Redesigning Individual Wellness Potential and Behavior in American Culture

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We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

— Albert Einstein

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PREFACE

Modern American culture has increasingly become dependent on external persuaders. More and more, individuals are becoming less capable of being self-sufficient, depending on technology to provide for us in some fashion. Information is literally at our figure tips and always accessible. We are trained to want more and not allowed to be satisfied with what we have. Attention spans have shortened, allowing fifteen seconds of our time to pass until we move on to the next stimulus. This culture is allowing less internalization of thought or behavior.

American culture is a complex system in itself. Its collective behavior overwhelms and shadows individual intuitiveness. At some point, and with the aid of technology, Americans drastically lost control of thinking for themselves. The observable world through the human senses will never be the same. Gradually, we are becoming a population that needs to be told what to think or do because we haven't experienced the world in a way that embraces what humans are capable of. There is so much potential for creativity and innovation, but we are stopping ourselves from accessing it.

This thesis originates from my experience coaching individuals in wellness. I had multiple daily conversations that consisted of people who wanted something new to create a better sense of well-being, who looked at their behaviors and thought, "I should do something about this." However, it does not happen. What I observed was an indescribable faulty system disguised as wellness. This faulty system did more than just hamper well-being intentions; it extended to all realms of the American life. Everything is designed for us and not by us. Current modern American culture shapes how we perceive ourselves and the environment. Behavior tells

us where we are headed. This thesis specifically explores the concept of wellness as a system in American culture. Fortunately, this faulty system can be reshaped.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS WELLNESS?

Wellness can be many things. Wellness can potentially be fifteen or thirty minutes of exercise a day or substituting a salad for fries with a burger. Wellness can be a certain medication or supplement that improves an individual's wellbeing. Even a spiritual connection, a night out with old friends, a smile; or a feeling of fulfillment, value, self-worth, and security could all be assumed as facets of wellness.

In America, the concept of wellness can be observed and interpreted in various ways. With regards to a consumer-driven market, wellness is advertised to a mass population. Economist Paul Zane Pilzer reports on this wellness market behavior in that, "the global health and wellness market is on its' way to being the next trillion dollar industry" (2012). Pilzer explains why consumers will turn away from consuming more material goods and instead seek to achieve internal self-improvement—healthier foods, vitamins, nutritional supplements and fitness programs—and why consumers will create a virtually limitless and sustained demand for wellness-based products (2012). In 2014, the Global Wellness Institute, which is a is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization with a mission to empower wellness worldwide by educating public and private sectors about preventative health and wellness, released research stating that :

> [The] global wellness industry is a $3.4 trillion market, or 3.4 times larger than the worldwide pharmaceutical industry. The GWI research also benchmarks the ten sectors comprising the global wellness market: Beauty & Anti-Aging ($1.03 trillion), Healthy Eating/Nutrition/Weight Loss ($574 billion), Fitness & Mind-Body ($446 billion), Wellness Tourism ($494 billion), Preventative/Personalized Health ($433 billion),

Complementary/Alternative Medicine ($187 billion), Wellness Lifestyle Real Estate ($100 billion), Spa Industry ($94 billion), Thermal/Mineral Springs ($50 billion) and Workplace Wellness ($41 billion).

Examples of wellness are detected in media advertisements, within friend or family dynamics, at a doctor's office, by wellness practitioners, or in health insurance policies to name a few. While these examples just scratch the surface of what individual wellness may represent, American culture is influenced by and strives to reach this phenomenon in achieving an optimal version of ourselves. However, disconnect in wellness behavior resides in how individual wellness potential is recognized and approached.

As a wellness coach, I have observed many individuals explain what their version of wellness means to them. Individuals have the ability to create wellness potential by embracing what aids them in optimizing wellness behavior. Each individual is unique and experiences life differently. Wellness potential, interpretations, and behaviors vary from one individual to the next. This is largely due to how information is individually perceived from external and internal stimuli. Donella Meadows (2008) suggests that on one hand we have been taught to analyze, to use our rational ability, to trace direct paths from cause and effect, to look at things in small and understandable pieces, and to solve problems by acting on or controlling the world around us. This training leads us to believe that external and specific factors are the causes of our problems. She goes on to say that; on the other hand, long before we were educated in rational analysis, we all dealt with complex systems (p. 3). Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Western society has benefited from science, logic, and reductionism over intuition and holism. It is sometimes easier to assume that the cause of a problem is "out there," rather than "in here." (p. 4). While

individual wellness influences come from both “out there” and “in here,” individual wellness interpretations originate from the “in here.”

The concept of wellness is vague, yet some form of a beneficial outcome can be interpreted. Perception, as described by Steven Lehar (2003), whose research involves cognitive and neural systems, explains that “the primary function of perceptual processing is the generation of a miniature, virtual-reality replica of the external world inside our head, and that the world we see around us is not the real external world but is exactly that miniature internal replica in an internal representation,” otherwise known as Gestalt theory (p.404). While perception is anawareness, interpretation is an explanation. Wellness, in theory, is capable of being interpreted as a state-of-being, and in turn a behavior.

While “wellness” has no universally accepted definition, its concept is used universally. What makes it desirable is that it shares common perceived characteristics associated with positive health benefits and lifestyle. Wellness is attributed to quality of life. With respect to our health and well-being, the decisions we make every moment holistically affect what options will be presented to us and the next actions we take. This continuous cycle of thought and action reveals individual wellness behaviors. These behaviors tell a story of who we are: how we perceive the world, how we think, and what we will do. However, a question remains: how conscious are of our perceptions, interpretations, and behaviors? In regards to our own individual wellness, how do we make the best decision for and to maintain an optimal self?

As a health coach**,** I have had the opportunity to observe what many individuals have experienced within their pursuit of wellness. Many individuals, who set tentative goals with a purposeful objective in mind, tend to generally be interested, educated in, and capable of

potentially improving their health and wellness. At the same time, individuals also allow minimal follow through in committing to potential wellness behavior. My personal experience within the American wellness industry has led me examine the cause of this disconnection between individual wellness potential and the lack of commitment to such behavior. The sheer volume of these disconnects led me to inquire into what type of denominator (shared trait) or pattern existed.

In modern day America, conscious and subconscious decision-making processes allow self-inflicted limitations to influence our wellness behaviors. These limitations are the design flaw in wellness potential aiding the disconnect between intention and action. This thesis will addresses wellness potential and behavior. As long as these limitations are allowed to exist, the wellness, viewed as a system, will struggle to function in a way that optimizes one's wellness potential and behavior.

While it is difficult to measure our thoughts in an empirical sense, with awareness we can begin to transform a subjective mind-set to an objective holistic approach to wellness. A whole systems thinking approach can lay the groundwork needed to address the wellness design flaw in self-inflicted limitations due to our preconceived assumptions, perceptions and interpretations. The disconnection between wellness potential and behavior will be explored by converging on the commonalities that a whole systems thinking approach shares in interpreting internal and external influences. Once this basis for wellness potential is established, this can lead to individual wellness redesign, embracing wellness potential and avoiding the limitations that hinder wellness behavior.

CHAPTER 2

THE WELLNESS DISCONNECT: POTENTIAL VS. LIMITATIONS

Self-observation is the first step to inner unfolding

~AMET RAY

Wellness behavior involves a relationship between potential and limitations. Disconnect in individual wellness behavior involves an imbalance between potential and limitations. Individual wellness potential has the capability of enriching individual wellness behavior. The lack of potential can not only lessen this enrichment, but also create limitations as well. While the focus of this thesis is exploring the disconnect between an individual setting a wellness intention and their commitment to action, the "disconnect" stems from the interconnections between potential and limitations within an individual wellness system. The wellness system structure, which will be discussed in chapter 3, consists of "potential" that represents what aids in optimizing wellness behavior and "limitations" that represents what hinders wellness behavior. A faulty wellness system or the "disconnect" involves too little potential or too many limitation.

Individual

One particular coaching session inadvertently began my pursuit in exploring these wellness disconnects. As the story goes, this individual has always been interested in ways to improve her health. Her idea of wellness is to try a new a new product suggested by the American wellness industry or within American culture itself. Possibly a supplement, an exercise tool, a new concept in nutrition, she tries the most recent recommendations found in published

studies or from her doctors, friends or the social media. Like many individuals I have coached in wellness, her understanding of wellness is that some feature, a product, service or "goal" will eventually "work" for her. Her mindset is focused on creating a healthier version of herself. Unfortunately, she is trapped in this cycle of perceiving wellness as attempting different but failing goals. For example, she read that soda can be harmful to your health. Even though she had it in her heart to change what she put in her body for the better, she could only go two days without soda. She told me, "at least its diet soda." What did that mean? Was she was justifying her lack of commitment to her goal by stating the soda she was drinking was not "as bad" as regular soda. Was she aware of the reasons why soda was considered bad for her health? What influences were behind her decision making? What potential was available and what limitations did she embrace?

There are multiple relationships in effect in this example. The disconnect is not just in giving up the soda, but a deeper disconnect that hides in our subconscious: shaping perspectives, and driving intentions and behaviors. It is a disconnect from the whole self; who we are and who we can be. It is a disconnect from our of conscious and subconscious decision making process. It is a disconnect of personal meaning, purpose, values, and self-truths in individual wellness behavior, all of which are influenced by the individual wellness system involving potential and limitations.

Collective

While coaching individuals in wellness, I began to observe patterns of disconnect emerging from individual wellness behavior within American culture collectively. An equally important query is what is causing these patterns to recur? The relationship between "thinking"

and “doing” is complex. Many factors exist and influence the decision-making process involved in wellness behavior both individually and socially. With respect to the limitations regarding wellness behavior, four discernable deductions causing the wellness disconnect continuously re-emerged while coaching individual’s in wellness.

Disconnect 1: Wellness is interpreted as a goal instead of a behavior

Represented as a goal, wellness is limited to a specific role. It is depicted as means to an end. Since goals have no distinct parameters, where does the goal stem from and to what end? What happens after the goal is reached? What happens if it is not reached? Reflecting on a failed wellness intention raises questions. What information is missing and what is attainable or realistic? The important matter is, “in what frame of mind is the individual in at that point in time”? Wellness embraced as a behavior will tell a different story.

Disconnect 2: Wellness is designed *for* the individual and not *by* the individual

Having a concept such as wellness represented vaguely by various disciplines with a multitude of definitions adds to the disconnect. With such ambiguity, perception of wellness at any given moment can be influenced in multiple ways. This is largely due to the concept being designed or “sold” to the American people. From a business point of view, wellness could mean marketing a product, service or research to promote or sell. From a western medicine point of view, wellness could mean having check-ups and vaccinations. Personal trainers, dietitians, and other well-being specialists apply self-improvement measures such as physical activity, nutrition, or stress reduction techniques. These wellness-based products and services are designed for individuals to focus their wellness efforts on marketed and consumer-driven goals and not on wellness as a behavior. Wellness, as expressed within a broad spectrum, can leave individuals

with little assurance as to what wellness potential to apply? We are all unique. How can a general one-size-fits-all model accurately reflect individual wellness desires? Again, how do we as individuals, "know" what our individual wellness needs are or even where to start?

Disconnect 3: Limitations are self-inflicted

Limitations present themselves in many forms. Any given perception of a situation can create a perceived reality that may not exist. For example, one individual can act and feel distraught on a gloomy and rainy day, bothered by the lack of sunshine. Another individual can look at the same weather and feel relaxed and calm, accepting the change in seasons. This difference in perception can either promote or dissolve limitations inflicted by the self. There are many limitations that can interfere with processing information. Both internal (i.e. perception, emotion, values, etc.) and external (wellness market and technology) influences shape an individual's wellness narrative, capable of being perceived in a way that supports a behavior that can strengthen and build upon meaning and purpose or amplify the limitations that are self-inflicted by these influences, hindering individual wellness behavior. As Donald D. Hoffman (2016), a professor of cognitive science at the University of California, Irvine, explains that, "the world presented to us by our perception is nothing like reality" (para 2).

Both types of influences, external and internal, function bi-directionally to shape wellness behavior. When information is interpreted in a way that amplifies a misperception, an individual can get caught in an endless cycle of dysfunction and unfulfilled personal wellness agendas. An essay titled, *Gentle Action: Surviving Chaos and Change* by David F. Peat (n.d.) discusses the dilemma that many organizations find themselves in today, as well as the anxieties faced by individuals: "Programmed by their goals and mission statements, as well as by their very

structures, many organizations inevitably seek ways of exerting control and believe that they must always take positive action in the face of uncertainty. Yet increasingly they discover that these actions are inappropriate. And so organizations, institutions, governments, groups and individuals retrench, break apart or in some other way get trapped into a spiral of ineffective decision making, paralysis and anxiety" (para 15).

Perception involves awareness of the self and the environment. It involves an interpretation of information that that promotes feedback in aiding the progression of wellness potential. When we are unaware of our own truths, values, and interpretations of the self and the world around us, a distinct illusion of reality can be created in which we abide to certain self-inflicted boundaries, hence, the wellness disconnect

Disconnect 4: Confusion distracts from self-awareness

In my experience with health coaching, I have the unique opportunity to meet many individuals who tell me about their perceptions and planned actions to achieve wellness. Subsequently, many reveal their failures in these intentions as well. This personal interaction between what individuals understand, intend to do, and act upon can be challenging due to the confusion and vagueness that surrounds this concept of wellness.

The American wellness industry is an example of how confusion is produced within individual wellness behavior. Wellness, as expressed in American culture, covers an immense range of subjects applied to multiple endeavors. Given the vast array of meanings the term *wellness* portrays, it produces much confusion as far as general suggestions opposed to personal intuitiveness. Lack of information, negative experiences, and misconceptions regarding personal wellness potential can shape one's perception of wellness adding to the confusion already in

place by such a broad subject. To complicate this pursuit of wellness potential even further, how does one evaluate which element of wellness is more or less important than the other?

Wellness, perceived as a behavior, instead of a goal-directed notion aids in the balance of an optimal state of being that is unique to each individual. Focusing more on individual uniqueness and less on generalized assumptions suggested by external influences will strengthen and personalize individual wellness meaning and potential towards wellness behaviors. Becoming aware that wellness behavior originates from within the self allows the opportunity to address limitations. Confusion weakens the relationship between intention and action. Wellness potential can be recognized with the aid of self-awareness and self-observations. Both self-awareness and self-observation techniques bring a level of comprehension to individual cause and effects behaviors before they occur and proceed to design a relationship between thinking and doing.

In the next chapters, these disconnects will be explored through a whole systems thinking lens. Through this approach, this thesis will focus on the re-design of individual wellness potential and behavior. The elements of wellness potential, the relationships between perceived wellness behavior influences, and the function of wellness behavior itself will be examined.

CHAPTER 3

DECONSTRUCTING WELLNESS BEHAVIOR: A WHOLE SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH

If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves

~THOMAS EDISON

Systems thinking is an approach to understanding the connections between parts in a system and how they work together. It acts as somewhat of a deconstruction process identifying where system issues may exist. It is a concept that is applied in multiple fields of study, such as business and design. Wellness systems contains complex parts and relationship that are involved in producing and hindering individual wellness potential. Examining individual wellness systems creates an awareness of how wellness is perceived and dissects behaviors in order to find a cause for disconnect in wellness potential. Exploring individual wellness systems begins with self-exploration, examining information from the environment, and connecting the relationships between them both. By focusing on system behaviors, information can be organized in a way that allows certain patterns to emerge. This method in identifying system behavior patterns offer insight into individual interpretations of wellness and denominators in wellness that individuals may share. Identifying these patterns will not only strengthen wellness potential, but reduce limitations that cause wellness disconnect is intentions and action.

The meaning of "potential" inherently implies the ability for "new," such as interpretations and behaviors of wellness to be created. Systems thinking explores the behavior between the relationships of parts within a system. With respect to individual wellness potential, it does so by deconstructing and reconstructing individual wellness parts and structures. Donella H. Meadows (2008) explains that systems thinking illustrates that the relationship between

structure and behavior are interconnected in such a way that we can begin to see how systems work, what makes them produce poor results, and how to shift them into better behavior patterns (p. 1).

Systems Theory

Thinking in Systems by Donella Meadows (2008) explores Systems Theory, in which a system is a set of things interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time (p. 2). Everything we encounter is a complex system (p. 4). The system--whether cells, individuals, companies, cities or economics--causes its own behavior. While an outside event may initiate that behavior, the same outside event applied to a different system is likely to produce a different result (p. 2). Weather is an example of this. If physical activity is applied as a part to an individual's wellness system, inclement weather could be viewed as an obstacle or an opportunity. Exploring individual wellness systems leads to a certain freedom in identifying the origins of one's behavior.

A "system" is the interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something. Systems involve elements such as tangible and intangible parts. Interconnections or the relationships of influences between the flow of information between elements begin to take shape. Lastly, the element and interconnections form a function in the behavior of the system (Meadows, 2008, p. 11). The function or purpose is often the most crucial determinate of the systems behavior (p. 16). Meadows also explains that a system is more than the sum of its parts. A system exhibits adaptive, dynamic, goal-seeking, self-preserving, and sometimes evolutionary behavior (p. 12). Physicist Eberhard Bodenschatz (2009) speaks to this dynamic in complex systems by stating, "systems" are entities composed of well-defined

components. When integrated the components act together as to form a functioning whole with dynamical behaviors and responses to the environment. (p. 1).

An individual wellness potential system causes its own behavior. The elements are perceptions visual cues, emotion, touch, and other sensory input. They are interrelated through a decision-making process that is influenced and regulated by interpretations. The function is the wellness behavior aimed towards a version of an optimal self. Wellness potential perceived as a system allows opportunities to observe where disconnections in wellness behavior may exist.

Wellness potential that exhibits faulty system behavior is due to the misconception of the wellness wheel (Figure 1). This diagram uses perceived elements of wellness ranging usually from 3 to 8 dimensions such as physical, emotional, spiritual, and others. System thinking tells us the wellness wheel is not a complete system misleading the perception of individual wellness potential. While a few elements are present, interconnections of the wheel's dimensions are absent. Without the flow of information or interconnectedness between the parts, the function of the wheel lacks potential and behavior.

Figure 1. Wellness Wheel.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow *Hierarchy of Needs* does a more accurate job involving a system of elements, interconnections, and function than the wellness wheel example. Here, Maslow identified seven categories of basic needs (the elements) common to all people. He suggests that human motivation (interrelationships) is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth, and with that, people become actualized to accomplish higher motives (function) only after they have fulfilled certain basic needs (Martin and Joomis, 2007, pp.72-75) (figure 2).

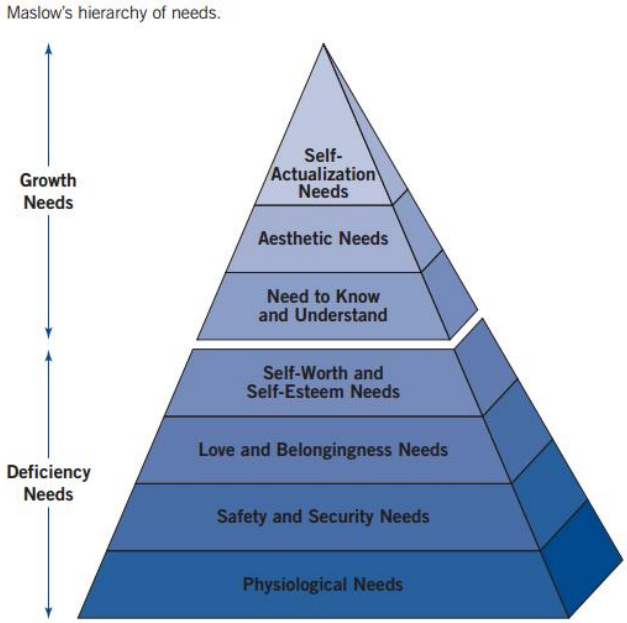

Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

While coaching wellness, individuals often mentioned frustration and inconsistencies associated with wellness behaviors. This is partly due to the stock and flow mechanisms involved in how a wellness system behaves (figure 3). Elements make up the "stock" or foundation of a system and the "flow" makes up the input and output of information (Meadow, 2008, p 17-18). Feedback loops interconnect elements of the system, the information part of the

system, and enable a system to cause its own behavior (Meadows, 2008, p. 34). Wellness disconnect can emerge from this feedback loop mechanism. Potential and limitations can both be affected, either strengthening or weakening each of their influences. Wellness potential strength can either increase or decrease the amount of limitation feedback loops depending on how the elements involved in wellness potential system are interpreted. Meadow imparts that if you see a behavior that persists over time, there is likely a mechanism creating that consistent behavior. Feedback loops are how the system monitors itself pointing out the success and problems of systems (p. 24-25).

Figure 3. "Stock" and "Flow"

Two steps within the feedback loop are:

- *Reinforcing feedback loop* – self-enhancing leading to exponential growth or to run-away collapses over time. They have the capacity to reinforce or reproduce (p.32).

- *Balancing feedback loop* – equilibrating or goal-seeking structures in systems. They are sources of stability and sources of resistance to change (Meadows, 2008, p.30). The behavioral patterns of these feedback loops suggest a gradual approach to a system

defined goal. They keep within a range of values and oppose change (p.27).

Meadows (2008) states that, “the presence of a feedback mechanism doesn’t necessarily mean that the mechanism works well…it may not be strong enough to bring the stock to the desired level…feedbacks can fail for many reasons” (p. 30). It is the behavior within the feedback loops of an individual wellness system where the disconnect may reside between a potential wellness intention and commitment to the wellness action.

In understanding system behavior, Meadows (2008) brings attention to the dissection of the systems parts, while looking for relationships that hold the elements together (p. 13). When a system is dissected, elements can be put back together to see what interconnections make up the feedback loop basic operating unit of the system or mechanism creating consistent behavior (p. 25). *Leverage points* are places in the system where one could intervene and make a small change that could lead to a large shift in behavior. (p.145). One of the leverage points involves reinforcing feedback loops: the strength of the gain of driving loops.

Meadows (2008) suggests that by understanding the dynamics of system behavior over time, we can create change in a complex system (p.19). The behavior of feedbacks loops within an individual wellness system is crucial in the commitment of individual wellness potential. Systems thinking provide an opportunity in which weakness can be identified and potential strength can be applied to individual wellness behavior. Meadows summarizes the behavioral possibilities of complex systems by recognizing what structures contain latent behaviors, what drives behavior and if possible, arrange the structures and conditions to reduce the probability of destructive behaviors and encourage the possibility of beneficial ones (p.72).

This thesis follows Meadows’ presumption that, through a systems thinking lens, any

wellness behavior can produce infinite results depending on individual interpretation and interaction of system elements, relationships and functions. She concludes that a systems thinking lens aids in reclaiming "intuition about whole systems and: hone in on abilities to understand parts, see interconnectedness, ask "what if" questions about possible future behaviors, and be creative and courageous about system redesign (pp. 6-7). Meadows quotes:

> I don't think the systems way of seeing is better than the reductionist way of thinking. I think it's complimentary, and therefore revealing. You can see some things through the lens of the human eye, other things through the lens of a microscope, others through the lens of a telescope, and still others through the lens of system theory. Everything seen through each kind of lens is actually there. Each way of seeing allows our knowledge of the wondrous world in which we live to become a little more complete (2008, p. 6-7).

The "whole" in whole system thinking is used to convey a duality in individual wellness potential. As systems theory focuses on the mechanisms involved in wellness behavior, chaos theory focuses on wellness perception. Although the concept of chaos can denote a negative inference such as confusion, disorder, or "out of control," it has the ability to embrace and naturalize such inferences creating potential and reducing limitations.

While coaching, individuals used the term "chaotic" when describing their lives. Examples include their take on daily responsibilities or relationship with others. Perception influences how individuals view their own lives. It is how these influences are interpreted that

can either create potential towards a wellness behavior or embrace limitations that can lead to this negatively influences hindering wellness potential.

Chaos Theory

Chaos theory, like systems theory, is a means to understanding and exploring wellness potential and behavior. In *The Seven Life Lessons of Chaos*, Briggs and Peat (1999) suggests that "Although we humans tend to abhor chaos and avoid it whenever possible, nature uses chaos in remarkable ways to create new entities, shapes events, and hold the universe together (p. 1) They explain that the scientific term "chaos" refers to an underlying interconnectedness that exists in apparently random events (p. 2). This interconnectedness has the ability to create novel interpretations that are significant in individual wellness potential.

Briggs and Peat (1999) explain that chaos science focuses on hidden patterns, nuance, the "sensitivity" of things, and the "rules" for how the unpredictable leads to the new (p. 2). An example Briggs and Peat use is a turbulent mountain stream modeling how apparent disorder masks an underlying pattern. On the surface it seems random, but if observed closely, you may begin to notice that it is simultaneously stable and ever changing (p. 4). Another example they use relates to the "self" that is in constant flux. We are the same person as we were ten years ago, while substantially also a new person (p. 4). Chaos, embraced as a tool for creating new perceptions while embracing its uncertainty, provides an attainable means to individual wellness potential. Chaos is about being unable to predict and control in addition to telling us about the missing information (p.167). Briggs and Peat acknowledge that chaos involves letting go (p. 7). By giving up control an individual can embrace uncertainty, allowing the system itself to re-organize opening the door to new perceptions of wellness potential and behavior. New

interpretations can encourage new intentions, limiting the disconnect between misinterpreted intentions and actions.

In a "Ted Talk" on vulnerability by Brene Brown (2010), she explores vulnerability as an uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure that can be utilized as an opportunity to expand perception. She explains that vulnerability is a fundamental necessity, a connection to ourselves that can produce purpose and reason. It is the birthplace of joy, belonging, creativity and the disconnection of shame and/or fear. She states that we live in a vulnerable world and cannot turn off emotion. If we numb vulnerability, we numb other emotions. In Warren Berger's *CAD Monkeys, Dinosaur Babies and T-Shaper People* (2009); Bruce Mau, a renowned designer, refers to the period of "not knowing" at the onset of an unfamiliar task or challenge as a window of opportunity." He goes on to explain that, "when you don't know what should be done, you are free to speculate on something unencumbered by the conventional structures (p.52). We learn more by putting ourselves out there. We gain more insight this way rather than holding steady to what we already know and minimizing risk and uncertainty. In *Mastery* (1991), George Leonard mentions that Key 5: the edge - is a balancing act. It demands awareness to know when you're pushing yourself beyond safe limits (p. 99). We can explore more in life when we step out from our comfort zones. This allows individual creativity to open up new perspectives and wellness potential.

Western industrial society practices the elimination of uncertainty by conquering and controlling nature. The ideal of "being in control," says Briggs and Peat (1999), is so much a part of our behavior that it has become an obsession or addiction (p. 8). In addition, they address limitations in that the scientific culture that has increasingly surrounded us-- and some would say imprison us -- for the last hundred years sees the world in terms of analysis, quantification,

symmetry, and mechanism (p.5). Chaos helps free us from these confines. Moreover, by appreciating chaos we begin to envision the world as a flux of patterns, enlivened with sudden turns, subtle and surprising relationships, and the unknown (p. 5).

Pre-programmed tendencies influence wellness assumptions, expectations, and interpretations, encouraging us to accept our experiences as they are and without question. Goethean science explores these perceived assumptions by analyzing the smallest, most broken down level of observation. Midge Whitelegg (2003) explains that reducing or dissecting a thought or thought process allows us to reconstruct a perception, an assumption or an expectation freeing us from possible limitations on a fundamental level. Goethe's science is a science of qualities. His methodology was about exploring nature, with the senses, deeply enough so that one can eventually intuit the inherent wholeness of a phenomenon (p. 312).

Whitelegg (2003) explains one difficulty of Goethe's science that emerges from our current understanding of science and the way it shapes our relationship to nature. There are additional complications that are encultured into thinking this way that we are not aware of this "seatedness" of our thinking. If we might be able to think from a different perspective, essentially, the problem could begin to seem more objective and reducible (p.313). Preconceived assumptions create a disconnect toward wellness potential and behavior. These limitations are what chaos theory challenges. Though it may be easier to accept habitual behaviors that stem from avoiding opportunities than to try something new, chaos allows an opportunity to redesign individual wellness potential and behaviors that are structured out of these limitations.

Chaos embraces a vast range of behaviors allowing new forms and structures to creatively self-organize. These new forms and structures shape individual wellness potential

reducing the disconnect between wellness intention and commitment to action. As Briggs and Peat (1999) discuss, “nature has this ability.” Every system has “Degrees of Freedom,” referring to the maximum range available to a system and a “Bifurcation Point,” referring to the self-order and patterns that emerge from random fluctuations. Wellness habits are an example of self-organizing. When practicing a new behavior, there is a range in potential and it either it continues or halts. If it continues, within the right conditions, a “bifurcation point” is reached. This change leads to a new self-organized behavior and eventually a habit. A self –organizing system is created by giving up some “degrees of freedom.” Systems that self-organize out of chaos survive only by staying open to a constant flow of energy and material (p. 16). Two types of feedback loops regulate certain systems. Negative feedback dampens and regulates activity to keep it in a certain range (i.e. homeostasis) and positive feedback amplifies effects (i.e. microphone and speaker) (p. 14). Again we observe how feedback loops affect a system. With respect to an individual wellness system, potential and limitations fluctuate between these feedback loops. It is this mechanism where both potential and limitation exhibit strength and weakness. Briggs and Peat explain that, “Chaos teaches that when our psychological perspective shifts - through moments of amplification and bifurcation - our degrees of freedom expand and we experience being and truth. We are then creative and “our true self lies there” (1999, p. 29).

Creativity is about getting beyond what we know out of confinement and our comfort zone. Creativity and self-organization allow the self as a system to embrace wellness potential form new truths. Understanding how change works is very challenging, but with these challenges comes opportunities that we never knew existed. This is the point of whole systems thinking and where individual wellness potential can be embraced. Wellness potential involves less of working with what we already know and more of creating new possibilities in wellness that are

more attainable, connecting intention to behavior.

Self-organization and collective creativity happens all around the world and in informal organizations of all kinds. Systems function within other systems. Mini self-organizations can lead to collective creative exuberance and activity. Self-organization and collective creativity is as much about how nature makes new forms and structures as it is about nature's "messiness" and unpredictability (p.13). Self-organized systems composed of individuals contain varying levels of complexity. Collective behavior follows different levels of complexity because they are separate systems. For example, systems that self-organize out of chaos survive only by staying open to constant flow, through energy and material, what we experience from our environment, i.e. weather patterns (pp.16-17). Systems that impose ideologies of hierarchy, power, and completion on top of natural tendencies in an attempt to collect creative activity towards a collective behavior can stifle creativity, i.e., a business, (p.72). Individual wellness potential is a system. But, it also has mini-systems working within it in addition to being part of a larger system in which practices its own behavior.

Along with duality of a system within a system, Briggs and Peat (1999) explain that life is a dynamic dance between simplicity and complexity (p. 80). Chaos reveals that what looks incredibly complicated may have a simple origin. While surface simplicity may conceal something stunningly complex, the simple and complex are reflections of each other (Briggs and Peat, 1999, pp. 79-80). Whenever interactions, iterations, and feedback are at work, simplicity and complexity constantly transform into each other and alternate. This is called *Intermittency* (p.83). Intermittency is a brief change, an irrational act that challenges the normal order of our lives by asking us to give more attention to its nuances and subtle patterns (p.86).

Chaos opens up radical new ways of thinking and experiencing a perceived wellness potential. It offers an understanding into unconscious patterns that we are part of. It gives insight into how the idea of control affects our decision-making process. What chaos demonstrates with respect to personal wellness potential is that the narrative in which we live our daily lives, our own and unique perceived realities are not be so absolute. Limitations may be avoided if wellness potential is interpreted differently. Chaos provides freedom from expectations. If a situation is not unfolding as I expected, this can cause me turmoil. However, if my expectations are not met and I accept that and let go - let what is to be unfolded happen - I create a new perception, a new potential, and a new approach to work with.

Chaos helps create a new version of reality. It embraces what we don't know rather than what we know. Chaos allows the individual wellness potential system to creatively self-organize by embracing a shift in perception. These systems parts; the elements, interconnections, and functions take on new meanings. Wellness potential can be strengthened while self-inflicting limitation is avoided.

The next chapter will explore notable individual wellness system elements I repeatedly observed when health coaching. The interpretation of these elements (internal and external influences) have the ability to shift the behavior of a system.

CHAPTER 4

EXPLORING SYSTEM ELEMENTS: INDIVIDUAL WELLNESS POTENIAL

Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.

~LEONARDO Da VINCI

This thesis focuses on individual wellness potential as a system. Within this system, elements make up its intricate parts. Elements originate from how we interpret internal and external influences. Meadows (2008) bases systems theory on the premise that everything we assume we know about the world is a model and not the real world. She states, "our knowledge is amazing; our ignorance even more so" (p. 87). With respect to wellness behavior, certain elements selected towards an individual wellness systems can either create potential or disconnect by allowing limitations. This chapter will focus on certain specific elements are selected, why they are selected and how they influence the system as a whole. When these certain elements are selected and recognized as parts of the system, interconnections between elements begin to form and relationships take shape producing a function or behavior.

Merriam Webster defines a" limitation" as something that controls how much of something is possible or allowed. Within an individual wellness system, limitations, in the form of feedback loops, can be produced instead of amplifying wellness potential if unsuitable elements are selected. Internal and external influences navigate the selection these elements. Because interpretations originate from within the system itself, limitations that are produced are self-inflicted.

The disconnect between wellness intentions and commitment to action stems from

allowing limitations to exist, preventing individual wellness potential. Limitations, or as Meadows (2008) defines as personal challenges, exist because they are, "intrinsically system problems – undesirable behavior characteristics of the system structures that produce them. They will yield only when we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find courage and wisdom to restructure it" (p.4). As Briggs and Peat (1999) explain, authenticity such as: truth, sincerity, and sensitivity, is needed to convey influences effectively. Since there are many different feedback loops, some loops can be destructive such as a limit–cycle system--this involves those that cut themselves off from the flux of the external world because a great part of their internal energy is devoted to resisting change and perpetuating relatively mechanical patterns of behavior (p. 40). How elements are interpreted and then selected from internal and external influences is vital in providing the opportunities needed to create an optimal functioning individual wellness potential system.

Whole systems thinking is comprised of elements, relationships, and functions that make up a system. Each individual is unique due to different experiences; therefore, every wellness system is interpreted differently. These differences should be embraced, forming individual wellness potential systems specific to that individual. While individual wellness systems are encouraged to be unique to the individual, at the same time, interpretations can either create potential or allow limitations to exist. Merriam-Webster defines confusion as a situation in which people are uncertain about what to do or are unable to understand something clearly. Since each individual's interpretation are different, these variation may cause confusion in individual wellness behavior as well.

The dynamics of the relationship involving internal psychological factors and external observable factors create an interpretation of individual wellness that can either embrace

potential or self-inflicted limitations. Social psychologist Albert Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory* (1999) expands on the idea that people are producers as well as products of social systems (p. 21). Bandura's theory is founded on a model of triadic reciprocal causation in which personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bi-directionally (Figure 4).

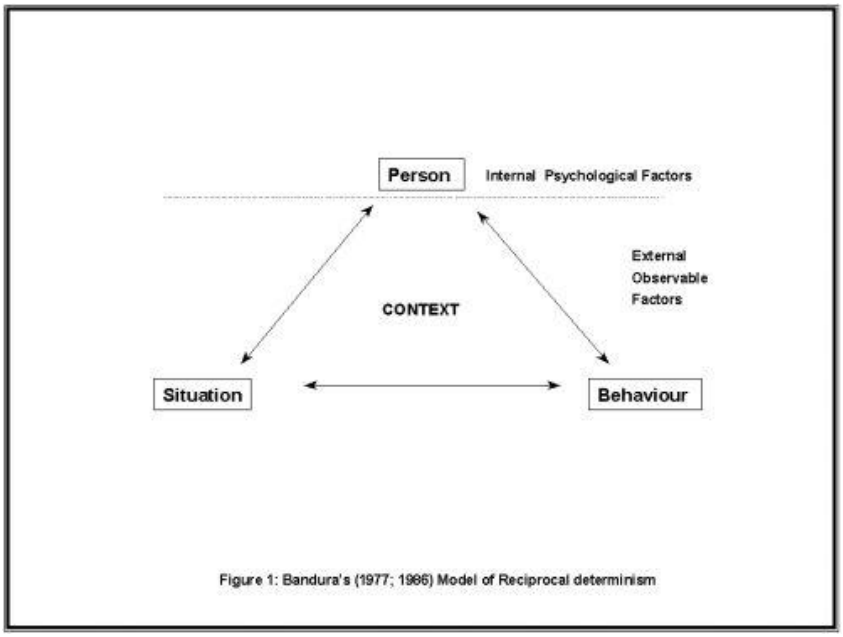

Figure 4. Bandura's Model of Reciprocal Determinism

Elements within an individual wellness potential system form out of certain influences or stimuli. It is how they are interpreted that shapes the direction of wellness behavior. While there are infinite amount of elements to examine, the elements I focused on where chosen due to an observed pattern that emerged while coaching wellness.

System Elements Involving Internal Psychological Factors

There are an infinite number of factors that make an individual who they are. All individuals have different self-truths and values that make up their mindset. However, while coaching wellness, recognition of collective patterns in internal wellness potential became evident as well. While there are an infinite number of factors that could produce wellness potential or limitations, I chose to explore the collective patterns involving perception and emotion. These collective patterns consisted of self-inflicting limitations and are part of the causes in the disconnect between wellness potential and behavior.

Perception. Perception is element in an individual wellness system. Individual sensory receptors are used to map perception. Perception provides information so that interpretation can be made about world around us. These interpretations have the ability to assign multiple meanings to a single object either creating wellness potential or limitations in a wellness system. Psychologist Douglas Bernstein (2010) explains that sensation and perception are processes of the mind that organize, identify, and interpret information in order to represent and understand the environment. Bernstein also states that "by shaping this experience, your perceptions influence your thoughts, feelings, and actions." However, perception is so quick and familiar that it is difficult to appreciate the processes that allow you to turn sensory signals into your personal experience of reality (Bernstein, p. 85). Neurologist D. J. Fortuyn (1979) states that: "The sense organs are instrumental in updating a 'map' of the outside world and of the organism as part of that world. The map is, in essence, a projection of the organism's own behavior modified by the regularities, constraints and supports encountered in the world" (para. 1-2).

Bernstein (2010) notes that "the brain must analyze incoming patterns of information and compare them with information about the target that you have stored in your memory . . . if the brain finds a match, recognition takes place and once you recognize a stimulus as belonging to a

particular category, your perception of that stimulus may never be the same again" (p. 122). The recognition process involves these "top-down" effects as well as the "bottom-up" process of processing sensory input. The "bottom-up" processing transforms low-level information to higher-level information relying on specific detailed information from the sensory receptors and assembling them into a whole. The "top-down" processing refers to a person's concept and expectations (knowledge), and selective mechanisms (attention) that influence perception. It involves high-level knowledge based information. Perception depends on complex functions of the nervous system, but subjectively seems mostly effortless because this processing happens outside conscious awareness (pp.122-123).

In *Redirect* by Timothy Wilson (2011), he states that perception (an awareness) plus interpretation (an explanation) can lead to positive behavioral change. Interpretation can be different for everyone because of different experiences in life (p. 8). Although we do not have complete control over things that make us happy, our wellbeing is tied up with the way we think about ourselves and our place in this world (p. 40). Our interpretations are rooted in personal narratives about ourselves, and these narratives aren't always so positive (p. 9). He goes on to say that if we interpret things in unhealthy ways, they can have negative consequences (p. 10)

Wilson (2011) refers to the idea of "shaping our narratives" as a means to aid in redirecting behavior. His approach to combat negative interpretations involve: (1) story editing - techniques to redirect personal narratives, (2) story prompting - using subtle prompts to aid in redirecting a personal narrative and, (3) do good, be good - changing behavior first in order to shape personal narrative (pp. 10-17). Wilson explains that how we initiate the process in thinking or taking action in altering our behaviors is motivated and influenced by something triggered within us (p. 51). Happiness is a great motivator or stimulus. A sense of meaning, hope, and

purpose “answers most basic questions about human existence and our place in this world…it helps to us to be optimistic…it helps us view ourselves as strong protagonists who set our own goals and make progress toward them” (p. 51). Wilson’s approach has a realistic grounding in the pursuit of individual wellness potential. Perception of wellness potential is one step. How wellness potential is interpreted is another, leading to behavior that amplifies potential or creates limitations.

Perception can be guided by various methods. Psychologist Felice Bedford (2012) explains in that guided imagery and mindfulness meditation are two well-known psychological manipulations for bringing about positive change. In guided imagery—or “visualization,” as it is also known—the mind is directed to intentionally invoke images in order to bring about positive change (Ch. 2). The imagination is used to conjure places or objects or events that are not externally present, with the aim of influencing psychological and physiological states (Ch. 2). Bedford explains that neuropsychological findings are consistent with the behavioral data that imagery can be functionally equivalent to vision. That is, that images created in the mind can substitute for the visual perception of an object in the environment.

Mindfulness meditation is an ancient spiritual practice in Eastern philosophy and a component of Buddhism (Bedford, 2012). Bedford reports that mindfulness meditation has been summarized as bringing one’s attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment. The practice involves greater than usual attention to exact perceptual stimulation over space and time that comes through any sense modality. In general, the study of mind–body interactions would benefit from perception’s cumulative body of knowledge and its paradigms for investigating problems (Ch. 2).

From sensory receptors to perception to interpretation, these elements of an individual wellness system creates an opportunity for building and strengthening individual wellness potential. Attention and awareness to personal narratives that are positive or negative provide opportunities to embrace wellness potential and bridge the gap between intention and commitment to action. When self–inflicted limitations, such as negativity, are the driving force of a wellness disconnect, practicing perceptual positively will produce an alternative element to the wellness system. And, there on out, change the relationship and function of the system.

Emotions. I have observed many individuals use an emotional response when explaining wellness endeavors. They mention moods in emotions such as not "feeling" (emotion) like committing to an intention, "I wasn't in the mood to walk fifteen minutes," or "I was in the mood to cook." Any individual is capable of "feeling" and feeling differently towards something.

Emotions are elements of a system. They are similar to the affects that a positive or negative personal narrative in perception in that they are an internal force that assists in interpreting the world around us. Emotions represent ranges in motivation, influencing wellness potential and self-inflicting limitations. How we feel manipulates our decision-making processes. While there is no single definition of what emotions are, the role of emotion will be examined as a behavior on a wellness system through a combination of theories.

Neuroscientist and psychobiologist Jaak Panksepp (2011) reports that emotional responses (located in the subcortical regions of the brain.) have the ability to shape our perception. Panksepp suggests that there are seven "primal" emotions that serve different survival functions, to "help navigate the world" (Panksepp & Panksepp, 2011). Psychologist Paul Ekmen (1999) uses the term "basic" to describe elements that combine to form more

complex or compound emotions (p. 46). These six basic emotions involve: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise. While interpretation of elements within the individual wellness system depends on how we feel, the direction or range of emotion or mood is able to produce or avoid disconnect between intention and commitment to action.

In Keith Sawyer's *Explaining Creativity* (2012), he states that many experiments have shown that being in a good mood increases your performance on creativity tests (p. 81). With this principle in mind, the assumption is that the structure of emotional states can produce a range of behavior. Psychologist and neuroscientist Edmund Rolls' (2005) defines emotions as "states elicited by rewards and punishers, that is, by instrumental reinforcers" (Ch. 2.2). Rolls explains these emotions as simple systems that approach or escape from stimuli:

> Consider the emotional effects of delivery of a 'reward': a state such as pleasure or happiness that will be produced. Consider the emotional effects of delivery of a "punisher": pain or fear may be produced. The converse reinforcement contingencies produce the opposite effects on behaviour, and produce different emotions. The omission or termination of a reward reduce the probability of responses, and may produce the emotions of frustration, disappointment, or rage. Behavioral responses followed by the omission or terminations of a punisher increase in probability and are associated with emotions such as relief. (Ch. 2.2-2.3).

See figure 5:

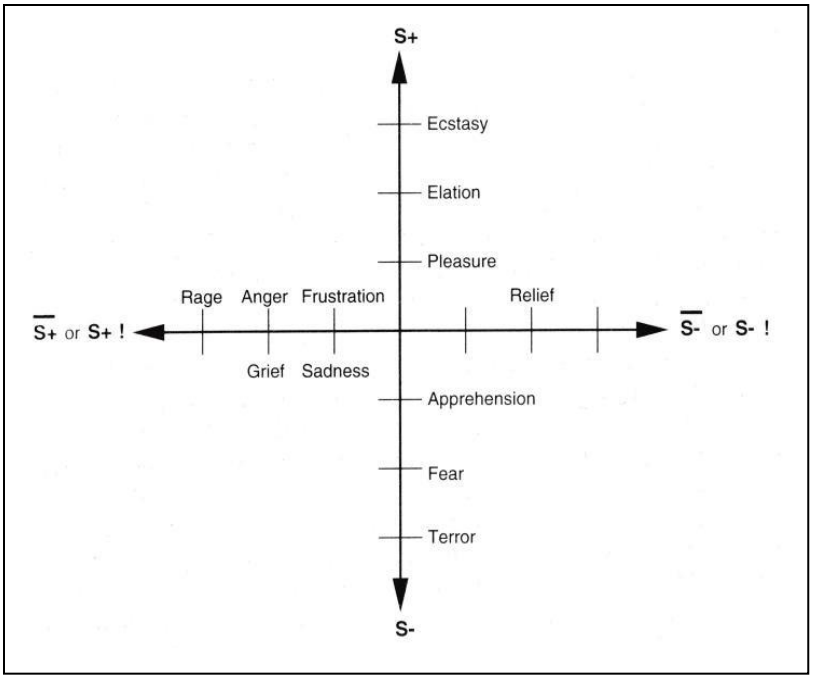

Figure 5. Reinforcement Contingency Classification Scheme

Rolls suggests that identifying the functions of emotion is important not only for understanding the nature of emotions, but also for grasping the different brain systems involved in the different types of response that are produced by emotional states (Ch. 2.2). While emotions are states elicited by goals (rewards and punishers), Rolls explains that this is part of an adaptive process by which genes can specify the behavior of the animal by specifying goals for behavior rather than fixed responses. Rolls focuses on system-based reinforcement contingencies (antecedents and consequences) that could be developed in different ways to account for most emotions. The reinforcement parameters of emotions are: (1) reinforcement contingency, (2) intensity, (3) multiple reinforcements stimuli linked to reward and punishment and conflicting feelings, (4) different primary reinforcers - positive and negative, (5) social context and, (6) the behavior responses available. Realizing that these six possibilities can occur in different combinations, multiple reinforcement contingencies can thus be used to classify a wide range of

emotions. In addition to the wide range of emotions, mood exhibits a range as well. The difference between emotion and mood is that emotion is produced by a stimuli or object while mood is produces without a stimuli or object. Rolls this differences further by explaining that:

> An emotion consists of cognitive processing that result in a decoded signal that an environmental event (or remembered event) is reinforcing, together with the mood state produced as a result. If the mood state is produced in the absence of the external sensory input and the cognitive decoding (for example by direct electrical stimulation of the brain), then this is described only as a mood state, and is different from an emotion in that there is no object in the environment towards which the mood state is directed. (In that emotions are produced by stimuli or objects, and thus emotions 'take or have an object', emotional states are examples of what philosophers call intentional states.) It is useful to emphasize that there is great opportunity for cognitive processing (whether conscious or not) in emotions, for cognitive processes will very often be required to determine whether an environmental stimulus or event is reinforcing. (Ch. 2.2)

Tellegen and Watson (1985) discuss a two-factor consensual structure of mood, representing the range and intensity and how the degrees in emotions may impact mood (see Figure 6). Mood assessment and mood research should reflect the structure of emotional experience. Mood is characterized by two dominant dimensions as to not throw away any valuable information to help identify true pattern of relations between positive and negative effect which correlate differently in a variety of areas and appear to reflect fundamental different processes (pp. 233-234). These two consensual factors (positive and negative effect) represent the extremely robust dimensions of emotional experience.

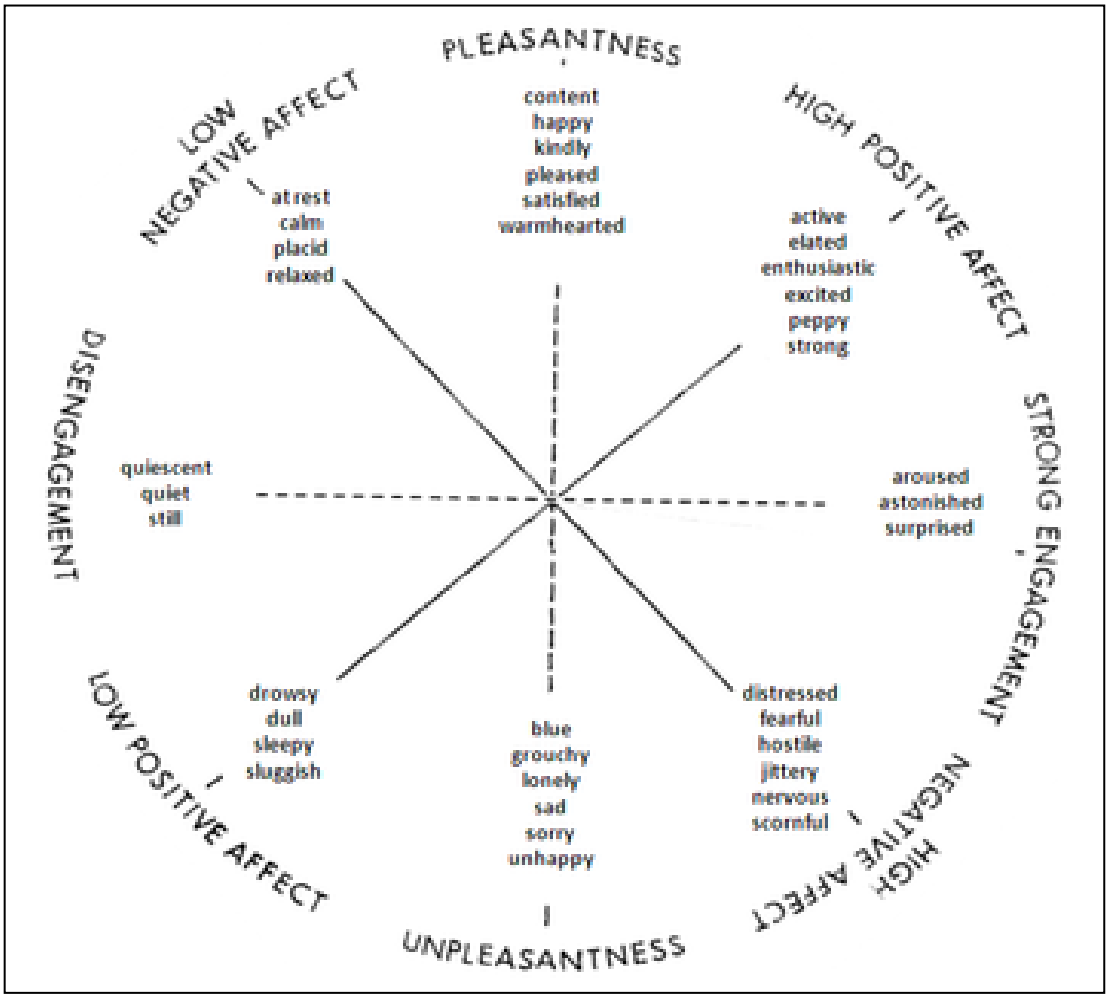

Figure 6. Two-Factor Structure of Affect

Psychologist James Russell's (2003) reveals that core affect is that neurophysiological state consciously accessible as the simplest raw (non-reflective) feelings evident in moods and emotions. At a given moment, the conscious experience (the raw feeling) is a single integral blend of two dimensions, hence describable as a single point on the map (p. 148). See Figure 7:

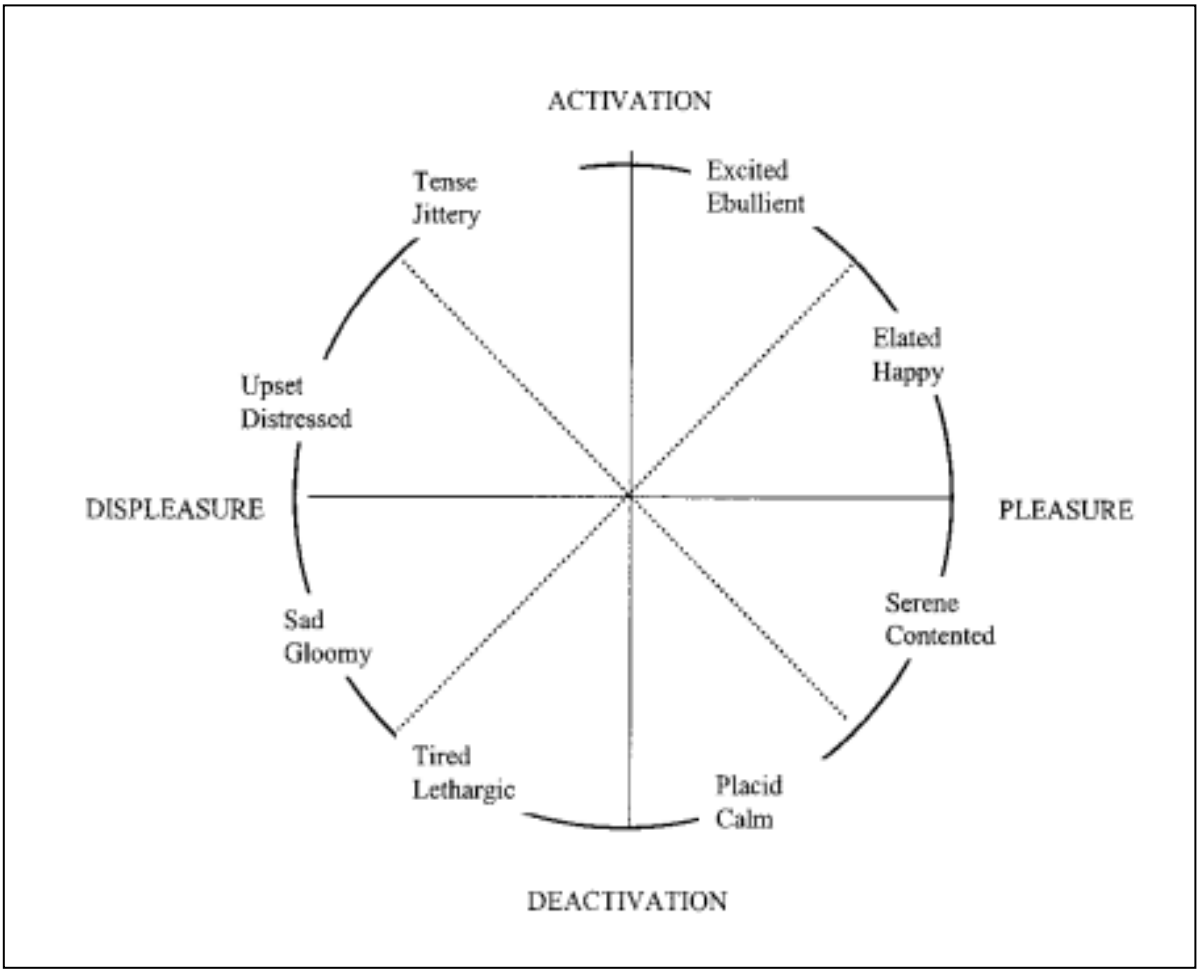

Figure 7. Core Affect Diagram

With respect to the above three theories on the functions of emotion and mood, individual wellness potential generally resides within the positive range while limitation generally resides within the negative range. In theory, these affects may contribute to a wellness disconnect between individual intention and commitment to action. Applied to a wellness potential system, the range of emotion and mood interpreted reflects the elements of the system. These elements (mood and emotion) interact with the interconnections of potential causing a possible negative or positive feedback loops that can either reinforce the wellness potential or limitations on the

behavior of a system as a whole. Below are further examples in how emotions impact certain systems and mind-sets.

***The stress response*:** Adapting change to wellness system behavior can activate stress responses causing a wellness disconnect in intention and commitment to action. The concept of resilience (the process of adapting well to sources of stress or "bouncing back" from difficult experiences – American Psychological Association, 2016), may stem from such an emotional range. This is largely due to the constant positive reinforcement of emotion and mood. Resilience is associated with the neuropeptide Y (NPY), a hormone released in the brain during stress. Unlike the stress hormones that put the body on high alert in response to trauma, NPY acts at receptors in several parts of the brain — including the amygdala, prefrontal cortex, hippocampus and brainstem — to help shut off the alarm. (Hughes, 2012, p. 166). In a sense, reducing the stress response by practicing positive ranges of emotion and mood can reinforce a feedback loop with the ability to commit to wellness potential.

***Molecules*:** The positive influences of emotion are research in multiple ways. Candace Pert (1997) speaks of recent technological innovations that allow us to examine the molecular basis of emotions. She contends that the molecules of our emotions share intimate connections with, and are indeed inseparable from, our physiology (p.18). She describes how emotions link mind and body. The molecules of emotion run every system in our body, she says, and this communication system, is in effect, a demonstration of the bodymind's intelligence, an intelligence wise enough to seek wellness, and one that can potentially keep us healthy and disease-free (p.19).

EQ: Psychology Today website (https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/emotional-intelligence) summarizes psychologist Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (EQ), as having the ability to identify and manage our own emotions and the emotions of others by: (1) emotional awareness, including the ability to identify one's own emotions and those of others, (2) the ability to harness emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problems solving, and (3) the ability to manage emotions, including the ability to regulate one's own emotions, and the ability to cheer up or calm down another person.

Embracing Joy: Authors of *Awakening Joy,* Baraz and Alexander (2012) expand the influences of emotion and mood, stating that setting a clear intention towards a positive perception can increase momentum towards positive change. A positive emotion is not a place you arrive at but the result of training your mind to ride with ease and flexibility (p. 7).

Awareness in and the practice of embracing a positive emotion and mood creates individual wellness potential. Practice separates the old from the new by reinforcing a specific mindset. Like a worn path, neural pathways need to be repeatedly visited to establish a new perception, emotion, or mood. Reinforcing positive emotions and mood creates resilience to impediments, allowing more ease and commitment into wellness development. Positive emotions reduce limitations that would otherwise stem from negative contributions.

Other Limitations. There are other, less common, but just as ineffective patterns that allow limitations to emerge. I have observed the following limitations in a smaller population of individuals, but I feel they are just as important to note.

Wrong goals: As mentioned earlier, an effective approach to wellness potential should be viewed as a behavior-driven system composed of working parts, not goal-driven. This is an

extension of self-inflicted limitations. This is a flawed approach to wellness in that they not only lack in identifying attainable and committable wellness potential, but they can also produce unintended limitations. Among many intentions individuals set towards their wellness potential, some may have been the wrong goals in what Meadows (2008) terms as a system trap (p. 140). System behavior is particularly sensitive to goals within feedback loops. If the goals – the indicators of satisfaction of the rules – are inaccurately or incomplete, the system may obediently work to produce a result that is not really intended or wanted (p. 140). For example, if an individual set a goal that limits their calorie intake to lose weight, at the same time, not enough calories are consumed to complete their exercise routine -- thus, the unintended consequence of having no energy for physical activity.

Lack of self efficacy: Believing in the intentions you set forth are just as important as the action. Albert Bandura (1999) points out that among the mechanisms through which human agency is exercised, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. This belief system is the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce changes by one's actions (pp. 28-29). Belief in wellness behavior can stem from practicing potential and avoiding limitations. Once wellness behavior begins to shift, it can reinforce the notion that it can be done because has been done.

Truths*:* Self-truths are unique to each individual. What each individual understands as true *is* true to them. Truth varies greatly between individuals depending on how they interpret an object or situation. Briggs and Peat (1999) speak to a point that we, in this case, Americans, are conditioned by society. Our conditioning lays out a map of what reality is that we have been

trained to accept and act upon (p. 20). Briggs and Peat say "Our habits of thought, opinions, and experiences, even the "facts" of the world, are similar to negative feedback loops that go 'round and 'round to keep us in essentially the same familiar place" (p. 20). While these feedback loops keep society stable, they are also confining. What we know as truth can change when our reality shifts. Perception, interpretation, creativity, and information can take part in this change. What we know as the truth is associated with what limitations we find ourselves trapped in.

System Elements Involving External Observable Factors

The individual wellness system is also comprised of many external factors that affect individual wellness potential. These factors can influence the wellness systems by aiding in potential or causing limitations. The American wellness industry in known to generate many of these influences toward individual wellness potential. An article titled "A Little Is A Lot: Health and Wellness Trends" (2016) by The Huffington Post, refers to health and wellness as integral parts of a sustainable future and it is essential for people to be healthy both physically and mentally in order to thrive. However, the article goes on to say that health and wellness is a critical trend with retailers, brands, and industry bodies. Accenture consulting states in "Consumer Health and Wellness Trends" (2016) that consumer healthcare growth will be driven primarily by preventive health and wellness categories such as vitamins, nutrition, weight management and fortified foods and beverages—fueled by demand from health focused consumers and the growing wealth of emerging market consumers. While the future of health and wellness is essential for individual well-being, trends in wellness will be greatly influential.

As a system, American wellness industry encompasses various trends that stem from over-generalized, non-personalized mass approaches to wellness. These trends can cause

confusion and self-inflicted limitations, misguiding individual wellness behaviors. This in turn, creates a disconnect between a person's intention and the commitment of action. Behaviors by the American wellness industry are fueled by ulterior motives in that they promote and advertise an individual's best interests; however, their true interest and purpose can also be self-serving as profit rules as a main motivator. Economically, it could be to market and sell a product or service. Culturally, it could be to promote a certain ideal. Politically, it could be to shape our environment or rules we live by. The confusion remains between what we know and what we are told, barring our intentions regarding our actions. The American wellness industry has the ability to detour individual wellness potential towards a more conveniently prepared, generally perceived, non-personal set of daily wellness influences. This barrage of external influence is the elements that are involved in individual wellness systems. While there are many external influences, the following are the most common I observed while coaching.

Consumer-Driven Wellness Market. Elements of an individual wellness system lies within the American consumer-driven wellness market. As mentioned earlier, the Global Wellness Institute (2014) reports that the global wellness industry is a $3.4 trillion market. Through overwhelming and sometimes aggressive marketing methods, this industry generates new information promoting a constant daily output of products, services or research related to wellness. An industry's profit-based efforts can be contradictory to what behaviors are represented in individual wellness systems. In turn, confusion between industry efforts and individual behaviors can limit individual wellness potential.

The American wellness industry also misguides individual wellness potential by false advertising. The wellness industry receives billions of dollars every year from supplements, foods and devices related to wellness. However, not all of these products live up to the

advertising claims that they can help people's health and fitness. In an article on "Health and Fitness Claims" published by the Federal Trade Commission, the FTC combats this type of deceptive advertising in coordination with the Food and Drug Administration and other government authorities, including the National Institutes of Health. The article goes on to state that:

> With regard to the supplement industry, which reported an estimated $25 billion in sales in 2009, all too often, the health claims made for these products are false or unproven. Over the last decade, the FTC has filed one hundred and twenty cases challenging health claims made for supplements. Meanwhile, in recent years there has been a trend in food advertising toward making unproven claims that eating certain foods can improve health and even reduce the risk of serious illnesses such as prostate cancer and heart disease. (FTC, n.d.)

The interests of external influence overshadow the wellness interests or potential of the individual. David Peat explains this idea in his essay on *Gentle Action* (c) that,

> In essence, these organizations, governments and institutions have been created according to our traditional image of reality; that is, of something external, predictable, relatively mechanical, and whose dynamics can be controlled by the application of directed force. As a result, organizations are themselves relatively rigid in their nature, operating from fixed plans, policies and mission statements. Their internal structures are often hierarchical in nature, their lines of communication are limited rather than being flexible and dynamic, and their response to challenge and change is often predictable. In

other words, most organizations are far less subtle and complex than the very systems they are attempting to address. (n.d.)

Many of these external elements that influence individual wellness potential cause limitations; however, practicing awareness and self-observation when choosing external wellness system elements can benefit individual wellness potential avoid a wellness disconnect.

Wellness Specialists. Wellness system elements can influence by opinions and information as well. There is growing awareness of personal health accountability acted on by self-improvement and preventative measures. In my experience as a wellness coach, many individuals inquired about specific diets, exercise routines, stress management techniques, finding meaningful purposes, or self-help strategies; wanting to understand why one suggestion, theory, or wellness practice by wellness experts and scientists is better or different than another.

I observed some common patterns involving products, services and research led by wellness experts in a consumer-driven market and the reaction by individuals who pursued what they were being told and sold. Recommendations from wellness experts have advised increasing physical activity and weight management but have led to disappointing outcomes. One individual told me she that had acquired many of the exercise DVDs and home exercise equipment she saw on television over a five year time span and only used each once. Another woman said she tried many types of diet pills hoping to lose fifteen pounds but never lost the weight. In addition, many individuals have expressed frustration in changing health habits when recommended by their doctor. They are told to do it, but not how.

Economist Paul Zane Pilzer explains that consumers will turn away from material goods and instead seek to achieve internal self-improvement, healthier foods, vitamins, nutritional supplements and fitness programs, which will create a virtually limitless and sustained demand for wellness-based products. *He also mentions* that about one-seventh of business and consumer earnings are spent on wellness every year (2012). With such an apparent interest in wellness, herein lies another disconnect between intentions and potential. Many individuals look to wellness experts for advice, however, with so many opinions and theories, how does one know what to try or which one is misleading?

Many self-improvement strategies are insightful and provide useful wellness information and strategies individual can benefit from. This information passed on by wellness experts are in the shape of influential elements that can support an individual wellness system; however, choosing the right elements is key in producing wellness potential and limitations.

Technology, Mass Media and American Culture. Technology is a means in which Individual wellness system elements are regulated how much access an individual has in wellness related information. Through the advancements of technology, most Americans have an overwhelming amount, constant flow, and access to information anytime and anywhere. There are positive and negative influences associated with mass media. M.A. Mughal (2013) mentions in the article "Mass Media and Its Influence on Society," that the three basic functions of mass media are: providing news/information, entertainment and education. Using mass media as a primary information source can have negative impact on our wellness potential. This is because the media, similar to a business model, creates an ideal of what wellness is. Images of beautiful and happy people portraying ease and comfort when addressing their wellness misleads and adds to the confusion surrounding individual wellness. It's a subliminal way to persuade the masses

that if you want to be successful at enhancing your wellness, you must buy that particular brand or product.

Another negative influence is when an individual sets a positive intention in their wellness but is negatively influenced by advertisements. For example, someone trying to make healthier food choices but who constantly sees junk food images. This adds to the disconnect in wellness behaviors. The media also has a huge impact on society in shaping the public opinion of the masses. They can form or modify the public opinion in different ways depending of what is the objective. For example, when new research involving health or wellness is published, depending on how the media wants to portray the information, a public narratives is then created towards that research.

Both, internal psychological factors and external observable factors can influence individual wellness potential. When wellness is designed for the individual instead of by the individual, this causes limitations, and hence, a disconnect in wellness intention and commitment to action. Interpretations of wellness system elements can create potential or cause confusion and self-inflicted limitations.

We live in this duality of what we experience and what we are told, being the observer and the observed. Awareness, self-observation and shifting interpretation of our surrounding breaks the routine that confines a system. Examining these elements and their interconnections can offer new information, aiding in identifying new individual self-truths. What we perceive as the truth holds strength in system relationships. This strength allows the function, purpose, and behavior become more attainable bridging the disconnect between intention and commitment to action. In the next chapter, methods in reconstructing and designing relationships and

interconnectedness leading to functional individual wellness potential system behavior will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

RECONSTRUCTING INDIVIDUAL WELLNESS POTENTIAL: A DESIGN THINKING APPROACH

Think left and think right and think low and think high.
Oh, the things you can think up if only you try
~DR. SEUSS

While whole system thinking essentially deconstructs individual wellness potential, design thinking can be used to reconstruct it. Design thinking navigates an individual's wellness system by providing a clear understanding and method for developing wellness behavior. Here, among our past experiences, dissection of interpretations and assumptions, the exploration of the unknown, and the practice of self-awareness and self-observation is where wellness potential exists and design begin. Once information related to wellness is perceived, elements are interpreted to produce potential, reinforced by feedback loops. These interconnections between elements and feedback loops produce a wellness potential function or behavior.

In Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind* (2005), John Heskett, a scholar of the subject of design explains that "Design, stripped of its essence, can be defined as the human nature to shape and make our environment in ways without precedent in nature, to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives" (p. 69). Everything around us has been designed. From our work schedule, the house we live in, where and how our food is grown, to the television programs we watch or books we read., somebody imagined them and brought them into being. Design is a classic whole-minded aptitude. Haskett terms design as a combination of utility and significance, in that there is a functionality that has to be met along with an idea or emotion (p.70). Frank Nuovo, one of the world's best-known industrial designers, is referenced as well stating "design in its

simplest form is the activity of creating solutions. Design is something that everyone does every day" (Pink, p. 75).

Design Thinking, is a process that links design to innovation (Berger, 2009, pp. 102-103). Design firm IDEO (2016) defines *Design thinking* as a deeply human process that taps into abilities we all have but get overlooked by more conventional problem-solving practices. It relies on our ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that are emotionally meaningful as well as functional, and to express ourselves through means beyond words or symbols. In the 1990s, IDEO began to implement "empathetic" research in its stages of design, stressing the importance of human factors, such as feelings, in design (p. 110). In order to make viable change, an objective shift in perspective and comprehension of all variables involved in a concept is needed. Designer Bruce Mau explains that everything is connected and all of these connected issues "are part of a complex system that is comprised of the behaviors and actions [of any company]" (Berger, p. 157).

Reconstructing or designing an individual wellness system begins with awareness. This awareness involves an objective stance on oneself and one's surroundings. It is a practice of self-observation, allowing elements to be interpreted in a way that consciously fuels feedback loops into creating and redesigning wellness potential. Our individual creativity produces many opportunities for this (re)design, in addition to reducing self-inflicted limitations that originate from interpreted selected elements within a system. Both creativity and design are valuable in developing individual wellness potential.

Creativity

Creativity is the cornerstone of design and plays a vital part in wellness potential. It is all around us and anyone can be creative. Creativity has the ability to illuminate multiple strategies unique and specific to each individual. Creativity is a tool that embraces a wide range of perceptions, individual interpretations, novel ideas, clarification of information, and the conscious awareness of our own individual wellness intuition.

Each individual interprets the world in a unique way through experiences and perception. How we think shapes more than our wellness potential, it reflects the times in which we live, the zeitgeist of modern day America. As each day passes, the interaction between the ourselves and our place in the world ebbs and flows throughout known and repetitive territory and adaptation of new events. It is at this junction of expectation and familiarity, versus the effort of observation and comprehension of a new experience, where creativity unfolds.

To cultivate creativity; anywhere, at any time, by anyone, the sense of risk must be embraced. Whatever sense of comfort, such as sense of familiarity or experience, are limitations. While creativity is around us all the time, it more easily attainable when there is less control in the approach to perception.

In Edward de Bono's website (https://www.edwdebono.com/lateral-thinking) on, *What is Lateral Thinking* (2016), he suggests that you can learn to be creative. Creative thinking is something you can get better at if you want to. It is a set of processes that provides a deliberate, systematic way of thinking creatively that results in innovative thinking in a repeatable manner. Lateral Thinking is based on changing concepts and focusing on the perception part of thinking. He states, "You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper." Often

trying to think harder in the same direction may not be as useful as changing direction. Lateral thinking deliberately distances itself from "vertical" or logical thinking (the classic method for problem solving: working out the solution step-by-step from the given data) or "horizontal" imagination (having many ideas but being unconcerned with the detailed implementation of them by deferring judgement). When a situation or object presents itself, we assume certain perceptions, certain concepts, and certain boundaries that are already associated by experiences and organizing the external world into the pieces we can “process.” A person uses lateral thinking to move from one known idea to creating new ideas.

Briggs and Peat (1999) explain that chaos is nature’s creativity and that:

> Our bodies are pervaded by chaotic, open systems that allow a constantly creative response to a changing environment. For example, our brain self-organizes by changing its subtle connectivity with every act of perception. The list of ways that nature puts the principle of self-organized chaos to use is virtually endless. (p. 19)

Creativity is all around us. It presents itself in every moment we experience. Briggs and Peat explain that for humans, creativity is about getting beyond what we know, getting to the “truth” of things, and that is when we embrace chaos.

Psychologist Keith Sawyer (2010) provides an integrated framework that captures key stages of the creative process that psychologists have proposed (Table 1).

Table 5.1: Sawyer's Eight Stages of the Creative Process, and How They Correspond to Other Process Models

	Wallas (1926)	Creative Problem Solving (Isaksen, Dorval, & Treffinger, 2000)	IDEAL cycle (Bransford & Stein, 1984)	Robert Sternberg (2006)	Possibility thinking (Burnard, Craft, & Grainger, 2006)	UK QCA (QCA, 2005)	Synectics (Gordon, 1961)	Mumford's group (Scott et al., 2004)	IDEO (Kelley, 2001)
Find the problem		Framing problems	Identify problems, define goals	Redefine problems	Posing questions	Questioning and challenging		Problem finding	
Acquire the knowledge	Preparation	Exploring data	Learn	Know the domain			Groundwork	Information gathering	
Gather related information			Look		Immersion	Envisaging what might be	Immersion		Observation
Incubation	Incubation	Constructing opportunities	Explore possible strategies	Take time off	Play	Keeping options open		Concept search	
Generate ideas	Insight	Generating ideas		Generate ideas	Being imaginative	Exploring ideas	Divergent exploration	Idea generation	Brainstorming
Combine ideas		Developing solutions		Cross-fertilize ideas		Making connections and seeing relationships		Conceptual combination	
Select the best ideas	Verification			Judging ideas		Reflecting critically on ideas	Selection	Idea evaluation	
Externalize ideas	Elaboration	Building acceptance	Act and anticipate outcomes	Sell the idea, persevere	Self-determination		Articulation of solution, development and transformation, implementation	Implementation planning and action monitoring	Rapid prototyping, refining, implementation

Table 1. Eight Stages of the Creative Process

Creativity is unique to each of us in that it enables us to develop our own wellness potential. It has the ability to refocus our personal truths, our realities, and give deeper meaning to our behaviors. It is something that is not encouraged nor practiced enough within the American wellness industry or within our own wellness potential. It is creativity that sets forth a design strategy capable of committing to the follow through in wellness potential and behaviors.

Design Thinking

As observed in Table 1, there are many design techniques. Design thinking for innovation approach is human-centered allowing individuals to embrace self-observation and questioning their own perception of wellness. This is an essential part in shifting wellness interpretations.

Design thinking, as taught by George Kembel at Stanford's d.school, is a boiled down design process with five basic requirements (Berger, 2009, p.272):

> **Empathy.** Gaining expertise about a problem or subject area, primarily through empathy with the people directly involved.
>
> **Frame.** Reframing the problem can give new insight into the challenges you're going to tackle (which is to say, making sure you're asking and trying to answer the right question(s).
>
> **Ideate.** Generating options or ideas.
>
> **Prototype.** Creating prototypes to test those options. Share your solution and get feedback.
>
> **Iterate**. Creating subsequent refined versions of your original prototype, based upon feedback

Kembel also notes that it's a basic methodology that can work for a professional in a design firm or for an individual trying to solve almost any type of design challenge. He explains, "you can begin anywhere, as long as you circle around to each one repeatedly" (Berger, 2009, p. 272).

The design process can lead to many wellness solutions. In terms of individual wellness potential, the empathic research stage is a means to observe everyday life. Self-observation creates an awareness and a perception of current wellness behaviors. When framing individual wellness potential as parts in a system, the deconstructed parts allow a greater opportunity for the right questions to be asked. For example, "where is the disconnect between my wellness intention and commitment to action originating from?" Ideate allows the generation of ideas. There are multiple techniques as to shift interpretations of certain elements influencing the

individual wellness system. Since wellness in unique to the individual, so are the ideas within this ideation stage. Prototypes are directly related to the feedback loops presented in an individual wellness potential system. This stages depend on the selected elements used to increase potential and decrease self-inflicted limitations. Iteration stage represents the behavior of the individual wellness system. This the wellness system [Re] design.

Redesigning one's lifestyle is not a foreign concept. Bruce Mau observed himself and changed his lifestyle by design thinking. He believes that people are hesitant to even think in these terms of designing their lives because it can be intimidating (Berger, 2009, pp. 241-242). Berger explains that "small everyday design decisions and actions often tend to be reactive rather than proactive: addressing individual challenges as they rise to the surface instead of anticipating them and dealing with them as part of a cohesive systems-design approach." Berger also quotes Mau stating that:

> Designers are as guilty of this short-term life design thinking as the rest of us. When I stop to think about it, I have allowed so many things in my like to just happen. Some of those things certainly could have been designed better. And I'm a designer! If anyone should be thinking about these things, it's me. (p. 242)

In addition to a design process, The *"Art"* of design, the approach to thinking freely and embracing new ideas, can be experienced by other modes. With respect to design thinking, methods involving the idea stage (generating options or ideas); have been creatively contemplated by many authors. These modes are tools that support the entire design process.

Goethean Observation explores perception and how to achieve insight and make discoveries. It is an alternative to standard scientific theory by observing what's physically there first. Whitelegg

(2003) explains in *Goethean Science: An Alternative Approach,* that to extend the experience of pure perception, we put concepts on hold to celebrate differences in order to access underlying phenomena may offer a different perspective (p. 319). This allows us to approach the true concept or theory that resides within them. Lancaster University (2005) website (http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/philosophy/awaymave/405/wk8.htm.) describes Goethean's four levels of observation as, (1) exact sense perception - parts and things, (2) precise sensorial imagination - relationships or process of parts, (3) Seeing in beholding – as a whole or goals, and (4) being one with the object - observe and intuition.

Briggs and Peat's *Seven Life Lessons of Chaos* (1999), speaks to the power of subtle influence. This practice is what they term as "butterfly power." Briggs and Peat explain, "measured against the great forces at play in the world, a butterfly fluttering its wings doesn't seem to possess much power. But an ancient Chinese proverb says that the power of a butterfly's wings can be felt on the other side of the world" (p.31). Acknowledging Edward Lorenz's insight into the butterfly's power by his testing of a simple model of weather prediction, Briggs and Peat explain how a nonlinear system—tiny influences can suddenly blow up in a way that transforms the system opposed to linear systems that change smoothly under the application of small influence such as the accelerator on a car—in a chaotic system full of iterating feedback makes it incredibly sensitive to tiny influence within a self-organized system (p.33). In a chaotic system, everything is connected, through negative and positive feedback, to everything else. Any one of those internal butterfly loops can become amplified through feedback until it transforms the whole situation (p.34).

The Hearty Soul (2016) website (http://theheartysoul.com/complaining-brain-negativity/) speaks to neuropsychologist Donald Hebb, who believed that neurons which fire together, wire together.

The article goes on to say that groups of neurons connect in our brain as a result of particular life experiences. When a stimulus is presented, thousands of neurons are triggered and they all get together to form a neural network. The brain learns to trigger the same neurons with repetitive thinking. For example, if you keep your mind focused on criticism, worry, and victimization, your mind will find it easier to bring up those same thoughts for similar situations. The important point this article makes is that our thought patterns wire our brains to react positively or negatively to the situations with which we are presented. It is at this where perception takes root and creates, for us, a reality.

In designing wellness potential, happiness shows a strong connection to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's state of flow. According to Martin Seligman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and former president of the American Psychological Association, people tend to think of happiness as a goal, but it's more of a process. He goes on to mention that there are two activities that lead to happiness. One is what he calls the "engaging" activity and the challenging and often creative activity that tends to lead to a "flow experience" (Berger, 2009, p. 264). This concept of designing happiness is similar to the concept of being in a positive mood when engaging in an activity as mentioned in chapter four. Positive thoughts are motivators when designing wellness potential. Berger (2009) refers to Dr. S. Ausim Azizi, chairman of the department of neurology at Temple University School of Medicine, stating that when you're engaged in creative activities, it activates an area of the brain called the nucleus accumbens that controls how we feel about life (p. 165). Berger also quotes Dr. Gabriela Cora of the Florida Neuroscience Center, "through constant acts of creative design, you also re-create yourself. You help propel your own growth spiral, feeding off the energy of creation. That's not just a feeling,

it's a fact: being in that state of "design flow" raises the levels of neurotransmitters in your brain, such as endorphins and dopamine, and that keeps you focused and energized" (pp. 265-266).

Physiological changes to the body can take place through practicing certain behaviors. A study by Kraft and Pressman (2012), found that that there are both physiological and psychological benefits from maintaining positive facial expressions during stress. Findings revealed that all smiling participants, regardless of whether they were aware of smiling, had lower heart rates during stress recovery than the neutral group did, with a slight advantage for those with Duchenne (real and not fake) smiles (abstract).

Warren Berger explains in *CAD Monkeys, Dinosaur Babies and T-Shaped People (2009)* that while *design* has many definitions, common threads seem to involve planning, purpose and intent (p.30). He also state's that the act of questioning basic assumptions can be the first step toward reinvention and meaningful change. How a problem is framed will determine the solution (p.23). This is a stage where an individual, through self-observation, creates an awareness and connection to their present reality. This is a place where one can ask themselves why they want to change and dig deep into their true intentions. "Going deep," as Berger puts it, is a process in how we can figure out what we need (p. 99). This is a point where individuals look inward and question assumptions and perceptions regarding their wellness potential.

In developing wellness potential, like most behaviors, practice is key in committing and enduring any resistance to change. The effort itself pushes one's perception to a new level of self. What took more energy and thought previously, can be attained again more quickly and easily. Much like learning the piano, the more time playing, the better one gets.

Albert Bandura (1999) speaks to cognitive guidance in *Social Cognitive Theory* as especially influential in the early and intermediate phases of skill development. Knowledge structures specify how appropriate subskills must be selected, integrated and sequenced to suit particular purposes. With continued practice, skills become fully integrated and are executed with ease. Human action is regulated by multilevel systems of control. Once proficient modes of behavior become routinized, they no longer require higher cognitive control. Their execution is regulated largely by lower level sensory-motor systems in recurrent situations, unless things go awry. In that case, cognitive control again comes into play for the development of new courses of action, which then become routinized as the habitual way of doing things. Efficient functioning thus requires a mix of routinized and mindful action (pp. 26-27). Consciously or subconsciously, individuals reinforce behaviors that can ultimately become habitual. Practice is an opportunity for a new behavior. It can contribute to shaping neural habits and the potential in changing wellness behaviors. George Leonard makes a similar point in his book *Mastery* (1992), explaining that within his five keys to mastery, the second step: practice, is not something you do, it's something you are, its staying on path (p 74). Practice can encourage a routinized state and also encourage a new behavior.

In Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* (1990), he delves into the notion that perception about our lives are the outcome of many forces that shape experience, each having an impact on whether we feel good or bad. While many forces are out of our control, such as our looks or choice of parents when we are born, there are times we feel in control of our actions. Csikszentmihalyi explains that when this happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration. This is what he calls "optimal experience." These are moments when an individual's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.

Optimal experience is something we make happen (p. 3). Because optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in conscious moment to moment, each individual has to achieve it on the basis of his own individual efforts and creativity (p. 5)

Individual wellness potential thrives when creativity is embraced. Self-inflicted limitations cease to exist when interpretations do not produce them. Design thinking allows resurgence in discovering a shift in perception and provides a way towards action.. Together, creativity and design thinking offer a connection in individual wellness potential and commitment in wellness behavior.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Wellness can be associated with any subject in American culture. It has no distinct definition, yet its very vagueness makes it desirable. When acted upon as a personal endeavor, an insurmountable influx of information competes for attention. Simultaneously, pre-existing behaviors and feedback loops reinforce wellness behaviors.

This thesis explores the wellness behavior disconnect between intention and commitment to action set by an individual. The further this disconnect was explored, patterns emerged and specific behaviors began to unfold. The disconnect observed was two-fold. The immediate and more evident behavior was the disconnect between intention and action. The more delayed or complex disconnect involved the origin of the intention itself.

My research has concluded that the concept of American wellness is designed for us and not by us. Each individual understanding of wellness is reinforced by external and internal influences. These influences can either hinder wellness potential, causing limitations to exist, or aid in wellness potential through self-observation.

External influences, such as the American wellness industry, promote a one-size-fits-all wellness structure. There is an internal conflict between what we are told and what we intuitively know and feel and this can produce limitations. External influences create a construct of wellness that we continuously strive for. This can range from what we give our attention to as consumers

or even avoid. This continuously changing landscape of external influences creates a perception of wellness, rendering it unattainable and keeping individuals in a constant state of confusion.

Internal influences are harder to identify than external. Interpretation of information that pertains to an object, place, or event, is reinforced by feedback loops, causing either individual wellness potential or limitations. Each individual interprets information differently. Past experience and perception shape individual narratives in wellness and this makes wellness unique to each of us.

A whole systems thinking approach allows an individual to identify wellness potential and limitations. Whole systems thinking is an awareness and recognition in plotting our next decision to benefit the one after that. It is a convergence of individual values, self-truths, and creativity that redesigns wellness potential and behavior. Whole systems thinking limits the disconnect in wellness by challenging the status quo, addressing long term solutions and opportunities, rebuilding assumptions and perceptions, and strengthening internalized potential.

Systems thinking involves deconstructing individual wellness behavior to understand the parts in which it behaves. System elements, interconnections, and function all react to interpretations and feedback loops. Individual wellness behavior can shift if these interpretations and feedback loops are altered.

Instead of our wellness being designed for us, we need to embrace creativity and design wellness for ourselves. Design thinking strategies reconstruct the individual wellness system by aiding in the interpretation of selected elements. With elements that aid in potential, feedback loops can produce a behavior that embraces the uniqueness and wellness meaning of each individual.

Wellness is not an end point to strive for, but rather a state of being we currently possess and need to reinvent. Wellness is a behavior, not a goal. It defines who we are and how we think. As we internalize this state-of-being, we reshape, strengthen, and project a new reality in ourselves and with that, a clearer picture of our potential and ultimate commitment to wellness intentions.

Conclusion

Multiple fields of study offer information, tools, and techniques for enhancing wellness potential. Leonard's *Mastery* (1992) speaks to why practice of any kind is pivotal when making changes to one's behavior. Edward de Bono's theory of *lateral thinking* (2016) offers insight into altering perception to solve a problem by producing fresh ideas from different angles and avoiding repetition. Goethean observation (2003) offers insight into a natural and fundamental comprehension of the world around us. Meadows' (2008) *leverage points* offers insight into when to take advantage of opportunities of change in a system. Similar to Peat's *Gentle Action(c),* Briggs and Peat's (1999) *butterfly power* suggests that small changes in thoughts and behaviors, no matter how insignificant they may be perceived, can change the path of a system. All of these aforementioned techniques speak to individual wellness systems in that perceptual change to a feedback loop creates new feedback loops and ultimately new realities.

The disconnect between intention and commitment to action stems from how individual wellness structure is set-up. The perception of wellness defines its behavior. Self-inflicted limitations fueled by misinterpretations can be reduced if the feedback loops quit producing them. Systems thinking counteracts limitations by identifying what parts need to be adjusted. Feedback loops can produce behaviors that reflect a shift interpretation. Through creativity and

design thinking, wellness can be designed in which to produce the best version of ourselves. Everyone is creative and creativity is around us all the time.

As a health coach, I have observed that wellness in American culture is analyzed and utilized in an inefficient and ineffective way. Wellness is not a means to an end, but rather is a behavior exhibited by organizing informational input and feedback in a balanced, objective, holistic and meaningful sense in order to perceive and produce the best version of one's self. With practice, awareness can propel new perspectives towards personal wellness endeavors. I have concluded through my research that reducing or even eliminating the disconnect between wellness intention and commitment to action include these ideas: (1) Wellness begins with accepting that it is behavior and not a goal -- unlike what the American wellness industry advertises which is designed for us instead of by us; (2) Using whole system thinking as a lens to redesign individual wellness potential. This begins with self-observation and awareness of our surroundings; (3) Individual interpretation of wellness information (the elements) must shift, allowing more opportunities for potential and minimizing self-inflicted limitations that only exist because we place them there (4) We must recognize that feedback loops reinforce behavior; and (5) We must embrace creativity as an outlet in redesigning the self. Design thinking strategies can aid in developing wellness behavior.

Wellness is unique to each individual and has the ability to reduce limitations and create a design based on self-observation and self-awareness. Shifting interpretations to allow for more opportunities in wellness potential is similar to how art utilizes negative space. Something is there--if we know where to look. Our own perception of wellness, as much as it inherently advertises a reality, can be interpreted differently, creating a new wellness reality. Potential wellness behavior can be designed to produce a new, optimal version of ourselves**.**

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