

Awareness, Allies, and Action: The Three Pillars of Resilience as a Culturally-Adaptive Model for Positive Psychological Interventions

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS AND RESILIENCE

Positive psychology interventions are characterized by a systematic and integrative approach that focuses on building and utilizing strengths in order to increase various positive outcomes including happiness, well-being, flourishing and optimal functioning (Rashid, 2009). Positive interventions generally target the interrelated domains of emotion, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2005). Research suggests that positive psychology interventions are successful in ameliorating psychological distress and help people to overcome various challenges. It is in the context of overcoming adversity that the construct of resilience is particularly relevant to the application of positive psychology.

Resilience is a "dynamic process that results in positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Conceptualizing resilience in this way is central to locating it as a transactional wellness-promoting process involving the interconnected and ongoing interactions between persons, culture, and context, rather than a static trait of individuals. As a transactional process, resilience must be continuously cultivated and nurtured since the determinants of positive adaptation may vary from context to context and from culture to culture. The study of resilience has fueled a shift in focus on what promotes adaptation and thriving in the face of adversity versus what predicts vulnerability and risk. Resilience-based approaches to stress management and trauma recovery have been increasing over the past decade.

How does resilience facilitate positive adaptation?

Resilience can help reduce the intensity with which adversity is experienced as stressful and facilitates quicker recovery. Resilience also helps one to transform stressful experiences into learning opportunities that facilitate growth. Through this process, one can build on and subsequently utilize internal and external resources to help manage future stressors. In addition, resilience provides a foundation for thriving, for transformation toward greater growth and higher functioning post-adversity.

What processes nurture and sustain resilience?

Given the dynamic and transactional nature of resilience, three processes are hypothesized to be the activating elements of resilience: Contemplative Processes ("Awareness"), Communal Processes ("Allies"), and Empowerment Processes ("Action"). The processes were identified through a comprehensive review of the literature on health, healing, and well-being across diverse cultures. These three processes appeared consistently and underlie various cultural expressions of wellness. The model presented here suggests that resilience is cultivated and maintained to the extent that these processes are engaged and active, and that the processes can be activated in diverse ways.

The Three Pillars of Resilience and Positive Well-Being (Harrell, 2016)



CULTURALLY-ADAPTIVE INTERVENTIONS: COMMON PROCESSES AND DIVERSE CONTENT

APA Policy, via the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* (2003), states that culture must be considered in psychological interventions. Recent meta-analyses have indicated that culturally-adapted interventions are effective for diverse populations (Griner & Smith, 2006). It is thus critical for positive psychology interventions to more explicitly demonstrate integration of culture. The model presented here offers an approach for recognizing the culturally-embedded nature of the content of positive psychology interventions. Emphasizing processes that can be expressed through culturally diverse forms and content is a central purpose of the three pillars model. For example, many conceptualizations of resilience include the identification of qualities of resilience that include characteristics such as optimism and perseverance. The model offered here maintains that such expressions of resilience are culture- and context- bound and may not always "fit" every target population. Thus, it is suggested that interventions should focus on activating the three core processes that nurture and sustain diverse expressions of resilience in ways that allow the needs, values, and resonant strengths of diverse cultural groups to inform the specific content that is chosen. The specific content of interventions should be culturally-syntonic and carefully chosen to emphasize those qualities and expressions of resilience that are optimally congruent with culture and context.

AWARENESS: CONTEMPLATIVE PROCESSES

Contemplative processes aim to enhance experiential awareness and critical consciousness through reflection on experience, attention regulation, and exploration of values, meaning and purpose. Contemplative practices such as meditation, mindfulness, prayer and journaling are ways to incorporate contemplative processes. Contemplative practices have been found to improve resilience through building internal resources. For example, loving-kindness meditation, has been shown to increase positive emotions such as joy, hope, and, gratitude (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Positive emotions not only assist in offsetting physiological effects of negative emotions but also facilitate positive coping and well-being (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), as well as other psychological and health outcomes (Singer & Lamm, 2009; Lutz et al., 2008).

ALLIES: COMMUNAL PROCESSES

Communal processes, or "Allies", include the identification and nurturing of connectedness to various entities larger than oneself. Research suggests that social support and belongingness are beneficial to our health and functioning (Cohen, 2004). Engaging the "Allies" pillar can affirm an individual's sense of belonging within various communities and promote experiences of individual and communal agency (DiFulvio, 2011). For instance, group affiliation has been found to enhance resilience in marginalized youth encountering oppression and discrimination through the process of collective meaning-making (Wexler, DiFulvio & Burke, 2009). Furthermore, culture-bound elements of connectedness, such as indigenous connections to spirituality and nature, have also been indicated as valuable aspects of healing and resilience (Moorehead Jr., Gone, & December, 2015). Overall, the creation, development and strengthening of relationships and shared experiences support individual and communal resilience in the face of adversity (Hartling, 2008).

ACTION: EMPOWERMENT PROCESSES

The Action pillar emphasizes empowerment processes to facilitate creative, committed, and transformative action. Empowerment processes allow individuals to create or have access to opportunities to control their future and have influence over the factors that affect their lives (Zimmerman, 1995). Wellness is cultivated via enhancement of existing strengths and applying them in new ways, flexibility in the utilization of diverse coping strategies, facilitating motivation and goal-directed behavior, and engagement in culturally-syntonic and values-congruent behavior. Empowerment involves participation with others to achieve goals and motivation to gain access and utilize to resources in the context of understanding environmental opportunities and constraints (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Through these empowerment strategies individuals are given the opportunity for transformation, choice, and change.

