality," This memory processing further involves identifying and challenging the youth's assumptions and beliefs associated with these reactions. According to HR, such processing greatly increases the volume of young people's thinking, or the amount of time they spend in the analytical mode of thinking. In HR terms, Seligman's approach proposes a psychological life of overactive thinking as youth process their way through daily life experiences. HR, in contrast, does not require memory processing, only insightful shifts in understanding its three principles. According to HR, once youth move to higher levels of understanding and personal well-being, their perceptions automatically change across the board. Thus, HR treatment keeps youth living in free-flowing thinking as they realize, in the moment, the creation of personal experience via Mind, Thought, and Consciousness. Krot (2000) states:

Paying attention to what a youth thinks as a means to understand the principle of Thought is like giving him a magnifying glass to survey a scenic vista. HR teaches youth to focus less and less on thought content and the personal use of mind and more on the gift of thought. As youth begin to look toward the impersonal power of thought which is not self-generated, thoughts lose their sense of importance... and personal minds quiet down. (p. 4)
Also, since it is memory-based, learned optimism is a deliberately generated, artificial, less satisfying experience than the natural feelings of exhilaration and well-being produced effortlessly by free-flowing thinking. Furthermore, as young people’s recognition of HR principles deepens, they naturally become more hopeful and resilient even during difficult times and insecure moods—not because they have learned to think optimistically, but because they have realized that temporary fluctuations in their thinking quality need not be taken seriously. Mustakova-Possardt (2001) provides a poignant example of a spontaneous return to optimism and common sense in a 16-year-old youth reported by him a few years later:

That year something happened . . . the only way I can describe it is that my mind shattered. . . . I realized at age 16 that I could only be found within myself . . . what people said made no difference, only how I felt about it. My feelings of depression, suicidal ideation, and worthlessness were all based on my perceptions of what others told me. Essentially, it was I who caused the pain, not them. Though it was others that sought to hurt me, it was my own false beliefs that caused the pain . . . my strongest illusion was that people make me sad, or angry, or happy. Most of my pain was from my emotions. I realized all emotion is reaction and everything within my mind is my creation. So I can choose my emotion, just as I can choose every other action I take. (p. 12)

Finally, Seligman’s model makes no distinction regarding thought process. It recognizes only one, processing thinking, which it proposes as the key to altering a youth’s “pessimistic” worldview. HR proposes, in contrast, that pessimistic thoughts that move through free-flowing thinking will always be functional and psychologically beneficial. The same thoughts grappled with analytically, however, may lower a youth’s spirits. According to HR, memory renovation is built into free-flowing thinking, negating the need to address it deliberately.

Recent cognitive research suggests that the field is beginning to recognize that it has ignored some of the mind’s most important potentials. Mustakova-Possardt (2002) summarizes this encouraging trend:

The pervasive discrediting of faith in our age of the Religion of Reason may be associated with the fact, recently discovered by cognitive psychologists (e.g., Claxton, 1997), that some of the mind’s most important potentials have been systematically ignored. These are slow ways of knowing, which Claxton calls “Tortoise Mind,” contrasting them to “Hare Brain,” terming them then as undermine. As Health Realization has found in the last 15 years (Mills, 1995; Carlson & Bailey, 1997), these capabilities, insights, intuition, wisdom—are central to many of life’s ill-defined problems. In contrast, education and psychology generally emphasize the “Hare Brain,” or what Claxton calls “Small D-Mode” activity-conscious,
deliberate, purposeful thinking. Thus, the findings that resulted from the practical application of the three-principle perspective converge with the independent theoretical premise of Lewis (2000), who draws on significant work in cognitive psychology (e.g., Bohm, 1992; Claxton, 1997; Donaldson, 1992; Sternberg, 1990, 1995), that an increase of the prevalence of qualities of the heart leads naturally into the development of a wider range of qualities of the mind. (pp. 14–15)

Proponents of the creative cognitive approach (e.g., Smith, Ward, & Finke, 1995), for example, have begun to view creativity as a mental phenomenon that results from the application of ordinary cognitive processes. Relevant as well, is the recent empirical demonstration of intuitive information processing as a regular manifestation of what cognitive researchers call the cognitive unconscious (e.g., Bowers, Farvolden, & Mermigis, 1995; Schooler & Melcher, 1995). Simonton (2000) summarizes how current cognitive research on insightful problem-solving, creative cognition, and expertise acquisition concur: “The optimal functioning embodied by these abilities entails ordinary cognitive processes... enhanced creative thought is accessible to almost anyone... it is a startling testimony to the adaptive powers of the human being that some of the most adverse childhoods can give birth to the most creative adulthood.” (pp. 152–153).

Taylor et al. (2000) discuss the implications of cognitive adaptation theory and the relationship of positive (e.g., optimistic) beliefs to disease progression and physical health. They conclude that positive psychological beliefs (e.g., meaning, control, optimism) and positive feelings (e.g., hopefulness) act as resources that likely preserve mental health during traumatic times and protect physical health as well. They point to much existing research that suggests that stressful life events (e.g., a life-threatening illness) provoke positive psychological changes like an enhanced sense of purpose, meaning, and appreciation for the value of life. They suggest that positive psychology must determine why some people respond to traumatic events with despair, depression, and purposelessness, and others with resilience and a new sense of purpose. The logic of HR principles appears to resolve these questions. First, some people have genuine changes of heart during life-threatening times because their personal minds quiet down dramatically, and deep wisdom kicks in. This explains, for example, why after 9/11 many youth had profound changes of heart leading to lives with new meaning and purpose. Fortunately, it does not take a tragedy to produce life-changing revelations; it takes thinking in sync with the principles behind HR. By so doing, well-being naturally bubbles up along with common sense, enhanced purpose and meaning, trauma insulation, and the mind-body harmony essential for optimal healing and physical health.
The True Purpose of Feelings and Emotions

The following from Goleman’s (1992) popular book, Emotional Intelligence, illustrate what HR views as misunderstandings in his model: (1) “As we all know from experience, when it comes to shaping our decisions and our actions, feelings count every bit as much if not more than thought” (p. 4); (2) “… as Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but with the appropriateness of emotion and its expression. The question is, how can we bring intelligence to our emotions … and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life?” (p. vii); (3) “… I can foresee a day when education will routinely include inculcating essential human competency such as … self-awareness, self-control, empathy, and the art of listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperation” (p. vii).

In the first quote, Goleman distinguishes between emotion and thought, contemplating the relative importance of each in shaping youthful behavior. Health Realization asserts, in contrast, that all feelings and emotions are, in fact, thought. Furthermore, Goleman appears to assign negative feelings a life of their own, describing them as discreet entities with the power to control a young person’s actions. According to HR, the major reasons that negative emotions appear to have such power in young people’s lives are that: (a) they appear to youth to be real rather than dismissable thoughts; and (b) even if they could be dismissed, emotions have gained a mystique in our culture of being important and demanding attention. HR views that all negative emotions are innocently sustained by learned, habitual misuses of personal thought. The only “existence” such emotions have is in the minds of the youth who learned them, at the moment those youth bring them to mind. According to HR, once young people realize that emotions are simply thought kept alive by processing thinking, they find it increasingly easy to dismiss them.

In the second quote, Goleman suggests that the essential need is to bring intelligence to young people’s emotions. HR asserts, in contrast, that there is innate intelligence in every feeling and emotion experienced by young people—they unfailingly serve as indicators of the moment-to-moment quality of their thinking. When youth recognize this fact, they become increasingly graceful during mood fluctuations, avoiding hostility and incivility. Furthermore, with deeper levels of understanding of HR principles, youth allow their thinking to function more in its natural way. Thus, they spend less time feeling insecure and more time demonstrating natural civility and compassion.

In the third quote, Goleman suggests that education must focus on putting healthy psychological functioning into our youth. In contrast,
HR asserts that the potential for healthy psychological functioning is innate and natural. As such, it does not have to be inculcated or added to young people from the outside-in. According to HR, the real quest is to point youth toward deeper levels of realizing HR principles—to rekindle what is already within, drawing out the inherent well-being and humanity available to all youth in each and every moment.

**Evolution of a Balanced, Aligned Use of the Power of Thought**

Buss (2000) discusses youthful mental health and happiness from an evolutionary perspective citing several major obstacles or barriers to happiness and well-being for American adolescents. He calls one such obstacle, “discrepancies between modern and ancestral environments,” examples of which are modern agricultural technology which leads youth to over-consume animal fat and display epidemic obesity; the modern ability to synthesize drugs leading youth to abuse numerous substances; the bombardment of youth with mass media messages leading them to violence and depression stemming from unrealistic expectations about future mates, and the self-defeating desire to compete with the best in the world.

HR concurs with Buss that there is far too much of the dysfunctional adolescent behavior he cites. It totally disagrees with Buss, however, that this dysfunction is related to technological advances in modern culture. If Buss’s view is accurate, for example, how does he account for the thousands of adolescents regularly exposed to McDonald’s, illegal drugs, and seductive media images who are not obese, drug dependent, violent, or competitive with media celebrities. Health Realization views all dysfunctional, health-damaging adolescent behavior as misguided ways of coping with insecure feelings that arise from the unrecognized misuse of thought. If comparable dysfunction did not exist in less advanced past cultures, HR asserts that the reason is not less technology, but that young people in earlier eras had not learned to abuse the gift of thought as often and severely as the youth of today. Lewis (2000) describes the evolution of thought misuse:

> ... thought often interferes within the ability to think fully ... because for reasons of evolutionary significance, thought has evolved in such a way that it ... forms neurophysiological reflexes. ... Through repetition, emotional intensity, and defensiveness, these reflexes have become hard-wired in our consciousness to such an extent that they respond independently of our conscious choice ... so that much of our thought is no more than reflex, though it appears to be volitional. (pp. 274–275)

Buss also argues that adolescents have evolved an array of psychological mechanisms (e.g., anxiety, depression, phobias, jealousy, and
anger) designed to cause subjective distress under certain circumstances. He proposes that these painful experiences are evolved psychological adaptations designed to solve specific problems in everyday living. According to Buss, youth experience distress when someone blocks their ascension in a social group, when they suffer a slide in status, when their friends betray them, when their team loses, when a sibling is favored by a parent—because they need pain to motivate them to successfully deal with these issues. HR agrees with Buss that painful feelings do serve a built-in psychological purpose—to inform youth that their thinking is dysfunctional and that they are headed for trouble if they take it seriously. Thus, HR asserts that the optimal way for youth to solve "specific adaptive problems" is to dismiss painful thoughts and ease into the wisdom and perspective in free-flowing thinking.

Buss also describes several of what he calls "evolutionary tragedies of happiness," such as the tendency of adolescents to adjust quickly to new possessions, social gains, and accomplishments, creating a "hedonic treadmill" in which increments in rewards fail to produce sustained increases in personal happiness, and "asymmetry in affective experience," or the fact that youth typically experience more distress from losses, than personal satisfaction from winning. HR does not view these apparent experiential paradoxes as natural evolutionary outcomes, but rather as dysfunctional experiences resulting from the innocent misuse of thought. Put another way, when youth do not understand how thought works to produce well-being from the inside-out, they innocently try to find it externally through possessions and achievements. In time, the artificial highs of ego (e.g., habitual thinking about winning and looking good) and lows of insecurity (e.g., habitual thinking about losing and looking bad) begin to replace the natural, noncontingent exhilaration and well-being product by free-flowing thinking.

Finally, Buss proposes several ways to close the gap between modern and ancestral conditions. These include increasing the closeness of extended kin, developing deep friendships, selecting a mate with similar interests and values, and managing competitive mechanisms. Again, HR points out that many adolescents who already have intimate, extended kin, close friends who share similar values and interests, and who are highly noncompetitive, are nevertheless bored, depressed, drug-dependent, and oppositional. HR suggests that Buss has it backwards—that the deep human feelings and wisdom inherent in innate health lead to intimacy in relationships, wise mate selection, and selfless competition. In sum, HR views both optimal adolescent
development and maturation of human civilization as products of the slowly evolving discovery of a balanced, aligned use of the power of Thought. Mustakova-Possardt (2002) puts it this way:

The understanding of the Principle of Thought provides the missing link which also bridges the gap between psychology and the other social sciences; i.e., between individual and the collective levels of analysis. If thought is a spiritual potentiality, a creative power which we only gradually learn to use and manifest in its full range of expressions, in the same way that we gradually develop and manifest our innate capacity for physical mobility, then both individual development and the collective history of human civilization can be viewed as a slow and painstaking discovery of a balanced, aligned way to use the power of Thought. As we can see in the current process of globalization, social structures as embodiments of thought are only very slowly moving in the direction of justice (Hanson, 2001), understood in Kohlbergian formalistic terms as all-inclusive judgments and decision-making (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). (pp. 8–9)

A FRESH VISION FOR POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The three principles behind Health Realization give the power of experience to adolescents, not to life-events. To the degree that young people understand that they are continually thinking, and that the outgoing thoughts that come to mind for them are translated into apparent reality by their consciousness, they begin to realize that every so-called reality is a fleeting, ephemeral product of their own minds at work. When adolescents recognize the perfect connection between their thinking and their experience, they instantly gain perspective on life. Shifts in their experience of reality stop looking as though they were randomly caused by outside events or forces. Anxiety, depression, boredom, and other negative feelings show up as thought-events, not as horrific life circumstances. At the other extreme, euphoria and gratitude are seen as thought-events, as well.

It would appear that the principles of HR have the power to significantly re-direct positive psychology’s inquiry into optimal youth functioning. They suggest that it is no longer plausible to look at multiple outside forces to understand either mental health or mental dysfunction in adolescence. Myers’ (1992, 2000) extensive accounting of well-being research, for example, innocently points positive psychology in the wrong direction. The principles of HR turn cause and effect inside-out. The causes of well-being and optimal adolescent functioning cited by Myers and countless others (e.g., Fowler, 2000)—supportive friendships, challenging work, religious faith, intimate friendships, realistic
goals, and so on—turn out to be effects, not causes. The HR principles clarify that there is only one source of human experience (optimal to dysfunctional)—the use of the ability to think brought to life by the ability to have sensory experience of thought. Thus, it would appear that the three principles behind HR can move positive psychology to a deeper, more precise understanding of optimal adolescent functioning, turning attention away from external causal factors and thought content, and focusing instead on the process of creating thought and experience from the inside-out.

At present, there have been several post-hoc, pre- and post, and controlled clinical studies demonstrating the effectiveness of HR-based psychotherapy for clients displaying a wide range of DSM-IV clinical diagnoses (depression to schizophrenia) in both inpatient and outpatient settings (Bailey, 1989; Bailey, Blevens, & Heath, 1988; Blevens, Bailey, Olson, & Mills, 1992; Heath, 1985; Pransky, 1999; Shuford, 1986; Shuford & Crystal, 1988; Stewart, 1987). There have also been several longitudinal studies showing the effectiveness of the HR approach in community empowerment programs in some of the most crime-ridden housing projects in Florida, California, Minnesota, New York, and Hawaii (Mills & Spittle, 2002). For example, HR was applied in Coliseum Gardens, a 200-unit public housing development having the highest homicide rate and the highest frequency of drug-related arrests in the city of Oakland, California. Results revealed that homicides dropped by 100% (none reported for six consecutive years), violent crimes went down by 45%, drug possession/sales decreased by 16%, assaults with firearms dropped by 38%, youth involvement in Boys and Girls Clubs increased by 110%, gang warfare and ethnic clashes between Cambodian and African-American youth ended, and 62 heads of household became employed.

Recently, West Virginia University, through its Department of Community Medicine, initiated a nationwide study of the impact of HR principles on stress levels, mental health, peace of mind, and creativity in a large national sample of HR-based courses. In 2000, the university, inspired by the changes already observed in its own faculty and students from exposure to this understanding, established the Sidney A. Banks Institute for Innate Health housed within its Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center. The institute is a multi-disciplinary center for the study, practice, research, and development of the understanding of the principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness, both as a philosophical/theoretical model and as a foundation for numerous applications.

The promise of understanding HR principles for American adolescents is eloquently summarized by Mills (2000): “Apparently when
youth recognize how HR principles work, they gain tremendous freedom and clarity . . . and the ability to live life at its highest potential, with peace of mind and creativity. As youth begin to see how reality is created, moment-by-moment, through the interweaving of these principles, they realize their innate creative power and resilience, their own wisdom and beauty, and their genuine potential for a gratifying life” (pp. 20–21). Hopefully, the proponents of positive psychology will take time to reflect on the three principles behind HR and consider the possibility that they can revitalize the century-old promise of William James, that psychology would eventually discover causal principles leading to a science of optimal human functioning and the realization of higher levels of well-being for everyone.

REFERENCES


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