WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

The Theory of Passion

When a problem presents itself, a solution is required in order to solve the problem. Sometimes the answer is found by relating the problem to a theory. A theory is a set of concepts, definitions, and propositions that explain or predict these events or situations by illustrating the relationships between variables (Services, 2005). With my future in wellness management I hope to implement wellness programs for populations of people in need of a behavior change. Therefore, I need creative, innovative approaches to solving the problems I will encounter in the wellness world. “Like an artist, a program planner who grounds health interventions in theory creates innovative ways to address specific circumstances. He or she does not depend on a “paint-by-numbers” approach, rehashing stale ideas, but uses a palette of behavior theories, skillfully applying them to develop unique, tailored solutions to problems” (Services, 2005). It is overwhelming, however, to think about all the different theories that are out there that could help me with any potential problems I run into. So why just choose one theory? If I can take the concepts I like from different ones to fit with my worldview, I can create an innovative method for problem solving.
Taking a New Approach

Research supports that our country’s wellbeing has gotten worse over the decades. Chronic sleep problems effect as many as 70 million people (Institute of Medicine, 2006). In 2000, no state in the U.S. had an obesity prevalence of 30% or more. In 2010, 12 states had an obesity prevalence of 30% (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012). More than 50% of adults do not get the recommended 150 minutes of exercise per week (Sapkota, Bowles, Ham, & Kohl, 2005). Less than a third of adults in the U.S. eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. That rate has not changed since 1994 (Blanck, Gillespie, Khan, Serdula, & Mokdad, 2005). These problems in wellbeing are not caused because there is a lack of information about health promotion and disease prevention. “Reinforcing this staggering data of ineptitude, results of one survey found that while many people are aware of the health benefits of physical activity and weight management, they don’t typically respond to that information with a change in health behavior” (Kimiecik, 2011). For example, one study found that 90 percent of heart attacks worldwide are caused by nine “easy-to-measure”, modifiable risk factors (Yusuf et al., 2004). “But prevention, no matter how sophisticated and elegant the biopsychosocial models guiding it, has fallen far short of making significant inroads into helping people live healthier lives through the avoidance of disease” (Kimiecik, 2011).

Most professionals have a way of looking at our bodies as a machine. “Briefly, in relation to health and wellness, the mechanistic worldview seeks to identify and isolate the causal sequences that lead to illness and ultimately to death” (Nicholas & Gobble, 1991). It is time to look at approaching holistic wellbeing from a different angle. I’m not saying that a different approach will dramatically improve an individual’s holistic
wellbeing. I only suggest that a new approach is worth exploring. If professionals want
to change behavior, then they should spend more time exploring why people develop
wellbeing risks.
Non-traditional Approach

An approach that focuses on people’s inner resources for thriving and flourishing rather than prevention and disease-risk reduction was is called the third revolution of health (Breslow, 2004). Concepts brought from salutogenesis, self-determination theory, and eudaimonic wellbeing support this type of focus for long-term behavior change in regards to holistic wellbeing. In other words, finding meaning in your life can contribute to improved wellbeing and long-term success of behavior change. “One potential explanation for the short-lasting effects of these interventions [health promotion and disease risk reduction] is that they may not be addressing deeper meanings as to why people may or may not perform health-related behaviors, such as physical activity, in the first place. This possibility suggests that for sustainable, long-term behavior change, the meaning or lived experiences of the individual needs to be taken into account” (Fahlberg & Fa, 1997; Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994; Kimiecik, 2011). “And without considering meaning or the lived experiences of individuals and the communities in which they live, the effects of most change attempts will be short-lived because the starting point is flawed” (Kimiecik, 2011). “Focusing on health issues without addressing deeper human experience, such as life meaning and purpose, will achieve limited long-term success” (Robison, 2004). The theory I made up from concepts from salutogenesis, self-determination theory, and eudaimonic wellbeing is not a traditional theory because it challenges the mechanistic worldview of health and wellbeing.
Exploring the New Approach

Concepts and Constructs

Aaron Antonovsky came up with a theoretical model for Salutogenesis in the late 1970s. “The concept of Salutogenesis aims on finding and examining factors, which are responsible for the formation and the maintaining of health, as the healthy pole of a health-disease continuum” (Buch, 2006). More specifically, I focused on the Sense of Coherence model of Antonovsky’s. Sense of Coherence can be defined as The extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic, feeling of confidence that one’s environment is predictable and that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected (Buch, 2006). The Sense of Coherence model is composed of the three concepts comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Within the manageability concept I have added the subconcepts of needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) and motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic). Also within the meaningfulness concept I have added the subconcept of eudaimonic wellbeing (pleasures, meaningfulness, engagement in life).

Helping an individual move towards a stronger Sense of Coherence ultimately will improve their holistic wellbeing. The concept of comprehensibility is the extent of how clear, structured, and understood one’s environment or problem is. The concept of manageability explains the extent to which a person believes they can cope with the resources that they have. The stronger Sense of Coherence they have the better the individual can cope with stressors in their life. This is where the needs and motivations of an individual are involved. “According to Ryan and Deci, three basic psychological needs are essential for optimal growth, social development and personal well-being—
competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Experiencing these needs provides an energizing state that facilitates health and well-being” (Kimiecik, 2011). The concept of meaningfulness describes the extent to which one believes their life has meaning and is worth living. “Without meaningfulness, respectively without the life attitude, which makes life seem worth living, all mobilization of resources won’t do anything” (Brieskorn-Zinke, 2002). Meaningfulness is one of the main concepts professionals should take a closer look at for the people they are trying to reach and help. “And without considering meaning or the lived experiences of individuals and the communities in which they live, the effects of most change attempts will be short-lived because the starting point is flawed” (Kimiecik, 2011). Eudaimonic wellbeing is an approach to obtaining happiness that has dimensions: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. These dimensions attribute to happiness for an individual. Pleasure is the process of maximizing positive emotion and minimizing negative emotion in one’s life. Engagement is the process of being involved and actively participating in the requirements and demands of one’s life. This process is also known as the good life. The good life is a result from one cultivating and investing their strengths and virtues into their relationships, work, and leisure (Seligman, 2002). Meaning is the process of having a higher purpose in life than our selves. One should perceive and use their strengths and virtues to serve a higher purpose in life. As one finds meaningfulness in their life their chance at improving their holistic wellbeing improves. “It is this life of becoming, of self-discovering, of experiencing that is missing in so much of the mainstream biomedical, prevention, wellness offerings. Eudaimonic well-being may be a new road to travel on to move past neutral and experience optimal health” (Kimiecik, 2011).
Living your life in accordance to these concepts suggests that improving one’s wellbeing is a result from a continuous process of finding meaning in their life. If people develop a deeper meaning in their life they are more likely to apply resources in order to better cope with stressors in their life (Antonovsky, 1987). “They propose that people high in subjective vitality may be better equipped to mobilize their resources to more actively participate in health-relevant activities” (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Subjective vitality in this case is interchangeable with meaningfulness in one’s life. In a study of older women, results showed that those with higher levels of eudaimonic well being had lower levels of daily salivary cortisol, pro-inflammatory cytokines, cardiovascular risk, and longer duration REM sleep. These factors are positively linked to long-term physical health (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This suggests that people do not change their minds and behavior based off what they know, they change their minds and behavior based of what they feel.
Practical Implications

As a professional this theory complies with my worldview. I want people to improve their holistic wellbeing. They can do this by making behavior changes. These behavior changes, however, must have a chance at being long-term. If I look to this theory for guidance when doing my job, then people will have a chance at long-term behavior change. For example, I can provide a supportive environment that fosters positive feedback for extrinsic motivation. Positive feedback could include rewarding the person or supporting autonomy. Providing positive feedback for extrinsic motivation helps a person move towards positive intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation for somebody could include relatedness, self-regulated and autonomous motivation, competence, and confidence. “This idea of autonomous self-regulation is very relevant to health behavior such as physical activity because the more an individual is guided by autonomous self-regulation, the more likely she or he will engage, persist, and enjoy these behaviors” (Patrick & Williams, 2012). I just need to remember that this type of theory is subjective in terms of wellbeing, and in order for an individual to get the full effect I cannot be too directive, to encourage one to strengthen their Sense of Coherence, and find meaningfulness in their life. This theory is a fresh, new approach to the problems the health and wellbeing world is facing. Professionals should try implementing some of these concepts into their work.
References


