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PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE THROUGH HEALTH REALIZATION

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This article proposes that youth violence is primarily a function of the generally poor mental health of American youth. It asserts, therefore, that the optimal solution to this vexing problem is to teach young people how to live in the experience of psychological health that is their birthright. It then suggests that this can be best accomplished by helping youth understand the principles behind Health Realization—a psychospiritual model that purports to account for all youthful behavior. The three principles behind Health Realization (i.e., Mind, Consciousness, and Thought) are delineated, contemporary research in support of its major assumptions cited, and the results of applied Health Realization programs with at-risk youth in clinical, educational, and community empowerment settings described.

Keywords: *Health Realization; Psychology of Mind; flow; positive psychology; violence prevention*

A disproportionate number of violent crime arrests involve young people. Although representing about 8% of the U.S. population, youth under the age of 18 account for almost 16% of violent crime arrests (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 1999). Although homicides committed by youth have dropped since the early 1990s, arrests and self-reports for other violent behavior are increasing (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2000). In 1999, for example, five million youth aged 12 to 17 reported serious fights with others at school or work and almost two million reported attacking others with the intent to harm (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association [SAMHSA], 2001).

Youth violence, aggression, and impulsivity are predictive of later chemical abuse (e.g., Caspi, Moffitt, Newman, & Silva, 1996), possession of firearms (e.g., SAMHSA, 2002), gang membership (e.g., Curry, Ball, & Decker, 1996), suicidal behavior (Greenblatt, 2000), risk taking, and victimization (e.g., Windle, 1994). Several experts (e.g., Fox, 1996) predict a significant increase in future teen violence if current population trends persist.

This article proposes that youth violence, in all of its destructive forms, is not typically a response to emotional disturbance or psychopathology but, rather, to the absence of well-being, self-esteem, common sense, and other positive qualities of healthy mental functioning. It suggests, therefore, that the optimal way to prevent youth violence is to teach young people to understand and live in the experience of healthy psychological functioning that is their birthright. Put another way, just as understanding and maintaining physical health is the best defense against disease, recognizing and unleashing psychological health

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is the best insulator against insecure feelings and the myriad of violent youthful behavior they can spawn.

Until recently, there has been a glaring absence of research on the etiology of healthy psychological functioning in young people. Larson (2000) described it this way:

While we have a burgeoning field of developmental psychopathology, we have a more diffuse body of research on the pathways whereby children and adolescents become motivated, directed, socially competent, compassionate, and psychologically vigorous adults. Corresponding to that, we have numerous research-based programs for youth aimed at curbing drug use, violence, suicide, teen pregnancy, and other problem behaviors, but lack rigorous applied psychology of how to promote positive youth development. (p. 170)

The emerging field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has attempted to address this void by reemphasizing the field's original mission of making young people stronger, more productive, and resilient and their lives more fulfilling. To date, positive psychology has developed scores of diverse models to explain the etiology of optimal youth functioning. These perspectives, in turn, have given rise to widely disparate approaches to positive psychological intervention. Although shifting the emphasis from dysfunction to understanding and promoting health in young people is long overdue, psychology as a science is still missing fundamental causal principles that explain all human behavior (dysfunctional to optimal) and that lead to higher levels of mental health for youth and adults, as well.

We know from the basic physical sciences that nature operates in economical ways. Physics and chemistry, for example, have shown us that at the heart of an infinite range of diverse phenomena are a limited number of underlying principles. Without fundamental causal psychological principles that account for all behavior, any explanation of optimal youth functioning is as possible and feasible as any other. Only a principle-based understanding of human behavior will lead to heightened levels of mental health for all youth and predictable reductions in youth violence.

The purpose of this article is to offer a working hypothesis for understanding the psychological functioning of young people based on three fundamental and unifying principles associated with the time-honored concepts of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought. Viewing the entire spectrum of youth behavior through these principles represents a significant shift to a deeper, generic level of psychological understanding that can integrate (a) disparate schools of thought on both youth violence and optimal youth functioning, (b) multiple levels of research on these issues, and (c) diverse approaches to facilitating healthy youth functioning and violence prevention.

When reflecting on this hypothesis, it would be helpful for readers to step back from the logical positivist perspective that may have them view these ideas as metaphysical and beyond proof and, instead, consider the value of these constructs in terms of a possible deeper, convergent, explanatory power. Presently, many social scientists (e.g., Fox & Prilleltensky, 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 that seek to 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 (2002) put it this way:

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) psychology. 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., Soren Kierkegaard). While none has 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 Health Realization Model

The principle-based paradigm to be presented here 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 (HR) and the Three Principle Perspective. The pioneering work of this model was done by psychologists Roger Mills (1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1995) and George Pransky (1990, 1997). The HR perspective has been applied extensively to the areas of at-risk youth, delinquency, and criminality by Thomas Kelley (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1996, 1997, 2001; Kelley & Stack, 2000).

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 suggested that a deeper understanding of human experience could be achieved by looking beyond the realm of form in which psychology had restricted its domain of inquiry. Banks asserted that there were spiritual processes that operated to create form and offered the conceptual principles of Mind, Consciousness, and Thought to represent these processes. Banks viewed these three principles as an inseparable and interrelated trinity that provided a connection between the formless life force and the world of form. Such a 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).

The Principle of Mind

At the formless level, HR defines the principle of Mind as the purest life force and 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) described these ideas as follows:

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 and 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 from 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.

The Principle of Thought

At the formless level, Thought is the creative agent, the capacity to give form to formless life energy, and 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, and 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 and 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 it is the only experience of which human beings are capable. Thus, each person's mental life is the moment-to-moment product of their thinking transformed into experience by their 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.

The Nature of Mental Health

Since its inception, the field of psychology has attempted to discover the true nature of mental health. The psychodynamic school viewed health as the successful resolution of psychosocial and psychosexual issues through the balancing of personality components. Adler's individual psychology saw it as the transformation of socially learned feelings of inferiority through the growth principle of the individual, which provided a positive integration of past, present, and future. Humanistic psychology defined mental health as the natural human drive toward personal fulfillment, self-actualization, and being in the here and now. The existential school characterized health as personal responsibility for creating meaning in life and making life choices. Gestalt psychology viewed healthy functioning as

the ability to be in the immediate presence of thoughts, feelings, and sensations and to accept responsibility for one's behavior. The behaviorist perspective saw health as learning adaptive behaviors and functional problem solving through appropriate reinforcement schedules. The cognitive school defined health as the ability to distinguish and challenge irrational beliefs and schemas leading to rational thinking and decision making (Craighead & Nemeroff, 2001).

Transpersonal psychology added a spiritual dimension to the picture, viewing health as the psychospiritual integration of personality. Recently, positive psychology has developed diverse models to explain health, linking it to evolutionary influences (e.g., Buss, 2000), mature adaptive defenses such as altruism and humor (e.g., Vaillant, 2000), and positive life events and social contexts (e.g., Myers, 1992, 2000; Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, & Steward, 2000).

Although each of these perspectives points to essential pieces of the mental health puzzle, none offers a definition of health fundamental enough to incorporate all of its dimensions. Furthermore, except for Maslow's (1971) work on self-actualization and Rogers' (1961) idea of the fully functioning person, these perspectives view mental health as the absence of symptoms. Finally, with few exceptions, these models view health through an *outside-in/something missing* paradigm asserting that some absent external factor(s) must be present for health to emerge (e.g., meaningful activities, religious affiliation, intimate relationships, etc.).

HR proposes an *inside-out/nothing missing* definition of innate mental health—the natural, inborn alignment of personal mind with Mind. Put another way, HR asserts that, at birth, personal mind is uncontaminated by conditioned ideas and memories and, thus, is one with Mind. According to HR, whenever personal mind is quiet or clear, it automatically aligns with Mind and receives an effortless stream of free-flowing intelligent thought that is unfailingly responsive to the moment. HR proposes that this generic free-flowing thinking process is the sole source of the experience of psychological health that includes well-being, contentment, compassion, self-esteem, exhilaration, and common sense. Regardless of current mental status or prior socialization, HR asserts that all youth have the same built-in source of mental health and will exhibit its attributes to the degree that their personal minds are in sync with Mind thereby allowing this natural thinking process to emerge. In the words of Mustakova-Possardt (2002),

Mental health is the innate capacity of every human being 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 accessed via a clear mind, or from realizing the infinite capacity for formless 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 natural and effortless flow of thought . . . as the experience of peace, contentment, 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 predominantly in the experience of psychological health produced by free-flowing thought. For most youngsters, however, this does not occur because most youth not only underutilize this generic thinking

process, but most do not even know it exists. What most young people have been taught to view as the preeminent, if not exclusive, thinking process is analytical or processing thinking. Unlike free-flowing thought, 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 unsatisfying, 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 that are inherently satisfying, unconditional, shared by humanity, and span age, gender, and culture. G. Pransky (1997), for example, contrasted the natural feeling of exhilaration with the conditioned feeling of excitement that many youth crave and often achieve through violence:

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 natural 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 moment. (p. 74)

Processing thinking, when used appropriately, is essential for successful cultural adaptation. Unfortunately, very early on, most young people innocently learn dysfunctional uses of this thinking mode—either overusing it or using it inappropriately. Because it takes effort, chronic processing, even used 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 youth to create self-images or egos by thinking that their worth is tied to external conditions, possessions, looks, and behavior (e.g., toughness).

Because the particular thoughts a youth thinks determine his or her feelings, habitually processing 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 abuse of processing thinking not only produces stress and distress, it obstructs free-flowing thought (i.e., alignment of personal mind with Mind)—the source of innate mental health. In the words of G. Pransky (1997),

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)

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 intuition and insight of free-flowing thought and the occasional implementation of analysis, when appropriate, without getting stuck in the processing mode.

Preventing Youth Violence

HR proposes that the key to preventing youth violence is to teach young people how to unleash their natural mental health—to rekindle what is already within and draw out the inherent well-being available to all youth in every moment. HR proposes that this can be done by teaching youth to recognize the inside-out creation of experience through understanding the principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness. Mills (1997) discussed two elements of this understanding that have significantly helped many violent adolescents relax and psychologically take charge of their world:

The first is knowing how their reality is determined in the moment. When adolescents understand how their view of life, their perceptions, are a product of an ongoing continuous thought process, they gradually and gracefully move into the driver's seat of their thinking. As a result, they start to experience more self-efficacy, along with the ability to better manage their moods and behavior. The second is knowing that a responsive, functional mode of thought, what we have called the free-flowing mode, is always available. Both recognizing its existence and seeing that the mind is always trying to elicit and utilize this more common sense mode, helps adolescents relax and feel less of a need to rely on their learned, memory-based processing mode thinking habits to project artificial images and to look for answers. (p. 206)

Furthermore, through understanding HR principles, young people begin to realize that their feelings serve as a reliable, moment-to-moment barometer of the quality of their thinking. Painful emotions (e.g., anger) always signal the misuse of thought and the need to lighten up, clear one's mind, and realign with Mind. Even anger that arises in response to a real and present danger, if entertained, will inevitably lead to a less functional, even tragic response. Thus, during dangerous encounters, police and military personnel, for example, are trained to dismiss angry thoughts, stay in the moment, and trust their intuition to guide their actions. Healthy feelings (e.g., well-being), on the other hand, inform youth that their thinking is working for them, that the light is green, and that they are heading in the right direction. Rather than viewing emotions as entities with which to contend, work through, or act on, youth come to see their feelings as reliable guideposts to the momentary quality of their own thinking. According to Sedgeman (1998),

When young people realize the one-to-one connection between thought and experience, they gain perspective on life. Changes in their experience of reality no longer look as though they were randomly caused by outside events or forces. Fear, hopelessness, and alienation begin looking like thought-events, rather than horrible life circumstances. Seeing the emergence of experience from the process of thinking appears to bring young people peace of mind, no matter what they are thinking. Understanding principles gives the power of experience to the youth, not to life events. (p. 3)

According to HR, as youths' understanding of principles deepen, the more closely they approach the standard of mental health proposed by this model: a naturally responsive thought process; a set of deeper, innately satisfying feelings; and the ability to distinguish and remain graceful and resilient during insecure moods and difficult circumstances. Also, as their level of understanding deepens, young people naturally exhibit more responsive behavior and act in more virtuous ways regardless of current circumstances or past history. HR proposes that the natural inclination of young people to live happy, productive, non-

violent lives can be rekindled, drawn out, and maintained through understanding HR principles and learning to trust their innate health.

Teaching HR

HR practitioners first attempt to establish and nurture the necessary preconditions for the change process to unfold. In HR programs, qualities of interaction are characterized by respect, seeing clients as equals, humor, empathy, compassion, engaging interactions, and by assuming they have inadvertently become caught up in certain roles, innocently forgetting that these roles were learned and not really who they are. HR practitioners see their client's behavior, no matter how misguided, as learned ways of coping with life the best way they can given how they were taught to think about life. As they gain the experience of being at ease, relaxed, and playful, as the pressure of insecure thinking wears off, youth relax and are themselves without self-consciousness. By so doing, they are able to see themselves as the equals of anyone and are able to experience a different caliber of relationships and qualities of interaction only available outside an alienated state of mind. These qualities of interaction allow youth to recognize their inherent integrity and reengage their innate health.

When this relaxed openness is achieved, HR practitioners begin teaching young people how to use the power behind thought in the way it was meant to be used. They help youth recognize how the outcomes in every area of their lives are determined by the quality of thinking they brought to those situations. They show youth the link between the quality of their thinking (i.e., their mode of thought) and their resulting perceptions and feelings. For example, they teach their clients to distinguish between the kinds of feelings and the qualities of thinking that characterize their processing mode versus the quality of feelings and insights coming from free-flowing thinking. They assist youth to see the logical connection of their moods and shifting states of mind to their innate mental health. They point out, in a way that youth can connect to their everyday experiences, the tendency of free-flowing thinking to reemerge spontaneously when they clear away the debris of their conditioned thoughts.

Young people's pasts, their culture, their education, job status, relationships, past traumas, and so forth are not the direct focus of HR intervention. As HR practitioners help their young clients realize and remove the smokescreen of memory-based thinking around these factors, their capacity for wisdom and resiliency moves into the foreground. Practitioners realize that, the more deeply youth tap into their own inner wisdom, the more easily they solve their own problems and improve their functioning in all of these areas themselves. For example, when youth grasp how thought carries the past through time to the present, they transcend their past no matter how negative.

There is no fixed formula for teaching HR distinctions to young people. HR practitioners must themselves be grounded in HR principles (i.e., walk the talk) and trust their wisdom to reveal the best way to teach in each setting. This being said, several HR practitioners have presented diverse teaching approaches in practical self-help manuscripts (e.g., Bailey, 1990; Carlson & Bailey, 1999; Kelley, 1997; Mills, 1995; Mills & Spittle, 2001; G. Pransky, 1990, 1997; J. Pransky, 1997). Several videotape presentations are also available that depict the teaching of HR distinctions in various settings (Health Realization Institute, 2002a). Finally, Pransky and Carpenos (2000) developed an HR-based middle school curriculum and guide for the prevention of violence, abuse, and other school-related

problem behaviors. This curriculum specifies in very practical terms one approach for teaching young people HR principles and the inside-out construction of reality. According to the authors,

The intent of the curriculum is to draw forth the opposite of insecurity—that is, security which is only possible with secure, “healthy” thinking. When young people come to understand, recognize, and experience the difference between their healthy thinking and their insecure thinking, and allow the infinite possibilities of healthy thinking to flow freely within them, they will be far less likely to follow their insecure thinking down problem paths into violence and other behavior problems. (Pransky & Carpenos, 2000, p. 5)

Contemporary Supportive Research

There is considerable evidence from contemporary developmental research that supports the HR assumption that children are born with a natural capacity for healthy psychological functioning. Thousands of naturalistic observations of infants and toddlers raised in nurturing settings reveal unequivocally that such youngsters possess a natural curiosity to explore and to learn. The vast body of developmental research reveals conclusively that, at birth, children do not have mindsets that predispose them toward violent behavior. Instead, these studies point almost unanimously to an inborn state of healthy mental functioning in physically healthy children, which includes a natural interest to learn; an intrinsic ability to act in mature, common sense, nondeviant ways; and a natural desire to use and expand their abilities in prosocial directions (Ainsworth, 1982; Arendt, Cone, & Sroufe, 1979; Dodge & Frame, 1982; Mills, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Patterson, Chamberlain, Reid, 1982; Sroufe, 1979; Sroufe, Egeland, & Erickson, 1983; Stewart, 1985; Suarez, Mills, & Stewart, 1987; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985).

Mills (1988) described the work of several researchers in the field of motivation who recognized a deeper or truer *metacognitive* self as a basically healthy, already actualized self that naturally provides intrinsic motivation (Bandura, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1988, 1990; Iran-Nejed, 1990; McCombs, 1991; McCombs & Marzano, 1990; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998; Weiner, 1990; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). Although Maslow (1971) was one of the first to recognize the existence of this natural agency, he felt that one had to first go through and satisfy lower needs states to attain this actualized experience. Contemporary motivation research appears to support the conclusion that youths begin life in this actualized state and then learn to function in lower needs states.

Furthermore, there is considerable research evidence in support of the HR assumption that the natural mental health in youth can be rekindled and drawn out—that even high-risk youth can access a natural capacity to behave in more mature, common sense, nonviolent ways (Dodge & Frame, 1982; Mills, 1988; Patterson et al., 1982; Stewart, 1985; Suarez et al., 1987).

Many researchers have concluded that even extremely at-risk children are not, most of the time, in frames of mind that lead to violent behavior. Patterson et al. (1982), for example, documented, by home observations, an average of only 3.1 (acting-out) behaviors a day in the more disturbed children he studied. Werner & Smith (1989) concluded from their longitudinal studies that, except for perhaps the most persistent circumstances, at-risk children evidenced healthy self-righting resources that moved the vast majority toward

normal adult development. Outcome studies of several national prevention programs focusing on substance abusers, dropouts, and delinquents who bonded with healthy adults, teachers, and peers began to display healthier functioning as predicted by HR (Curtis, Smith, & Smoll, 1979; Foley & Warren, 1985; Gadwa & Griggs, 1985; Heath, 1991, 1994, 1999; Larson, 2000; O'Connor, 1985; Peck, Law, & Mills, 1987; Shure & Spivak, 1982; Smith & Smoll, 1990, 1997; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993; Stern, Catterall, Ahadef, & Ash, 1985). Youth involved in such relationships showed significant improvement in positive attitude, rational problem-solving ability, prosocial behavior, and motivation to attain educational goals and nondeviant lifestyles. In these programs, the consistent predictor of program success was the caring, supportive, nonjudgmental, nonpunitive qualities of the relationship between youth and program staff.

Research on a national level has identified the qualities of adults who are capable of improving the self-efficacy of youth, reducing their performance anxiety, and influencing potential dropouts to stay in school. Such adults were found to be consistently positive and empathetic and demonstrated respect and concern for young people. Also, they were optimistic about their youngsters' ability to learn and allowed them to structure their own learning. In so doing, they were creative and flexible in adapting their teaching methods to the needs, interests, and performance level of each youth. In this type of relationship, even high-risk youth were able to see the distortions that emerged from their dysfunctional thinking habits, and they began to experience more mature and objective frames of mind (Coombs & Cooley, 1986; Ekstrom, Gortz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Peck et al., 1987).

In sum, there is voluminous evidence in the literature that supports the HR assumptions that children are born with innate psychological health and that even high-risk children will gravitate toward this innate healthy functioning when conditions exist that allow it to surface.

Applied HR Programs

Research is growing in direct support of the simple logic of the HR paradigm. This research has been conducted predominantly in three applied areas: clinical settings, community empowerment projects, and educational programs. At present, there have been several post-hoc preclinical, postclinical, and controlled clinical studies demonstrating the effectiveness of HR-based psychotherapy for adolescent and adult clients displaying a wide range of mental clinical diagnoses (i.e., depression to schizophrenia; according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition) in both inpatient and outpatient settings (Bailey, 1989; Bailey, Blevens, & Heath, 1988; Blevens, Bailey, Olson, & Mills, 1992; Borg, 1997; Pransky, 1999; Ringold, 1992; Shuford, 1986; Shuford & Crystal, 1988; Stewart, 1987). Because the focus of this article is on the prevention of youth violence, however, the outcomes of HR, youth-focused, community empowerment projects and educational programs are emphasized.

Community Empowerment Projects

Presently, HR-based community empowerment programs have been initiated in some of the most severely violence-ridden housing projects in Florida, California, Minnesota, Hawaii, Colorado, and New York. In each of these projects, community residents and social

service agency staff were trained in leadership and change strategies following logically from the HR paradigm (Mills & Spittle, 1998). After training, residents identified their most pressing needs and priorities for community revitalization and worked collaboratively with agency professionals to develop community action plans and implementation strategies. Longitudinal follow-up studies were carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of these projects (Mills & Spittle, 2000).

Modello and Homestead Gardens—two Miami public housing communities with the highest violent crime rates in Dade County—began their HR revitalization project in 1987 (Pransky, 1998). After 3 years, the program served 142 families and more than 600 youth. Mills (1990c) cited the following results:

1. Parents reported that 87% of their children were more cooperative, and parents stated that they were significantly less frustrated with and hostile toward their children.
2. More than 60% of households became employed from a baseline of 85% on public assistance.
3. School discipline referrals and suspensions decreased by 75%.
4. School truancy rates dropped by 80%.
5. Parent involvement in the schools increased by 500%.
6. Only one student from the two communities failed at the middle school level from a baseline of a 64% failure rate.
7. Police serving these communities reported no calls for drug trafficking or criminal activities such as stolen cars or burglaries for almost a year.

Robert Thomas, then senior advisor to Dade County United Way, was asked by Janet Reno, then Florida attorney general, to organize a task force of agency heads to work closely with the Modello-Homestead Gardens programs. In his final report to Attorney General Reno and the United Way, Thomas (1993) concluded,

Change became apparent after the initial ten-week leadership training program . . . by the third year, residents had organized their own agenda for improving their community and preparing themselves to leave it for the outside world. They were collaborating to write their own grants and initiating their own contracts with government officials and service providers. They had no further need for the coalition of providers and officials I had organized to bring change from the outside. Change had followed the drawing out of the innate competence of individual residents and they were working as an inspired community to change the quality of their own lives. (p. 7)

Beginning in 1990 in Oakland, California, an HR-based program was instituted in Coliseum Gardens—a 200-unit housing development with the highest homicide and drug-related arrest rates in the city. By the end of the second project year, homicides dropped by 100% (none reported in the second year). In fact, the homicide rate in Coliseum Gardens remained at zero for 6 consecutive years (1991-1996)! Also, violent crime rates dropped by 45%, drug possession sales went down by 16%, and assaults with firearms decreased by 38%. Furthermore, youth involvement in boys and girls clubs increased by 110%, gang warfare and ethnic clashes between Cambodian and African-American youth virtually ended, 80% of residents participated in regular meetings with housing management and community police, and 62 families went off welfare (Roe & Bowser, 1993).

The South Bronx HR Comprehensive Community Revitalization Project spanned a year and a half with 70 professional staff, community residents, and resident leaders of six

large community development corporations participating. Subsequently, HR training was expanded to all social service departments, Head Start, and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPO) parent programs; numerous employment and youth-serving agencies; and several law enforcement and school personnel. Beginning in 1994, a youth-school ombudsman program was funded by the State of New York to bring the HR understanding into community schools. O.M.G., Inc. (1994), evaluated the South Bronx project and concluded that

the HR group planning sessions and programs designed to enhance self-esteem and confidence had enabled community residents to become a significant part of community change, to become involved in shaping their own future and that of their communities in a meaningful way, and also helped community service personnel to have more positive relations with community residents. (p. 13)

Beginning in 1993, the Glenwood/Lyndale Community Center, located between two of the most crime-ridden public housing projects in Minneapolis, implemented a variety of programs based on HR within all of its community youth service programs. Prior to implementation, police and social services reports of violence involving families, gangs, and other community residents were virtually constant. By 2000, reports of fighting or conflict among families, gangs, and residents were rare. Also, citizens began assisting police with information to aid in solving crimes—something unheard of in 1993. According to Mills & Spittle (2000), the former atmosphere of fear in these communities was replaced by trusting community relationships. Furthermore, the Minneapolis Department of Public Safety reported that crime within schools dropped to next to nothing from the prior high rate more typical of public housing communities around Minneapolis.

In 2000, the Health Realization Institute (HRI, 2000b) initiated a 5-year, multimillion-dollar community revitalization project in San Francisco. The Vistalio Valley Community Resiliency Project involved teaching HR understandings to community residents, public school students and teachers, an array of community agencies, and city mental health and public health departments. External evaluators conducted surveys that showed that 85 to 90% of residents who participated in the project were more involved in their community, less depressed and anxious, more in control of their emotions and behavior, had higher self-esteem, and more positive attitudes. Furthermore, resident-led action planning retreats resulted in additional HR programs that substantially improved school climate and student attitudes and reduced suspensions. HR training programs were also developed for police officers, drug addicts, and medium-security jail inmates. Surveys administered in the jail and work furlough HR classes revealed significant, pre-post training decreases in inmate anger, anxiety, and impulse to act out of anger. Also found were significant increases in inmate feelings of calm and peace, thankfulness, hopefulness, and relaxation (HRI, 2002b).

Applications in Schools

Stewart (1985) utilized HR in her work with remedial reading students in Miami. Twenty students randomly selected for control and experimental groups were a mean of 2

years behind their grade level in reading. The intervention consisted of thirty 40-minute classroom sessions over a 6-week period. The experimental group instructors were trained in HR principles and spent much less time on actual instruction and traditional reading exercises than control group teachers. Instead, they emphasized building rapport, raising the mood level of students by telling stories, jokes, or playing games, and finding *teachable moments*, in which they would instruct until students became bored or distracted. The experimental group gained 14 months in reading level—significantly higher than the mean gain of 7 months for the control group as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test. The mean gain for vocabulary was 1.6 years for the experimental group versus 0.45 for the control group ($p < .01$). Stewart concluded that levels of mental health and well-being significantly affect learning and that learning is accelerated when both teachers and students are in healthy states of mind.

School data were also collected from the Dade County, Florida, and Oakland, California, empowerment projects cited earlier (Mills & Spittle, 2000) where specific HR programs targeted youth fitting each school district's profile for youth at risk for dropping out. These projects, funded through federal drug-free school grants, taught HR principles to at-risk youth, teachers, school counselors, youth agencies, and parent groups in all 12 high school feeder patterns. Over the 3-year pilot program, 375 students in grades 7 to 12, 36 teachers, 5 guidance counselors, and 40 parents received HR training. Postintervention grade point averages increased significantly in all 3 years of the project. The mean increase was 64% for year one, 56% for year two, and 57% for year three. Interestingly, students for whom HR instruction ended after year one continued to show additional GPA improvements of 24% during both the second and third project years.

Furthermore, absenteeism and discipline referrals decreased significantly in each year of the project. By the end of the program, participants' rates of absenteeism and discipline referrals were significantly below county school norms. By the third project year, participants displayed an overall 58% decrease in absenteeism and an 81% decrease in discipline referrals. Finally, significant pre-post test differences on the Pier-Harris Self-Esteem Scale were found for youth on both the Positive Cognition and Self-Worth subscales (Cherry, 1992).

In May of 1990, the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory initiated an HR youth and community empowerment project in Aurora, Colorado, defining their target community as the catchment area for West Middle School, which served a large population of low-income minority students. This program was funded by a grant through the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Evaluation data showed student suspension rates declined in both the 1990-91 school year and again in the 1992-93 school year. The 30 students participating in the HR after-school program (compared to nonparticipating students) showed significant grade improvement, decreased absences, and fewer discipline referrals (Mills & Spittle, 2000).

Aurora teachers participating in the HR training reported that they were able to change their perceptions of high-risk students, to see them in less judgmental ways, and to establish more positive relationships with them, which resulted in students taking more interest in school and achieving higher grades. All parents participating in the HR empowerment training sessions reported a positive impact on their relationships with their children (Mills & Spittle, 2000).

Conclusion

It would appear that the principles behind HR have the power to transform the field's present understanding of both optimal youth functioning and the prevention of youth violence. These principles suggest that it is no longer plausible to look at multiple outside forces to either explain youth violence or to improve the mental health of our children. The bulk of well-being research chronicled by positive psychology (e.g., Myers, 1992, 2000), for example, appears to have innocently pointed us in the wrong direction. The principles behind HR turn cause and effect inside out. The purported causes of well-being and optimal youth functioning reported by positive psychology (e.g., supportive friendships, challenging work, religious faith, intimate relationships, realistic goals, etc.) turn out to be effects, not causes. The principles of Mind, Thought, and Consciousness reveal 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 these fundamental causal principles can move us to a deeper, more precise understanding of all human functioning, can turn attention away from the myth of external causes and the products of thought, and can focus instead on the fact of thought and the process of creating experience from the inside out.

This article has cited extensive contemporary research that supports the presence of innate mental health in children and documents the fact that this health can be drawn out of even severely violent youth. Numerous studies were also described that support the effectiveness of HR-based interventions in applied clinical, educational, and community revitalization settings. Clearly, additional research is needed, and some is presently under way. At Wayne State University, for example, researchers are conducting an empirical study of the relationship between a key HR construct, thought recognition, and psychological well-being. Also, West Virginia University's Department of Community Medicine has 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 participants of HR courses. In 2000, the university, inspired by changes observed in its own faculty and students exposed to this understanding, established the Sydney A. Banks Institute for Innate Health within its Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center. The Institute is a multidisciplinary 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.

Ideally, from an empirical perspective, more longitudinal studies are needed that simultaneously study both risk and protective factors in the etiology of youth violence. Furthermore, it is clear that violent youth with biochemical imbalances or brain dysfunction or damage must be treated medically, as well. Nevertheless, it is apparent that with certain populations of at-risk violent youth, HR can be used successfully to draw out the natural, healthy psychological functioning of which many such youth are capable. When these children and adolescents are exposed to HR principles in ways that relate to their own experiences, when they are responded to in ways that engage their healthier states of mind, and when these interactions occur within the context of secure, supportive settings, the results appear to have a cumulative reciprocal effect that can reverse the process leading to alienation, violence, delinquency, drug use, and other health-damaging behaviors.

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