9-21-2016

Growth and Happiness in the Human Personality

Rien Havens

Allan Combs

Growth and Happiness in the Human Personality

Rien Havens
California Institute for Integral Studies

Allan Combs
California Institute for Integral Studies

Abstract: This paper explores stages and styles of meaning making in a population at Kegan's (1982) developmental levels 3 through 5. It is a qualitative study of the relationship between adult personality development and how individuals speak about meaning and wellbeing in their lives. Nineteen participants ranging widely in age and socio-economic class were selected informally through connections with the researchers, and snowball sampling. They were chosen from an original group of 50, based on informal interviews suggesting that they had achieved Kegan's developmental levels of "Socialized Mind" (stage 3), or especially "Self-Authoring Mind" (stage 4) or "Self-Transforming Mind" (stage 5). The subject-object interview (Lahey et al., 1988) was chosen for the study because it is a powerful instrument for examining adult developmental complexity in the context of a flexible variety of topics, in our case especially how the participants describe experiences of meaning making around the topic of wellbeing.

In this investigation it was found that people experience wellbeing differently as meaning-making structures shift from concrete to more flexible and expansive developmental organizations. Here wellbeing was examined in exploratory interviews, allowing participants to talk openly. The study was able to capture and organize ways experiences of wellbeing shift in conscious across these three developmental levels. The participants articulated conscious links between experiences of wellbeing and experiences of more complex developmental stages, and many of the participants at higher developmental stages described a connection between altruistic thoughts and behaviors, and the highest levels of wellbeing.

***Key Words*:** Wellbeing, consciousness, personal growth, adult development, happiness, wellbeing, meditation, subject-object interview, Robert Kegan, socialized mind, self-authoring mind, self-transforming mind.

There are two main types of wellbeing research. These concern *hedonic* wellbeing and *eudemonic* wellbeing. Hedonic wellbeing is measured in terms of positive emotion (Kahneman, Deiner, & Schwartz, 1999). Eudemonic wellbeing, on the other hand, is related to

CONSCIOUSNESS: Ideas and Research for the Twenty-First Century, Vol. 4, No. 4 [], Art. 3

Consciousness: Ideas and Research for the Twenty First Century | Fall 2016 | Vol 1 | Issue 4
Havens, R., Combs, A., Growth and happiness in the human personality

the living of a rich life by fulfilling one's own potentials (Waterman, 1993). In the present investigation eudemonic wellbeing was explored in extensive interviews, and compared to personality growth measured using the Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental method. The latter was assessed with the *Subject-Object Interview* (SOI) (Lahey, L., Souvaine, E., Kegan, R., Goodman, R., & Felix, S. , 1988, 2011). This procedure addresses the core ways individuals make sense of the world (Kegan, 1994; Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

Eudemonic wellbeing is based on living one's deepest purpose, fulfilling one's potentials, and living a virtuous life (Waterman, 1993). It has been studied in one way or another by many psychologists, philosophers, and spiritual teachers for generations. These include Carl Jung and his concept of *individuation* (1933), notions in positive psychology that define positive mental health (Jahoda, 1958), and the concept of achieving maturity in adulthood (Allport, 19561); as well as humanistic psychology's idea of the good life in which the organism engages in a continual process of opening towards the fulfillment of its potentials (e.g., Barron, 1995; Maslow, 1968; and Rogers, 1995). Eudaemonia lends an interesting context to the understanding of the constructive-developmental stages because, according to the present findings, people experiencing the higher stages of the constructive-developmental continuum also show evidence of coming closer to living their truest sense of purpose.

Method
Participants
The participants were 19 members of a larger community of acquaintances familiar to one of the researchers (RH) and who appeared informally to meet the criteria for high levels of personal growth. Nine of them were also prac-

ticed in Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen meditation. Informal criteria for selection included experience with personal growth work, reported depth of meditation, and mature age. This was all in an attempt to tap the higher and more complex stages of constructive-developmental epistemology with its complex and expansive ontology.

Procedure
Interviews were carried out by one of the researchers (RH) in the general Piagetian semi-clinical style (Lahey, et al. 1988, 2011). The SOI differs from the strict Piagetian interview, however, by exploring the lived experiences of the participant, including emotional, cognitive, inner and intrapersonal constructions of meaning. Beyond this, for the present investigation the first question in each interview concerned wellbeing, the aspect of ontology of greatest interest to the investigation. During a subsequent interview the interviewer asked the participant questions designed to determine deep aspects of worldview that create the participants' meaning making processes. For example, participants are asked to describe the last time they felt conflicts such as being torn between conflicting ideas, or different courses of personal action.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed into a written format, then scored in detail to reveal its constructive-developmental level (Lahey, et al. 1988). A thematic coding process was also undertaken to reveal important experiences of wellbeing. Themes were derived from these latter transcriptions based on content related to wellbeing, and participants who did not articulate experiences of wellbeing with clarity were discarded. The frequency of each theme was recorded on a spreadsheet and organized according to developmental level. Meta-themes were then devised to organize the participants' content in more understandable ways (Havens, 2014).

Corresponding authors: RienHavens@Gmail.com, Leslie.Allan.Combs@Gmail.com

For example, love, anger, stress, freedom of choice, failure, compassion, and many others.

Results

Significant differences in reported wellbeing experiences were found to be related to developmental levels, with the participants at lower developmental stages reporting less opportunity and fewer experiences of wellbeing than those at higher developmental stages. As the developmental level was seen to increase, participants reported significantly more free choice regarding the ability to access and experience wellbeing in their daily lives.

The Socialized Mind.
As anticipated from previous research (e.g., Kegan, 1994), participants who exhibited Kegan's Socialized Mind tended to orient towards social acceptance. They characterized their own wellbeing as feeling part of, loved, and accepted by their personal groups. For example, one participant phrased his need to feel loved in this way:

> *If I spend too much time alone it is not good for me. I need to have some time alone, but my life has been too much time alone. And relationships are the opposite of time alone in my mind. And in relationships I can feel like I can be appreciated, I can be seen, I can actually be enjoyed as a person and that brings me joy, when someone enjoys me as a person.* (Participant 30)

Interestingly, it was common among participants with this worldview to find those spiritual practices rewarding that created a sense of community with other spiritual or divine beings, such as the presence of God or Jesus.

The Self-Authoring Mind
As participants went through the process of transitioning from the Socialized Mind to Self-Authoring they became increasingly able to see the emotions and behaviors of others impartially, gaining increased freedom and detachment.

For the Self-Authoring Mind satisfaction is associated primarily with achievement experiences, which expand the sense of control and choice over experiences of wellbeing. Personal relationships are mentioned less frequently, and there is an increasing ability to differentiate feelings of others from one's own, holding them both in suspension. For example, one participant described a professional meeting in which there was significant disagreement but in which satisfaction came from,

> *... just engaging in conversation where we were able to see views that weren't always my own but were made in the same spirit as myself.*

In this exchange wellbeing was not derived from feeling a need to be in agreement, or to make things go a certain way, but in the ability to hold multiple points of view, understand them, and to entertain conflicting perspectives without dissonance.

The Self-Transforming Mind
The transition between Self-Authorship and Self-Transformation is the developmental differentiation between goal and process orientations, with a growing ability to use experience to transform the one's own cognitive-developmental structure. It is the also the beginning of questioning one's own control and thus allowing for extended possibilities. One participant (Participant 18) is a meditator who scored in this transitional zone between Self-Authorship and Self-Transformation. He is

beginning to have a growing sense of transforming his own belief structures, often through meditation and personal growth methods. Here is an example of how he is beginning to change his own Self-Authorship belief structures:

> *The mind is a wonderful...tool, it gives us the ability to work on and plan to balance your checkbook to see vision and see accomplish a tremendous amount of things, and it gets in the way of who we truly are and how we can connect to people, because the mind has got judgments in it, and all those filters prevent us from being who we are and experiencing others for who they are, because our minds are throwing all these filters and things that we are flowing our attention to all the time. And unless you stop all of that you never get to hear the underlying theme of what is going on. It is not necessarily a bad thing. It is just the ability to shift attention. Oh, I am doing this right now and it is great and it is fun, but at the end of the day if you were to hug your partner for example, and shut up, it is not about that. In your heart, or if you are feeling something within yourself with what you want to do in life, you need to trust that that answer is below your neck.* (Participant 18)

In this excerpt, the participant shows the beginnings of an integration of meta-themes into his developmental construct. His comment, for instance, characterizes the mind as making judgments and filtering experiences that distance us from our true selves, and from experiencing others for who they actually are. This participant is moving into a space of Self-Transformation. He has meditated exten-

sively, and has experienced systems of spiritual and personal growth that suggest how contemplative and meditative traditions have facilitated his developmental progress.

Those most grounded in the Self-Transformative stage appeared to exercise much choice, control, and flexibility over their wellbeing experiences, and because of the way they see the world, this structure also opened up more frequent opportunities for wellbeing. Self-Transformers develop into a stable present-moment process-oriented stance that allows for wellbeing to be experienced and felt under many circumstances. These individuals also find frequent pleasure in helping others in a present-centered awareness, and a state of flow.

The sense of wellbeing with loved ones also changes from the Self-Authoring to the Self-Transforming mind. For example of a Self-Transformer talking about his family observes:

> With family the only orientation is to be together. I mean we might do something together, but the real wellbeing just comes from being together. So it is not an achievement related relationship. It is a sense of what I might call a sense of intrinsic value...a simple sense of wellbeing, and there is no requirement to achieve anything in order to have the sense. (Participant 14)

A careful review of the interviews suggests a sense of depth to this type of experience, an ability to integrate multiple sources of wellbeing, like dancing and meditation practice, all at the same time without a strong self-identification with the multiple aspects that comprise the experience of wellbeing. There are many parts of the experience, but

the experience is felt as a whole, with the Self-Transforming participant encompassing that experience, and allowing the entirety and complexity of the experience to transform itself, without necessarily having to manipulate in order to experience the wellbeing or transformative experience.

Preferences, behaviors, and fundamental views on life change as one moves towards higher stages of development. This in part contributes to the fact that people at higher developmental levels have more opportunities, can more easily access, have more flexibility in bringing forward both pleasant and unpleasant experiences as sources for wellbeing. And because of their higher overall orientation towards process and being in the moment, the experience of Self-Transcendence allows wellbeing experiences to arise spontaneously and consistently. The habit of wellbeing is strong enough to bear against the ups and downs of everyday life.

For example, a person with a Socialized Mind might take a walk and need it to be sunny and warm to experience wellbeing, whereas a Self-Transformer is more often engaged in the process itself, enjoying its details, both seeing the layering depth and richness as well as the simple and enjoyable act of walking. This does not mean that the Self-Transformer is not sometimes uncomfortable, cold, or grumpy. It is just that all of those aspects are part of a larger functioning, self-created process that naturally lends itself to experiencing wellbeing more frequently.

Participants who were early in the developmental progress don't understand as easily or have access to the kind of complexity that folds the small moments into larger tapestries of meaning and purpose. Their states of mind often see rules, rewards, punishments, expectations, goal orientations, and so on, limiting wellbeing to only a couple of those categories and limiting its experience.

Conclusion

It is clear that meditation, adult development, and wellbeing are closely interrelated. And that our own emotional states can teach us moment by moment how we can make progress on the path towards self-actualization. Most importantly, personal growth is self-actualization, and adult development and spiritual development share the same basis, path, and result.

References

Allport, G. (1961). *Pattern and growth in personality*. Harcourt College Pub.
Barron, F. X. (1995). *No rootless flower. An ecology of creativity*. Cresskill,
NJ: Hampton.

Combs, L, Krippner, S. (2003) Process structure and form: An evolutionary transpersonal psychology of consciousness. *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. (22).

Deiner, E., & Lucas, R. (2000). Subjective emotional wellbeing. In M. Lewis, & J. Haviland, *Handbook of emotions 2nd Ed.* (pp. 325-37). New York, NY: Guilford.

Deiner, E., & Lucas, R. E. (1999). Personality and Subjective Wellbeing. In D.

Kahneman, E. Deiner, & N. Schwartz (Eds.) Wellbeing: The foundations of hedonic psychology (pp. 213-29). New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.

Forrester M.A., (2006) Projective identification and intersubjetctivity. *Theory and Psychology,* 16(6) 783-802.

Garvey-Berger, J. (2011). *Changing on the job: Developing leaders for a complex world.*

Havens, R., Combs, A., Growth and happiness in the human personality

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Havens, R. (2014). *Adult development and wellbeing*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1548328680)

Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. New York: Basic Books.

Kegan, R. (1982). The evolving self: Problem and process in human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lahey, L., Souvaine, E., Kegan, R., Goodman, R., Felix, S. (1988). *A Guide to The Subject Object Interview.* Cambridge: Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Laboratory of Human Development.

Lahey, L., Souvaine, E., Kegan, R., Goodman, R., & Felix, S. (2011). *A guide to the Subject-Object interview: Its administration and interpretation*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. (1st edition, 1962; 2nd edition, 1968).

McIntosh, S. (2007). *Integral consciousness and the future of evolution.* St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.

Piaget, J. (1954). *The construction of reality in the child.* New York, NY: Ballantine.

Rogers, C. (1995). *On becoming a person: A therapists' view of psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudemonia) and hedonic enjoyment. Journal of Personality and S*ocial Psychology,* 64:678-91.

Wilber, K. (2006) *Integral Spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and post-modern world.* Integral Books, Boston & London.

Corresponding authors: RienHavens@Gmail.com, Leslie.Allan.Combs@Gmail.com
Retrieved from http://www.conscjournal.org/?page_id=191