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Thriving Across the Life Span

By common definition, the word “thrive” implies a desirable life condition. Virtually any rational person who is not bent on self-destruction wishes to thrive; and virtually anybody who cares about the well-being of others wants to see them thrive. Certainly the question is not whether it is a good thing to thrive throughout life, but rather what exactly it means for a person to thrive. This question is difficult enough when asked about a single individual at a single point in time. Adding greatly to the complexity of the question is that individuals and their needs change over time. Moreover, what it takes to thrive in one social, cultural, and historical setting may not work well at all in a different time and place. Because of these daunting complexities, along with a lack of conceptual consensus and limited empirical study of the construct, no one has yet fully reviewed and put forth a detailed set of criteria that could define “thriving” in a manner that could be studied across all of life’s stages and contexts.

As a developmental goal or *telos*, “thriving” retains considerable appeal to those who wish to explore optimal conditions of human development. Most parents, teachers, youth workers—indeed, anyone who has a stake in the positive development of young people—would likely agree to the benefits of promoting more than mere competence. Thus, a term is required that identifies a *telos* and draws attention to the more elevated aspects of human thought and behavior. The study of “thriving” is consistent with recent shifts in the psychological sciences towards interest in the positive dimensions of our life goals and experiences (see Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Not surprisingly then, the term appears frequently in current writings about individual growth over the lifespan. But often the term is left undefined or ambiguous, and

there have been few attempts to build a scientific knowledge base of what thriving means, how it comes about over the life course of individual lives, and how it can be studied empirically.

In this chapter, we advance a set of definitional criteria synthesizing previous work that we intend to function as the basis for the systematic study of thriving across diverse social and cultural contexts, and at all phases of the lifespan. We then outline a number of essential assumptions that follow from this definition, and consider the condition of thriving from developmental, and more broadly-defined psychological perspectives, reviewing the existing scientific literature that has examined thriving and its closely related constructs. Finally, we derive several conclusions regarding the nature and facilitators of thriving throughout the course of human development. The general goals of this chapter are to establish the concept of thriving as a scientifically useful means of analyzing progress towards positive developmental ends, and offer a conceptualization of thriving that represents a first step towards a unifying theory of positive development across the life span.

The Concept of Thriving in Developmental Study

The term “thriving” has been used in various ways during its century-long history in developmental study. Holt’s (1897) *The Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* may be the first research publication to introduce the term, describing inadequate growth and development in infancy as a “failure to thrive.” The phrase “failure to thrive” soon became a measurable (if not quite general) syndrome in pediatric medicine, and retained that status for most of the 20th Century until falling out of favor after it was replaced by a number of more specific behavioral deficits.

More recently, thriving has been conceptualized by both medical and social scientists in a variety of ways (and with a variety of labels) across the entire life span, from optimal

development in adolescence to growth as a response to adversity in adulthood through the reemergence of the notion of “failure to thrive” in late adulthood. A major advantage of developing and employing this concept lies in its potential to capture the unique features of optimal development, rather than to note a deficit by its inverse or absence. In this chapter, therefore, we shall introduce a concept of thriving and its associated principles derived primarily from the frameworks of the positive psychology approach (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive youth development approaches (Benson, 2008; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2007). In the context of these perspectives, we review the ways in which the term has been used by scholars from a number of research traditions as well as a number of closely related concepts dealing with positive development and optimal human functioning across the life span.

Fundamental to the perspective we present on thriving is the view that human development must be understood from a strengths-based rather than a deficit-centered focus. Indeed, recent decades have seen a mushrooming of research among these lines, such as studies of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), happiness (Diener, 1984), psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), flourishing (Keyes, 2002), optimal experience or “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), developmental assets (Benson, 1997), purpose (Damon, 2008), “sparks” (Benson, 2008), and healthy adolescence (Lerner, 2007). This positive perspective in the field of developmental psychology has its roots in seminal writings on cognitive development by Jean Piaget (1952) and Heinz Werner (1948), as well as those on resilience by Norman Garmezy (1983) and Emmy Werner (1985; Werner & Smith, 1982), which helped to turn the tide of negative, deficit-centered views of youth potential. Researchers and practitioners of youth development, once focused solely on the prevention and remediation of problem behaviors such as alcohol and drug use, delinquency,

and violence, have since heard and responded to Karen Pittman's (1991) call-to-arms: "Problem-free is not fully prepared." In the years hence, the positive youth development movement has "introduced a more affirmative and welcome vision of young people [which] envisions young people as resources rather than as problems for society [and] emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people" (Damon, 2004, p. 15).

Research on late adult development and gerontological health has followed suit, redirecting some of its focus from primarily cataloging declining mental and physical health in later adulthood to emphasizing their potential to effectively deal with losses and capacity for "successful" development at this stage of life (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996; Heckhausen, 1999; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Baltes & Smith, 2003). Though conceptualizations of successful late adult development vary somewhat, Rowe and Kahn (1998) offer a concise and straightforward three-component definition, which includes the capacity for high cognitive and physical functioning, active engagement in life, and a low probability and existence of disease and disease-related disability. In particular, Baltes and his colleagues have advanced their notions of wisdom and selective optimization with compensation (SOC) as integral to successful development in late adulthood (Baltes, 1997; we will cover these concepts in more detail later in this chapter; see also Sternberg, this volume, for an extended discussion of the development of wisdom). This notion of successful late adult development, in particular the SOC model, provides a framework for understanding the continuation of positive development through later life, and may be brought to bear on how we understand optimal development across the life span (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999; Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001)

The findings of this ever-growing body of research on positive development at all stages of the life span have not only presented a more encouraging view of human development where the headlines had too often focused on deficiencies and personal problems (or “crises”; Erikson, 1968), but they also have demonstrated the value of drawing attention to personal strengths as a way to prevent such problems and to provide protection when life crises do occur. For example, Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992) have proposed a social-development model through which children’s and adolescents’ increased opportunities for involvement, social skills, and reinforcement from important others (such as parents) can lead to social bonding which acts as a buffer against drug and alcohol use. Other scholars of youth development such as Peter Benson, Peter Scales, and their colleagues at the Search Institute have demonstrated that the presence of certain developmental strengths, or “developmental assets,” during adolescence is associated with a decrease in problem behaviors such as depression, suicidal thoughts, violence, and drug and alcohol abuse (Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Drake, & Blyth, 1998; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; for a review, see Benson, 2007). Similarly, in older adult populations the presence of certain developmental strengths, such as a sense of purpose in life, is predictive of lower depression and greater physical health (Pinquart, 2002); similarly, greater wisdom has been shown to be related to an increased ability to exercise self-restraint when tempted to engage in one’s vices (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999).

Together, the combination of a developmental perspective (see Overton, 2006) with a strengths-based approach (see Damon, 2004) brings us closer to an understanding of what it means to “thrive.” Such knowledge may have vital implications for, among other things, the education system, youth development programs, parenting practices, elder care, human longevity, personal fulfillment across the life span, and even the stability of civil society (Lerner,

2004). We now turn to the current definition of thriving and an explication of a set of principles we have distilled from the literature which are core to the construct. First, we will offer a brief history of the theorizing around and conceptualizations of thriving leading up to the current definition and set of principles.

DEFINITION AND PRINCIPLES OF THRIVING

Brief History of the Conceptualization of Thriving

Generally speaking, researchers in the positive youth development (PYD) tradition agree that thriving refers to, broadly speaking, the optimal development of adolescents; however, disagreement and conceptual confusion about what constitutes “optimal” development has pervaded the literature. Indeed, it has proven difficult to keep pace with this moving conceptual target, let alone the specific contextual-temporal factors which make thriving appear different for different people across time and place. While it is promising that the notion of “thriving” has received serious attention by scholars, and recent work has advanced both the theory and measurement of the construct (e.g., Benson & Scales, 2009; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007), it is time for consensus—the current review of this literature along with the definition and principles advanced herein are intended to serve that end. In the present section, we will identify and explore some of the more prominent conceptualizations of thriving in the PYD literature, which have formed the foundation for the current definition.

Since Benson (1990) first used the term “thriving” to refer to a set of positive “vital signs” in adolescence (e.g., academic success, caring for others and their communities, the affirmation of cultural and ethnic diversity, commitment to healthy lifestyles; see Benson & Scales, 2009), scholars of PYD have referred to “thriving” in a variety of ways, including as the process of positive development, successful regulation of one’s development, a variety of

outcomes of positive development, a variety of behaviors thought to be reflective of this process, an individual orientation toward positive development, and/or some combination of the above (Scales et al., 2000; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Dowling, Steinunn, Anderson, von Eye, & Lerner, 2003; King, Dowling, et al., 2005; Theokas et al., 2005; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007; Jellicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007; Benson & Scales, 2009). Further, thriving has at different times been operationalized by many different “indicators,” ranging from one’s social competencies (such as compassion and connection) to one’s engagement in discrete behaviors (such as attending church and volunteering). There has been a decided lack of consistency in the sets of indicators different researchers employ; for example, sometimes religion and/or spirituality are considered indicators of thriving (e.g., Dowling, Gestsdottir, Anderson, von Eye, Almerigi, & Lerner, 2004; King & Benson, 2005), sometimes they are not (e.g., Lerner, Phelps, Alberts, Forman, & Christiansen, 2007). If this brief overview is any indication, the confusion in the literature over what thriving is, not to mention what it includes and how to measure it, is apparent (see Benson & Scales, 2009, for a similar perspective).

While the first mention of thriving in the empirical PYD literature can be found in Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth (1998), the first study in the PYD tradition to operationalize thriving was performed by Scales et al. (2000). These authors constructed a composite measure of what they called “thriving outcomes” from an existing assessment tool known as the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (PSL-AB) survey, which included self-reports of engagement in the following behaviors and individual characteristics: (a) school success, (b) leadership, (c) helping others, (d) maintenance of physical health, (e) delay of gratification, (f) valuing diversity, and (g) overcoming adversity. Each of these behaviors was measured by one item; these items were then combined to create a “thriving index” (which,

besides the limitations of one-item subscales and the post-hoc nature of its construction, suffered from low internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha below .50). The authors chose these outcomes to represent "thriving" because, in their review of the literature on adolescent development, they found these categories to be "generally related to other positive outcomes" and, as a group, "collectively reflect some of the developmental tasks of adolescence" (p. 28). Scales et al. (2000) employed primarily cross-sectional, correlational analyses to explore the relations between these seven thriving outcomes and the Search Institute's well-established model of 40 Developmental Assets, which present a set of individual and environmental building blocks of positive development (Benson, 1997; additional review of the 40 Developmental Assets model can be found later in this chapter). The authors found that the presence of four of the eight theoretical groupings of developmental assets (planning and decision making, time in youth programs, cultural competence, and self-esteem) predicted higher scores on their measure of thriving; the results for the other groupings of assets were mixed as a function of race and in their magnitude. While the authors' efforts to operationalize thriving represent an important early step in the scientific study of the construct, their work reflects the growing pains of an emerging field of inquiry. For example, it is unclear whether developmental assets were considered by these authors to be necessary inputs for one optimally develop, whether they are themselves indicators of the thriving process, or perhaps instead whether thriving is actually defined by the presence of these assets. It is also unclear whether thriving is a cause or a consequence, or both, in the short and long term. As such, this study might be viewed more symbolically as a success in the direction of putting an early theory of thriving to the empirical test, and in laying the groundwork for future empirical work in the field.

Though suffering from the same limitations regarding their operationalization of thriving, Theokas et al. (2005) extended Scales et al.'s (2000) investigation through an exploration of the factor structure of the 40 Developmental Assets and these factors' relations with thriving behaviors. Following an exploratory factor analysis of the assets, the authors employed multivariate analyses to uncover relations among two second-order factors of "individual assets" (such as personal values and social consciousness) and "ecological assets" (such as family support and adult mentorship), and thriving behaviors. These factors, both by themselves and in combination, accounted for unique variance in the prediction of thriving behaviors. Specifically, they found that, on average, the more overall assets an individual has, the more thriving behaviors they report engaging in, and that those high in either individual or ecological assets are more likely to report greater thriving, regardless of the number of assets in the other factor. These findings support the notion that a combination of positive individual and contextual attributes is conducive to positive development, a notion to which we will return later in the chapter in a discussion of relational developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2006; Lerner & Overton, 2008; Overton, 2006).

Benson and Saito's (2001) report on the scientific foundations for youth development further fleshed out Benson and his colleagues' thinking on thriving. These authors defined thriving outcomes as positive developmental outcomes that are opposite of high-risk unhealthy behaviors, including both short-term outcomes (through adolescence) and long-term outcomes (into adulthood). Their indicators of youth thriving included school success, affirmation of diversity, and positive nutrition, while adult thriving outcomes included work effectiveness, parenting effectiveness, and civic engagement. More recently, Benson and Scales (2009; Benson,

2008) have sharpened their conceptualization of thriving as having three “key interconnected parts,” which suggest that thriving:

1. Represents a dynamic and bi-directional relational interplay over time of a young person intrinsically animated and energized by discovering his/her specialness, and the developmental contexts (people, places) that know, affirm, celebrate, encourage and guide its expression [see Figure 1];
2. Involves ‘stability’ or ‘balance’ of movement toward something; that is, thriving is a process of experiencing a balance between continuity and discontinuity of development over time that is optimal for a given individual’s fused relations with her or his contexts; and
3. Reflects both where a young person is currently in their journey to idealized personhood, and whether they are on the kind of path to get there that could rightly be called one of exemplary adaptive development regulations (Benson & Scales, 2009, p. 11).

 INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The authors importantly note that they “prefer to describe a young person at any point in time as more or less thriving *oriented*, rather than as thriving or not” (p. 12). This reflects (and has helped inform) the current view that there exists a distinction between the thriving process and thriving as a descriptor of an individual person at a give point in time, a point to which we will return shortly.

Beyond offering their conceptualization of thriving, Benson and Scales (2009) further present a new measurement tool for assessing thriving. Revealing its theoretical underpinnings, the authors have constructed this tool to measure a profile of thriving youth composed of four groupings of thriving indicators: (1) the young person, (2) the young person’s developmental contexts, (3) the young person’s active role in shaping contexts, and (4) developmental contexts’ active role in shaping the young person. These must be considered in unison in order to obtain a complete picture of the thriving process and one’s thriving orientation. Among them, the authors propose an indicator of thriving missing from previous conceptualizations: the development of a “spark.” They refer to the thriving process as “animated by a passion for, and the exercise of action to nurture, a self-identified interest, skill, or capacity. . . . the pursuit and exercise [of which] is done for its own sake. . . . the motivation is intrinsic, not extrinsic” (p. 13). Adding to this, Benson (2008) suggests thriving may be thought of as “the dynamic interplay of a young person animated and energized by discovering his or her specialness, and the developmental contexts (people, places) that know, affirm, celebrate, encourage, and guide its expression” (p. 174).

 INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As the authors note, this new measure still requires further validation and confirmation of its factor structure; furthermore, their inclusion of the “spark” among their indicators invites both broad discussion and empirical testing to better understand the degree to which it is a component, predictor, and/or outcome of thriving. Nonetheless, Benson and Scales’ (2009) new

conceptualization and measurement tool represent an important advance in thriving research and will no doubt move the field forward.

The term “thriving” as an optimal developmental construct has received attention from other scholars of youth development as well. Along with a number of other terms related to positive youth development, “thriving” was one of the main foci in King, Shultz, et al.’s (2005) evaluation of the adolescent development literature. Their comprehensive scan of the titles and abstracts of nearly 1200 articles from prominent developmental journals published between 1991 and 2003 revealed that the term "thriving" only showed up once. The authors concluded that “there exists a wide disparity between what theory and practice suggest is the importance of the PYD perspective and what researchers... indicate through their actions” (p. 223). Pam King and her colleagues (King, Dowling, et al., 2005) further sought to determine whether their scholarly definition of thriving as an optimal developmental construct was similar to everyday conceptions of thriving. The authors spoke with both research investigators in the field and practitioners of youth development, along with parents, and youth about their understanding of the meaning of the term “thriving.” Results suggest that while thriving was conceived of by community members and practitioners of positive youth development in much the same way as it is by scientists in this field, there nonetheless exists little consistency in the specific terminology used to describe thriving, and there remains a general lack of agreement on a set of indicators. Taken together, this work further highlights the need for a common understanding of (and usage of the term) thriving.

Rich Lerner and his colleagues’ have also contributed significantly to the study of thriving and optimal development, drawing (as did Benson and his colleagues, and King and her colleagues) on relational developmental systems theory and the concept of adaptive

developmental regulation (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 2006; Lerner & Overton, 2008). From this perspective, to understand the concept of thriving one must first understand the tenets of relational developmental systems theory. Damon and Lerner (2008) describe the defining features of this theory, as summarized below:

1) Relational developmental systems theory espouses a synthetic and integrated approach to understanding development, which involve the integration of all levels of organization from biological and physiological through the cultural and historical.

2) Developmental regulation involves mutually influential individual \longleftrightarrow context relations among all levels of the developmental system.

3) The integration of actions of the individual on the context and of the multiple levels of the context on the individual (individual \longleftrightarrow context) constitutes the fundamental unit of analysis in the study of the basic process of human development.

4) The relational developmental system is characterized by the potential for systematic change, or plasticity, which at the individual level may vary in its trajectory across time and place and its magnitude across the life span and history.

5) The integrated levels of organization within the relational developmental system will result in individual and contextual differences in plasticity, which makes the study of diversity essential to understanding human development. (Relative plasticity thus implies that there is no “ideal” developmental pathway that applies to all people; Ford & Lerner, 1992.)

Following from these assumptions, the development of an individual cannot be fully understood in isolation; one must take into account his or her relation to the many levels of systems or ecologies in which their development is embedded. Integral to development, and foundational to the idea of relative plasticity, is the idea advanced by Lerner and his colleagues

of temporal embeddedness (Lerner, 2002; Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003), which acknowledges that the individual's potential for change in person-context relations exists across situations and throughout the life span.

These notions are closely associated with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which suggests development may be viewed as a function of the reciprocal interactions between individuals and the many environments and systems in which they interact. Bronfenbrenner emphasized the significance of bidirectional relational interaction, arguing that to understand an individual's development one must examine how the individual influences his or her many ecological systems and how each of these systems impact the individual. This dynamic process between the person and context is further characteristic of Elder's (1998) lifespan theory, Cicchetti and Lynch's (1995) ecological-transactional model of development, Overton's (2006) relational embodied action theory, and Magnusson's (1988; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998; Magnusson & Mahoney, 2003) holistic-interactionistic framework. Indeed, Magnusson and Mahoney (2003) suggest that any "definition of positive development cannot be made with reference to an isolated individual; it must be formulated with reference to the characteristics features, resources, and restrictions of the individual considered and the social, cultural, psychical, and historical contexts in which he or she is embedded" (p. 230).

The relational developmental systems theory notion of relative plasticity further stresses that across the lifespan, development involves the integration of changing relations among the multiple levels of organization that comprise the ecology of human life (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, 2002; Overton, 2006), and thus that all humans have the potential for systematic change in structure and/or function at any age (Lerner, 1984, 2002; Baltes, 1997; Thelen & Smith, 1998). Relational developmental systems theory also integrates action theory (Brandstädter,

1984, 2006), which holds that humans are active producers of their own development through these individual \leftrightarrow context relations. Lerner, Dowling, and Anderson (2003) offer a succinct summary statement of relational developmental systems theory, suggesting that “changes across the life span are seen as propelled by the dynamic relations between individuals and the multiple levels of the ecology of human development, all changing interdependently across time” (p. 675).

Taking together these notions of relationism and integration, bidirectionality, active production of one’s own development, and relative plasticity, relational developmental systems theory suggests that human development can be strengthened through what has been termed “adaptive developmental regulation” (Lerner, 2004). Reflecting the fundamentals of relational developmental systems theory, adaptive developmental regulation refers to engagement in mutually beneficial interrelations between an individual and the multiple ecologies in which he or she is embedded, maintaining and perpetuating healthy, positive functioning for all facets of these relations.

In their discussion of thriving, Lerner et al. (2003) focus much of their attention on their notion of adaptive developmental regulation, or the ability for a young person to effectively gather resources and shape the environment to meet personal goals. These authors imply that developmental regulation is in essence the sum total of thriving behavior. The authors argue that “adaptive regulation of person-context relations constitutes the basic process of ontogenetic change,” and have “conceptualized the idealized version of this ontogenetic change process as thriving” (p. 175).

Reflecting his principle of temporal embeddedness, Lerner (2004) argues that what behaviors constitute thriving at one time and in one context may look quite different at another

time. As a result, he suggests that a theory of thriving should first clarify what effective developmental regulation entails in a given time and place; however, he believes there exists a set of thriving indicators that are temporally and contextually standard. All six of his theoretical categories start with the letter “C”: confidence, competence, character, compassion, connection, and contribution. Thus, according to this perspective, thriving is the idealized ontogenetic process of developmental regulation, and occurs when persons have the first five “Cs.” The developmental endpoint of thriving in adolescence is an adulthood status marked by the sixth “C,” contribution. Thus, a person could be said to be thriving when “he or she is involved across time in such healthy, positive relations with his or her community and on the path to what Csikszentmihalyi and Rathhunde (1998) called ‘idealized personhood,’ and adult status marked by making culturally valued contributions to self, others, and institutions” (Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003, p. 172).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Taking these assertions together, Lerner and his colleagues conceptualize thriving as a marker of healthy and successful developmental regulation in adolescence, which leads to healthy and contributing adulthood. Furthermore, Lerner (2004, Lerner et al., 2000) has linked this conceptualization of thriving to the notions of liberty and the advancement of the common good, suggesting that thriving “is a developmental concept that denotes a healthy change process linking a youth with an adulthood status enabling society to be populated by healthy individuals oriented to integratively serve self and civil society.” (p. 22; Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002).

Current Definition of Thriving

While there are many points of overlap between these conceptualizations of thriving, for the field to move forward it is essential to have a common understanding and usage of the term. Based on our review of the literature, we propose the following as an integrative (yet succinct) definition of thriving:

Thriving refers to a dynamic and purposeful process of individual \longleftrightarrow context interactions over time, through which the person and his/her environment are mutually enhanced.

Most of the aspects of this definition follow directly from relational developmental systems theory and incorporate the notion of adaptive developmental regulation. *Dynamic* draws directly on these theories, particularly invoking the idea of relative plasticity (that human beings are constantly developing over time, and both across and within multiple ecologies), and thus must adaptively self-regulate as they grow and encounter new situations, and select, pursue, and adjust their life goals (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; Lerner, 1984; Thelen & Smith, 1998; Baltes, 1997). By *purposeful*, we are suggesting there is intentionality to the thriving process, which reflects Brandstädter's (1984) notion that humans are active producers of their own development. In particular, thriving entails goal-setting and -striving in accordance with one's individual talents and unique skills (with the individual's understanding and consideration of how these talents and skills might uniquely equip him or her to contribute to the common good), and from the pursuit of which one derives some degree of meaning. Of course, not every interaction will constitute an explicit step in the pursuit of one's life goals, but over time the thriving process ought to include many interactions that do. The relational *individual \longleftrightarrow context interactions* component follows directly from Lerner's and Overton's (and their

colleagues') relational developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2006; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner & Overton, 2008), suggesting that people and their environments interact with and influence each other throughout development. The final component of the definition which highlights *mutual enhancement* implies that these interactions are beneficial for both the context (i.e., the individual contributes to his or her surroundings) and the individual (i.e., the environment in which one is embedded has a positive influence on one's development). Brandstädter's (1984) action theory also applies to this component, in that individuals may actively choose environments which are more conducive to their positive development.

Five Core Principles of Thriving

The fundamental components of thriving may best be understood through a set of core principles. As with the definition of thriving, these principles are largely derived from and reflect the defining features of relational developmental systems theory, and are meant to represent an amalgamation of the essential components of the existing theories of thriving. Further, they are meant to be applicable to the entire life span, encompassing the processes and individual capacities that are necessary to thrive at any age—in this way, these principles were designed to go beyond the focus on adolescent development as has been the case in the thriving literature to date. Indeed, positive development certainly does not occur only in youth; in one form or another, it happens (and thus needs to be understood) at every life stage. The five core principles of thriving are:

- 1) Thriving is an essentially *developmental* construct, which entails a general orientation toward and, over time, the realization of relatively stable movement along an upward (though perhaps non-linear) life trajectory.

2) Thriving focuses on aspects of development beyond merely the absence of the negative, and beyond mere competence or simple achievement of developmental tasks—in this way, we might think of thriving as a *theory of optimal development* (not just *adequate* development).

3) Thriving refers to the functioning of the *integrated, whole person across all life domains*; thus, the term implies personal balance, such that one is not considered to be thriving if he or she is functioning and developing positively in one aspect or area of his or her life but having serious developmental problems in others.

4) Thriving recognizes the multidirectional nature of relations between person and context, through which both *the individual and his or her contexts are mutually enhanced*. This notion of mutual enhancement implies a moral component of thriving—when thriving individuals act on (thus help create) their environments, they seek to in some way contribute to others and/or the multiple ecologies in which they are embedded.

5) Thriving entails the *engagement of one's unique talents, interests, and/or aspirations*. In this lies the assumption of one's self-awareness of his or her uniquenesses, and the opportunities to purposefully manifest them. Through such engagement, one might be thought of as actively working towards fulfilling his or her full potential.

These principles of thriving are intended to function as general rules of thumb; under their umbrella, at the person level, one can expect to find more specific psychosocial and behavioral *indicators* of thriving, such as future orientation; optimism; openness to experience; the ability to adapt to new situations and regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and actions; resilience in the face of adversity; and a sense of meaning and purpose in one's actions and decisions. The quest for a comprehensive list of individual indicators and capacities of thriving is

ongoing—we will review some of these efforts later in the chapter. It should also be noted that these principles of thriving may apply not only to individuals, but to families, communities, and societies as well. An ecological setting can develop positively just as can an individual; a community may engage in mutually enhancing relationships with both individuals and other communities, and in turn facilitate their thriving (see Lerner & Benson, 2003).

Thriving: Process vs. Orientation

An analysis of the literature suggests that the term “thriving” has commonly taken on both the forms of intransitive verb (“The young boy is clearly thriving as he moves forward on a path to a hopeful future”), and attributive adjective (“The thriving young girl is involved in a variety of volunteering activities”). Unfortunately, this distinction has not been clearly elucidated, which may lead to some conceptual confusion. In its verb form, “thriving” refers to a process, namely that of actual ongoing positive development—the current definition of thriving stems from this understanding. Following from this process-oriented notion of thriving, the adjectival use of the term thriving refers to an *orientation toward life* that reflects the tenets of the thriving process (see also Benson & Scales, 2009). This “thriving orientation” is marked by individual characteristics such as (but not limited to): the maintenance of personal balance (i.e., one devotes attention to all facets of their well-being and domains of their lives), a sense of purpose and meaning (which is often derived from the purposeful pursuit of one’s life goals and positive values), and an openness and adaptiveness to experience (which is integral to adaptive developmental regulation). Further essential to the notion of a thriving orientation is that one knows, acts upon, and finds resources that foster one’s talents, interests, and aspirations (or “sparks”; Benson, 2008) and through which one contributes to the common good.

To be clear, thriving is understood as a developmental process, which may be *characterized* by the orientation toward life as described above. Put another way, thriving is an active process (verb) which implies actual, observable growth, marked by successful and mutually beneficial engagement with others and one's multiple levels of ecologies, and forward motion along a developmental trajectory pointed in the direction of a hopeful and meaningful future and the pursuit of one's purpose(s) in life. A thriving orientation, which provides a descriptive status (adjective), suggests a point-in-time assessment of the developmental direction in which one is pointed (i.e., toward a hopeful, positive future), as well as capacities of the person which might suggest positive growth (see also Benson & Scales, 2009). This emphasis on the developmental nature of thriving suggests that the appearance of well-being (or its lack) at a given point in time may not provide the necessary information upon which to judge whether a person is optimally developing. Thus a thriving orientation does not merely constitute point-in-time mental health or happiness but must also consider one's developmental trajectory. In this sense, there may be some indicators of both current well-being and a thriving orientation. For example, while one's level of positive affect at a given point in time is a clear indicator of subjective well-being (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), it may not provide much information as to whether that individual will be experiencing positive affect at any given time in the future, or develop in a positive manner. In contrast, having a sense of purpose in life has also been considered a hallmark of well-being (e.g., Ryff, 1989), but at the same time the goal-directed and future-oriented aspects of having a purpose reflect an increased prospect of positive development (see Damon, 2008).

As further evidence, Mahoney and Bergman (2002) point out that developmental studies of children in high-risk environments (such as low SES, high crime neighborhoods) have

revealed the unexpected prevalence of a combination of behaviors that may at the same time appear to indicate both negative *and* positive development, such as poor academic achievement coupled with high peer acceptance (popularity) and avowed happiness (e.g., Luthar, 1999). According to these authors, given the disadvantaged background of these children, this combination may actually be viewed positively by others under similar circumstances; but the long-term educational and job prospects for these low achieving, high popularity kids may be less-than-promising. In this case, apparent high current well-being may mask sub-optimal future prospects. Conversely, apparent low well-being in times of stress may reflect a temporary dip in one's sense of well-being, though that person may emerge even better equipped to deal with stress once the difficult situation is resolved (a.k.a., the "steeling effect"; Rutter, 1985; Garmezy, 1986). Thus, any person may at a given time be thriving in the developmental sense while struggling from a well-being perspective.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED TO THRIVING THROUGHOUT THE LIFE SPAN

With the definition and these principles of thriving laid out, we turn to a review of the research literature that has addressed the construct of thriving and other closely related concepts at each stage of life, from infancy to the late mature years. In this review, we will incorporate both the developmental and social psychological literatures on thriving as a theory of optimal development and functioning, as well as the broader social and medical science literature that has addressed other conceptualizations which have incorporated the term "thriving" in some way. To underline the breadth of related research, the review will include understandings of thriving from perspectives that differ from our own; in these cases, we will highlight important distinctions. To date, no conceptualization of thriving or positive development has taken a full life-span

perspective from infancy to late adulthood; however, the principles of thriving we have outlined underlie many related constructs used throughout the life span. As a consequence, this section will be organized by life stage, starting in infancy and ending in late adulthood.

Usage of the Term “Thriving” in Infancy

As previously noted, historically the first scientific use of the term “thriving” occurred in the pediatric medical field. Because the term “thrive” in this conceptualization is referred to only in terms of its absence, this usage runs counter to the positive perspective espoused in the current chapter. Nevertheless, findings from this research tradition are informative for a life-span account of thriving.

Since the time of Holt’s (1897) influential article in *The Diseases of Infancy and Childhood*, “Failure to thrive” syndrome (FTT) had been used broadly in the pediatric medical literature to describe inadequate infant growth and development. The *Gale Encyclopedia of Childhood and Adolescence* indicates that “failure to thrive occurs when an infant, toddler, or child fails to grow at a normal rate, either due to organic or environmental causes” (Kagan & Gall, 1998). The APGAR Score method (Apgar, 1953) and Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Bayley, 1969) are among the two more commonly used tools for assessing FTT in infants.

Despite over a century of medical observation, there remains little consensus on a specific definition of FTT, and a general lack of uniformity of indices and criteria for abnormality (Wilcox, Nieburg, & Miller, 1989). Although Olsen (2006) has asserted that “agreement exists as to defining failure to thrive solely by anthropometrical indicators” (p. 5), with weight gain as the preferred choice of indicator (and weight-to-length ratio as an additional option), much of the literature suggests that the definition should also include criteria that address psychological capacities (Schwartz, 2000). Indeed, several studies have explored infant

FTT in terms of impairments in intellectual functioning, some showing links between infant FTT and cognitive performance early in life. For example, Singer and Fagan (1984) found that deficits in performance at 20 months on the Bayley Mental Scale of Infant Development predict deficits in performance at three years on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.

Failure to thrive in infancy has been shown to have implications for physical functioning later in life, though the long-term consequences of infant FTT on cognitive performance are less clear. In their review of the infant FTT literature, Boddy, Skuse, and Andrews (2000) found that “there is consistent evidence that infant growth failure [FTT] has a long-term impact on physical development” (p. 1004). For example, Drewett, Corbett, and Wright (1999) found that children who failed to thrive in the first eighteen months had lower weights, body mass indexes, and head circumferences at ages 7-9 when compared to a matched sample. Practitioners generally suggest that early diagnosis of and interventions regarding FTT are important for preventing malnutrition and negative developmental consequences (Krugman & Dubowitz, 2003). In contrast to the physical outcomes, Drewett, Corbett, and Wright (1999) found no statistical difference in cognitive functioning between 7-9 year olds who had FTT as infants and matched samples. Similarly, the results of Boddy, Skuse, and Andrews’s (2000) follow-up study of 6-year-old children who were diagnosed as FTT in the first year of life “provided limited evidence that infant growth faltering had a long-term negative impact on cognitive development” (p. 1012).

FTT has traditionally been divided into organic (biological) FTT and non-organic (environmental) FTT. However, the causes of FTT can be traced to both biological and environmental factors (Rosenn, Loeb, & Jura, 1980; Kagan & Gall, 1998). Among others, Wright, Parkinson, and Drewett (2006) found that parental and other environmental factors (especially maternal handling of the feeding dynamic) along with intrinsic characteristics of the

child are important determinants of FTT. Indeed, many now believe that the organic/nonorganic distinction is not practical, due to the prevalence of mixed etiologies (Krugman & Dubowitz, 2003).

Though the vast majority of developmental research in infancy has focused on preventing and remediating deficits, some have attended to the positive aspects of infant development. For example, Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth (1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), and Sroufe (1979; Sroufe & Waters, 1977), among others, conducted seminal research on secure attachment between infant and mother (as well as infant and father), which has been suggested to set the stage for the development of certain “character strengths” later in life (see Park, 2004) and are likely to undergird the relational aspects of thriving. Erikson (1968) explored the role of the positive virtue of trust at the very early stages of psychosocial development. Tronick (1989) investigated positive exchanges between infant and adult and the positive emotions these exchanges elicited, leading him to hypothesize that “positive development may be associated with the experience of coordinated interactions characterized by frequent reparations of interactive errors and the transformation of negative affect into positive affect” (p.112).

Despite the lack of a broad theory of positive development in infancy, this literature may form the foundation for an understanding of developmental building blocks of thriving in these formative years of life. The capacity for healthy attachment and trust, empathy, and positive interactions with one’s environment is likely integral toward developing a thriving orientation in childhood and adolescence. It is also likely that the physiological focus of the FTT perspective is equally vital toward understanding the early development of the cognitive capacities which underlie the psychological, social and emotional components related to thriving. It will be

important for future research to bridge this gap in our understanding of how such positive development in infancy might lead to positive development in childhood, and beyond.

Concepts Related to Thriving and Positive Development in Childhood

The term “thriving” has not been widely used in developmental research focusing on the childhood years, though there has been some scholarly work at this life stage that has embraced the strengths-based perspective. For the most part, the progression through stages of cognitive and psychosocial development, the achievement of age-appropriate developmental tasks, and the development of competence have dominated the child development literature on various aspects of optimal development in this life period. Because such accounts have helped form the developmental foundation for theorizing on thriving and positive development through the life span, we now briefly review some of the most prominent of these theories.

Many of the classic theories of development focused extensively on infancy, childhood, and adolescence, including Werner’s (1948), broad organismic developmental theory, Piaget’s (1952) cognitive developmental theory, Havighurst’s (1948) theory of developmental tasks, Bowlby’s (1958, 1969) attachment theory, and, to a lesser degree, Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial stages. In Piaget’s (1952) theory of cognitive development, young people develop a system of cognitive capacities through four sequential stages (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational). These cognitive processes are the means through which developing persons understand and reason about their world. According to this theory, at each point in the child’s development there is a tension between current understanding and novel information that challenges this understanding. Any action in the world entails both ‘assimilation’—interpreting new information through the lens of current thought patterns or “schemes”—and ‘accommodation’—change in the scheme based on the novelty of the

information. It is this imbalance or lack of ‘equilibrium’ between assimilation and accommodation that drives cognitive development. With the achievement of equilibrium at any given level (e.g., sensorimotor) the system advances to a new higher or more “adapted” level of thought and reasoning. Thus, the telos of cognitive development is represented by a movement towards increasingly higher levels of ‘adaptation,’ where ‘adaptation’ itself is defined as any behavior that increases the probability of the survival of the child, and ‘higher levels of adaptation’ are defined by increased flexibility, mobility, and generalizability of thought and reasoning. This perspective is very much in the spirit of relational developmental systems, and (as evinced by the preponderance of the term “adapt” throughout this chapter) provides a building block for any theory of thriving.

Werner (1948; Werner & Kaplan, 1963) focused on cognitive and emotional features of development, and the processes of differentiation and reintegration that underlie this development. Werner’s “orthogenetic principle,” formulates these processes into an explanatory principle stating that “whenever development occurs, it proceeds from a state of relative globality and lack of differentiation to a state of increasing differentiation, articulation, and hierarchic integration” (p. 126). From this principle follows the idea that as humans develop, they become less bound to the stimuli of their concrete immediate environments and more open to goal-setting, planning, motivation and self-regulation, all of which have direct bearing on the thriving process (see Mascolo & Fischer, this volume; Mueller & Racine, this volume for extended discussions of similar ideas).

Havighurst’s (1948) theory of developmental tasks understands human development as involving a series of problems and challenges that naturally emerge at different points in the life course. These developmental tasks have their sources in physical and biological development,

one's personal value system, and social expectations. Childhood in particular presents a set of such tasks, such as learning to play and share with other children, developing self-knowledge and a moral conscience, and understanding social roles, which are likely to lay the foundation for many of the capacities of thriving. Indeed, according to Havighurst (1973) these tasks "give direction, force, and substance" to one's life and one's development over the life course (p. 11).

Erikson's (1968) developmental theory of psychosocial stages primarily concerns the development of "ego identity" across the lifespan, which he conceptualized as the sense of self that individuals develop and come to understand primarily through social interaction. Erikson's eight stages each involves the confrontation and resolution of a "crisis," which is conceptually similar the notion of a developmental task. Successful progression through these stages is thought to develop in a young person the capacities of trust, autonomy, social skills, confidence, competence, pride, and self-esteem. Such development at this stage may lay the foundation for many of the psychosocial capacities implicit in the principles of thriving.

Bowlby's (1958, 1969) attachment theory, like Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, was constructed within a relational metatheoretical context (see Overton, 2006) and was influenced by the work of Piaget and Werner. Bowlby believed primary relationships (e.g., the attachment bond formed between mother and child) were the principle source of cognitive, social, and emotional development. He, along with his colleague Mary Ainsworth (e.g., Ainsworth, 1969), emphasized the role of attachment figures (especially parents) in laying the early groundwork for positive social relations throughout life, which is in turn likely foundational to adaptive developmental regulation (see also Sroufe, 1979; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

Although Piaget, Werner, Havighurst's Erikson, and Bowlby would all accept the notions of holism, relational bidirectionality, epigenesis, and dynamically progressive change that are at the conceptual core of thriving, each fails to consider development beyond mere competence. Moreover, none of them directly address young people's orientation toward and optimism about the future, their self-exploration and engagement of their unique talents and aspirations, or their capacity and desire to positively affect others and benefit their surrounding environments.

Contemporary work on the development of competence has its roots in these early theories of development, to which Havighurst's (1948) notion of developmental tasks is particularly relevant. Masten, Coatsworth, Neeman, Gest, Tellegen, & Garmezy (1995) define competence as "a pattern of effective performance in the environment, evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in the context of [a given point in history]" (p. 1636). Building off the work of Havighurst (1972) and clearly integrating some of the tenets of relational developmental systems theory, Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, and Tellegen (2004) suggest these "salient developmental tasks" represent "the benchmarks of adaptation that are specific to a developmental period and are contextualized by prevailing sociocultural and historically embedded expectations" (p. 123).

Masten and Obradovic (2006) have more recently suggested a refinement of developmental tasks theory, enumerating a set of new perspectives that have evolved since Havighurst, including (among others) that "adaptation is multidimensional and developmental in nature," "success in salient tasks of particular developmental periods forecast success in future age-salient tasks, even in new domains," "success or failure in multiple developmental task domains can have cascading consequences that lead to problems in other domains of adaptation, both internal and external," and "interventions to promote success in these tasks have preventive

effects on behavioral and emotional problems” (p. 15). The first of these propositions is very Piagetian in that it explicitly acknowledges the multidimensionality of adaptation; this is due in large part to the complexity of the multiple ecologies in which one is embedded. The second suggests competence is likely to be relatively stable across time and situations. The third proposition reflects the interconnectedness of individual \longleftrightarrow context relations. And the fourth provides further support for an earlier claim in this chapter, that the presence of the positive (or at least the adequate) often provides protection against the negative.

The net of these perspectives reveals four basic tenets of competence: 1) it entails the organization and coordination of multiple mental and physical processes, 2) there are generally multiple routes to the achievement of adaptive developmental outcomes (a view shared by Piaget), 3) competence involves the complex interplay of individual and ecological processes, and 4) competent “outcomes” are part of ongoing processes and therefore are inherently dynamic rather than static in nature (Masten et al., 1995, p. 1636). Though the authors do not make explicit reference to relational developmental systems theory, their integrative, transactional approach appears to be cut from the same cloth.

Competence has often been studied alongside the related construct of resilience with regards to one’s response to adversity. From this perspective, competence is designated as good adaptation in the relative absence of adversity (at present or in one’s life history) while resilience refers to good adaptation in the presence of such adversity (Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy, & Ramirez, 1999). Though there is still a lack of full consensus in the field, resilience can be more formally defined as “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). It should be noted that resilience is not the same thing as recovery—the latter refers to a trajectory in which normal

functioning temporary suffers (e.g., via depressive symptoms or signs of post-traumatic stress disorder) for some period of time before returning to normal, whereas the former reflects the ability to at least maintain a stable equilibrium, if not demonstrate even improved functioning, in the wake of adversity (Bonanno, 2004). Of course, like competence, the phenomenon of resilience is not limited to the young; however, the research on the development of resilience has focused primarily on children (and, to a certain degree, adolescents), as these life stages represent a formative period for such development.

As noted earlier, a focus on the strengths of young people rather than their deficits took hold in the perspective espoused by a group of researchers investigating resilience in the 1980s and early 1990s. In one of the most well-known of these studies, Garmezy (1983) introduced and explored the notion of the “invulnerable child.” Garmezy found in his longitudinal investigation of children growing up in poverty and other difficult life situations that, despite the adversity, the majority of these kids were able to successfully adapt to their life circumstances, deal with life’s most severe stressors, and overcome very difficult odds. Most of these young people developed into perfectly normal functioning (and some quite high achieving) adults. Similarly, in their cross-cultural study of children in Hawaii and the mainland United States, Werner and Smith (1982) found that most children have the capacity for what they termed *resiliency*, or the personality characteristic that enables many young people to positively develop in the face of adversity. Building off the work of Garmezy and Werner, Benard (1991) suggested that, contrary to the once-popular belief, *every* child possesses the potential to develop resiliency, and claimed that this capacity could be learned by all young people (albeit perhaps to differing degrees; see also Masten, 2001). This more hopeful perspective on youth development provided the underpinnings for the positive youth development approach.

Increasingly, researchers in this field have emphasized the process-like nature of resilience, making a clear distinction from the terms “resiliency” and “resilient child” which are descriptive of a personality attribute. The resilience process consists of two primary components, the challenge (also referred to as the threat, adversity, or risk), and the achievement of adaptive developmental outcomes in the face of that challenge. The challenge may constitute one specific negative life experience, such as one’s parents suffering a divorce, or a constellation of negative life events or conditions across a span of time, such as growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood.

Just as there is a lack of consistency in defining the challenge, there is variation in how “good” developmental outcomes are defined and operationalized, ranging from growth specific to the area affected by the challenge (e.g., strengthened interpersonal relationships with friends amidst a parental divorce) to adjustment across multiple life domains. Some have suggested that the criteria for assessing these outcomes might consider the quality of adjustment to one’s external environment as well as improvement in one’s internal psychological states (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). In this way, contemporary models of resilience have begun to incorporate the transactional-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Masten, 2001).

The resilience process is enhanced in the presence of what are known as “protective factors.” Werner (1995) referred to protective factors as “the mechanisms that moderate (ameliorate) a person’s reaction to a stressful situation or chronic adversity,” and argued for their indispensability to positive adaptation (p. 81). Jessor, van den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, and Turbin (1995) demonstrated that protective factors may act as moderators between risk factors and negative behavior (such as delinquency). Masten (2001) asserts that the absence of protective

factors in youth, such as good parenting and intellectual functioning, may increase the likelihood of a traumatic event having long-term negative effects. Garmezy (1983) outlined three categories of protective factors characteristic of resilience: 1) positive personality dispositions, 2) a supportive family milieu, and 3) an external supportive system outside the family of one's origin.

Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) has brought into this conversation the notion of vulnerability, defined as "the net experience of risk and protective factors that an individual encounters" (Spencer et al., 2006, p. 628). According to Spencer et al. (2006), resilience involves "successful negotiation of exacerbated challenges" and "is not possible without significant challenge [first] being encountered" (p. 628). PVEST addresses resilience and vulnerability in terms of the existence and degree of risk and protective factors present in an individual and his/her environment. Spencer's "Dual-Axis" model attempts to account for these interactions by considering how these factors come together to increase or decrease the likelihood one will behave adaptively when confronted with adversity.

Though again we see similarities between these conceptualizations of competence and resilience, and the current conceptualization of thriving, the differences are also evident. The principles of thriving explicitly note that the construct implies development beyond mere competence (see also Benson & Scales, 2009); and while the notion of resilience by definition refers to functioning beyond what is expected given one's level of risk or challenge and is clearly a strengths-based approach, it is predicated on the existence of the negative in the form of that risk. Although the notion of thriving certainly allows for risk and challenge in one's life—indeed, in the face of adversity the resilience process likely quite closely resembles the thriving process—the current conceptualization of thriving is not yoked to the risk in the same way. According to Ryff and Singer (2003a), it is not necessary for one to experience great adversity at

any point in his or her development in order to live a good life and function optimally in adulthood. From this perspective, resilience is one integral aspect of the larger, more balanced picture of human strengths and adaptive development. One may thrive both in the presence and absence of such risk; within the traditional resilience framework, the optimal developmental trajectory appears to be no greater than simple competence. Beyond these distinctions, neither competence nor resilience integrates the moral component of contribution to the common good inherent in a thriving framework, and one's uniqueness and purposeful pursuits are not particularly salient in these concepts.

Another strand of research in the child development literature, that which addresses moral development, has also helped lay the conceptual groundwork for our understanding of thriving, specifically with regards to the dimension which incorporates mutual enhancement and contribution to the common good. Scholarly investigations of empathy, for example, have demonstrated that children have the capacity to recognize and understand another's feelings from early in life, and that the development of empathy leads to growth in both the moral and social domains (Kagan, 1984; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). Indeed, the presence of a strong moral sense in childhood has been shown to contribute to greater engagement in prosocial behaviors, especially in disadvantaged youth (Hart, Yates, Fegley, & Wilson, 1995). Madsen (1971), Feshbach (1983), and others have further demonstrated that the capacity for such moral awareness and prosocial behavior is universal across cultures, though these dispositions may develop and manifest themselves differently once children have the exposure and the cognitive capacity to understand the belief systems and values particular to their cultures (Damon, 2004) (see Turiel, this volume, for an extended

discussion of moral development domains theory, constructed within a relational developmental systems approach).

Also of great importance to the positive development of children is the development of a moral identity, in which one uses moral ideas to define the self (Damon, 1999). With the development in late childhood of the cognitive capacity to analyze and understand the self and others, moral identity may take shape. One's moral identity becomes evident when he or she moves from simply understanding a general moral precept (such as "people should be kind") to adopting it as a central part of his or her personal identity ("I want to be a kind person"). Not surprisingly, there are individual differences in the degree to which children adopt a sense of moral identity (e.g., Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995); however, the development of a moral identity can be facilitated by encouragement from loved ones and respected others, as well as educational and social interventions such as character education and community service programs (Youniss & Yates, 1997). According to Damon (2004), "acquiring a moral identity is an essential part of [young people's] positive development as future citizens" (p. 23)—it is also essential to better understanding the thriving process.

Thriving and Positive Development in Adolescence

It is at the life stage of adolescence that we find the bulk of the efforts directed toward an understanding of thriving as conceptualized in the current chapter, and more broadly as part of the positive youth development movement. As noted, the strengths-based perspective espoused in the resilience literature helped spur the wave of both research- and practice-focused work that has emerged on risk prevention, asset promotion, and youth development. Yet in itself the research on resilience was limited as a developmental approach to thriving. The notion of "resilience" focuses on the strengths and growth that come about in reaction to adversity, rather

than as a natural part of the human condition. In the words of Damon (2004), “while the positive youth development approach recognizes the existence of adversities and developmental challenges that may affect children in various ways, it resists conceiving of the developmental process mainly as an effort to overcome deficits and risk.... Although the resiliency research put a number of important positive youth attributes squarely on the psychological map, it did not provide a sufficient basis for a universal model of youth development” (p. 15). In the decades since the seminal resilience research emerged, significant efforts have been made to better understand the capacities of young people beyond those geared toward responding to adversity.

Some of the most well-established work on positive youth development related to (but not the same as) thriving began in the early 1990’s at the Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN, under the leadership and direction of Peter Benson. The flagship of the Search Institute’s foundational work in this area surrounded their 40 Developmental Assets framework. Developmental assets refer to “key relationships, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions that help young people limit their engagement in high-risk behaviors, enjoy resilience in the face of adversity, and thrive” (Benson & Scales, 2009). They were originally identified by way of a review of the strengths-based literature that existed at the time of their formation in the 1990s, which primarily constituted the constructs of resilience, competence, and developmental tasks (Scales & Leffert, 2004). These 40 distinct developmental assets are grouped into eight asset categories. Support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time are the four categories that make up the external assets, provided to youth by parents, school, peers, and community. Commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are internal assets that youth develop; they are thought to be

the self-processes that eventually become the guideposts of effective self-regulation (Benson, 2003).

As noted earlier in this chapter, research has consistently shown that these developmental assets are reliable negative predictors of problem behaviors such as risky sex, substance abuse, gambling, etc. (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales et al, 2000), and are positive predictors of academic achievement (Scales et al., 2006). Benson, Scales, Hamilton, and Sesma (2006) refer to the ideas of “vertical pile up” and “horizontal pile up” of assets, which suggest that the more total assets one demonstrates over time, and the more assets one experiences across settings, the better. They also propose that these assets are universally relevant (though they may be experienced or express themselves differently in different contexts and cultures), and that they will be enhanced under certain conditions, and in certain contexts and ecologies. The authors refer to these assets as “dynamically interconnected ‘building blocks’ that, in combination, prevent high risk health behaviors and enhance many forms of developmental success (i.e., thriving)” (p. 906). The connections between developmental assets and thriving will be explored later in this chapter.

In addition to the pioneering work performed by Benson, Scales, and their colleagues at the Search Institute, the field of positive youth development has flourished in large part due to the work of researchers exploring the efficacy of youth development programs themselves, and the ways in which such programs, along with schools, communities, government, etc., can actively help our children and adolescents optimally develop. One of the most comprehensive reviews of youth development programs in the United States was conducted by Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2002). In this review, the authors echo the drum beat of many researchers and practitioners before them who believe youth development programs have benefited greatly from the shift in focus from deficit-centered to risk prevention- and strengths-

based models (Pittman, 1991; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000; Roth et al., 1998; Blum, 1998, 2003; Henderson et al., 1999; Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 2000). In the spirit of the PYD movement and influenced by the relational developmental systems model, Catalano and his colleagues take a holistic approach to understanding youth in the context of these youth development programs, noting the importance of considering each level of individual, family, school, and community factors. They rigorously evaluated twenty-five youth development programs, measuring both positive and negative outcomes across diverse youth, and found that intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies can both prevent the occurrence of problems as well as create a positive developmental pathway. Catalano, Berglund, et al. (2002) suggest a set of common themes of successful youth development programs, including that their standards are clear, consistent and integrated with the messages promoted by the families and in the community; that they strengthen interpersonal bonds with peers, family, and other adults, while also building intrapersonal competencies (social, emotional, and behavioral); and that they expand opportunities for youth across the span of the program and beyond.

While Catalano, Berglund, et al. (2002) focus primarily on the risk-reduction approach as a means toward positive youth development (see also Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002), others have centered on and promote a more explicitly strengths-based focus (e.g., Blum, 1998, 2003; Bumbarger & Greenberg, 2002; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, et al., 2003; Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Durlak, Taylor, Kawashima, Pachan, DuPre, Celio, et al., 2007; Pittman et al., 2000; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, 2003b). One prominent model of the strengths-based approach is known as the "Social and Emotional Learning" process (SEL; Bumbarger & Greenberg, 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004; Durlak & Weissberg,

2005; Durlak et al., 2007). The SEL approach was designed as a comprehensive framework for integrating social and emotional instruction across academic, physical health, prevention and PYD activities. Proponents of this approach logically contend that youth benefit from strong and supportive relationships with teachers, parents, and the community. It espouses five “teachable competencies”: 1) self-awareness, 2) social awareness, 3) self-management, 4) relationship skills, and 5) responsible decision making. Studies have shown the benefits of SEL for students’ academic performance, social competence, emotional regulation, and a reduction in risk behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg & O’Brien, 2004; Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Durlak et al., 2007).

In other investigations of the benefits of youth development programs, some researchers have adopted approaches from the positive youth development research-based literature (Blum, 1998, 2003; Pittman, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a, 2003b; Henderson, Barnard, & Sharp-Light, 1999; Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007). For example, in their expansive review of the literature on youth development programs, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a) draw on Lerner’s “5 C’s” model of positive development suggesting that “youth development programs [should] seek to enhance not only adolescents’ skills, but also their confidence in themselves and their future, their character, and their connections to other people and institutions by creating environments” more amenable to positive youth development (p. 180). Pittman et al. (2000) call for more integrative efforts between research and practice (as they have accomplished in their own work with Child Trends, an independent research group). Edwards et al. (2007) reviewed the PYD and resilience literatures as they apply specifically to at-risk children, and address the ways in which youth development programs and asset-building initiatives, based on the

Developmental Assets model (Benson, 1997) are beneficial to at-risk students, and suggests ways in which asset-building can be directly integrated into schools.

In what may be the most comprehensive review of the positive youth development literature to date, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's national report on youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) covers ground from across a variety of PYD perspectives in what effectively amounts to a guidebook for building, evaluating, and sustaining youth development programs. This report summarized and evaluated the current state of the field of adolescent health and development, with a focus on community programs for youth. Although this report is not centered only on understanding positive youth development, it offers some insights of particular relevance to the current exploration in their chapter entitled "Personal and Social Assets That Promote Well-Being." In their approach, the contributors wisely integrate theory, practical wisdom, and findings from empirical research to arrive at their own definition of optimal positive development—which bears certain resemblance to the current definition of thriving—as "development that is headed along a positive trajectory toward finding a meaningful and productive place in one's cultural milieu" (p. 66). The contributors to this report were clearly of much the same mind regarding positive development as the authors of the current chapter.

Further, the contributors to the Eccles and Gootman (2002) report endeavored to compile a list of indicators of positive development and well-being from across developmental theories in psychology, anthropology, and sociology, integrating empirical findings that incorporated three types of evidence: "(1) evidence that particular characteristics are either positively related concurrently to other indicators of well-being or negatively related concurrently to indicators of problematic development; (2) evidence that particular characteristics predict positive indicators of adult well-being and of a 'successful' transition to normative adult statuses; and (3) evidence

that the experimental manipulation or training of particular characteristics produces changes on other indicators of either current well-being and adequate functioning or a successful transition into adulthood.” (p. 68). Additionally, the committee included insights from practitioners whose experience informed a better understanding of indicators that might be revealed only in practice. Integrating all of these sources and perspectives, the authors presented a comprehensive (though somewhat less-than-parsimonious) list of personal and social assets that facilitate their conceptualization of optimal positive development. They grouped these assets into four categories: social development, psychological and emotional development, intellectual development, and physical development. Examples of social developmental assets included “perceived good relationships and trust with parents, peers, and some other adults” and “commitment to civic engagement;” among the psychological and emotional developmental assets were emotional self-regulation, confidence, prosocial values and purpose in life; intellectual developmental assets included school success and critical thinking skills; and good health habits and “health risk management skills” comprised the assets of physical development (pp. 74-75).

While each of the approaches outlined in this section advance scholarly research and guide practice, there is a notable lack of uniformity in the research approaches, theoretical models, desired outcomes, and program recommendations. As Small and Memmo (2004) point out, the “lack of an integrative conceptual scheme and consistent terminology” (p. 3) hinders our overall understanding of what exactly constitutes positive youth development (cf., Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003b). Moore and Lippman (2005; see also Moore, Lippman, & Brown, 2004) likewise lament the lack of a universally-accepted set of indicators of positive youth development, and offer a set of criteria for positive outcome indicators, including that they: 1)

predict desirable adult outcomes, 2) are intrinsically important, 3) provide age-appropriate measures, 4) are psychometrically rigorous, 5) consider possible moderating and mediating effects, and 6) meaningfully inform practice.

These PYD approaches to adolescent development certainly share much conceptual space with the current theory of thriving. They celebrate the positive approach (while also addressing the reduction of risk behaviors), and focus squarely on development (though all-too-often employ point-in-time assessments). However, they generally do not adopt all of the principles of thriving; relational bidirectionality is often not considered, future orientation and purpose are rarely included as key indicators of positive development, and contribution to the common good is sometimes but not always hailed as a necessary component of PYD programming. There are also methodological shortcomings; longitudinal research is relatively sparse, and unit of analysis is typically a variable of interest (such as increased confidence, or reduced drug use) rather than the whole person. This line of research has helped the field of PYD make tremendous strides in its understanding of many aspects of youth development, especially in ways that inform practice which is particularly laudable. At the same time, even greater strides are in store in this area when the principles of relational developmental systems theory and thriving are integrated more directly into the research agenda.

As noted earlier, the current conceptualization of thriving is borne out of research on this construct from the PYD tradition, and is very much in alignment with this work. While much of this research has already been reviewed earlier in this chapter regarding the early theorizing, underpinnings, and evolving definition of the construct, further work in this tradition has deepened our understanding of thriving. For example, Pam King and her colleagues have extended beyond their earlier conceptual contributions to the literature regarding the use and

understanding of the term “thriving,” (e.g., King, Dowling, et al., 2005; King, Shultz, et al., 2005) and have formulated and empirically tested a set of thriving indicators that mark advances from the relatively simple (and in some ways, problematic) measures employed in early empirical studies of thriving. For example, Shultz, Wagener, and King (2006) explored the relation between an established group of developmental resources (including parent involvement, positive school orientation, adult support, neighborhood resources, and social ties with peers) and a set of thriving indicators that included future orientation, positive values, resourcefulness, fulfillment of potential, religion, happiness, and contribution to the common good. This investigation uncovered a factor structure of thriving including five factors, which they labeled: future orientation, positive values, resourcefulness, fulfillment of potential, and religion. Religion was later dropped from their model when it was shown to weaken the link between the thriving indicators and developmental resources; however, the authors noted, this may have been due to their use of a measure of religiosity, rather than employing a more general consideration of spirituality. Indeed, it is worth noting that the contribution of spirituality to positive development in adolescence has garnered significant attention in recent years (e.g., Dowling et al., 2004; King & Benson, 2005; King & Furrow, 2004) and remains a possible indicator of thriving. Shultz et al.’s (2006) final set of four factors of indicators was found to strongly predict the developmental resources, and provides one of the few examples of the empirical validation of a set of thriving indicators in the literature.

Additionally, Bill Damon’s work on moral development (e.g., 1978, 1990), self-understanding (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1982, 1988), moral exemplarity (Colby & Damon, 1992), character building through school and community programs (e.g., 1995, 1997), work-related adult ethical and prosocial behavior (e.g., Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001; Damon,

2004), positive youth development (e.g., 2004; Damon & Gregory, 2002), and most recently the development of purpose (e.g., Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Damon, 2008) has significantly advanced both the thinking and research agenda related to optimal youth development and thriving. His and his colleagues' contemporary work on the development of purpose reflects the future oriented, prosocial, and motivational aspects inherent in any positive developmental definition of thriving, as denoted in the current definition by inclusion of the term "purposeful." The stability of movement in the direction of one's purpose reflects the stability of upward movement of the thriving process. According to Damon (2008),

"More revealing than any particular behavioral signposts, such as tests passed, prizes won, or popularity gained, is the *direction* and *meaning* of a young person's efforts.... When two crucial conditions apply: (1) forward movement toward a fulfilling purpose, and (2) a structure of social support consistent with that effort, there is every likelihood that the child will thrive" (pp. 37-38).

The focus here is on the idea that an individual is on track, that he or she has forward momentum in life... not necessarily that he or she is always feeling extremely happy or is popular or "succeeding" at some given task at any given point in time. In accordance with relational developmental systems theory, Damon (2008) explicitly notes that one "must be observed over time in order to make this determination" that he or she is thriving (p. 38) (see Nesselroade & Molenaar and McArdle, this volume, for extended discussions of multiple observations). Like Benson and his colleagues, Damon and his colleagues are at present engaged in a multi-year longitudinal research project which addresses and is beginning to sort out the ways in which purpose and thriving are interrelated (e.g., Bundick, Yeager, & Damon, 2008).

While Lerner and his colleagues have significantly advanced the theory of thriving (e.g., Lerner, 2006), they have further been engaged in empirical work seeking to confirm the structure of the “5 Cs” (confidence, competence, character, compassion, connection) model and its relevance to positive youth development and thriving (Dowling et al., 2004; Theokas et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Naudeau, et al., 2006; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007; Lerner et al., 2007). For example, studies by Dowling et al. (2003, 2004) used factor analysis to test the structure and relevance of spirituality and religiosity to the seven thriving outcomes used by Scales et al. (2000). As summarized earlier in the chapter, the authors found that the best fit for the data was one where both spirituality and religiosity are indirectly related to thriving outcomes through a mediating factor, though it is not clear whether either or both of them should be considered indicators of thriving.

As with many of the other major scholars in the field of thriving research, Lerner and his colleagues are engaged in a multi-year longitudinal study investigating youth involved with 4-H Youth Development programs and the presence of indicators of positive youth development (i.e., the 5 Cs), which he suggests represent the thriving process. Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestsdottir, et al. (2005) used the first wave of these 4-H study data to confirm five first order latent factors representing the 5 Cs of positive youth development. Wave two of the 4-H study data confirmed that factor structure (Jelicic et al., 2007), and further found that the presence of positive youth development (thriving) in fifth grade predicts lower levels of risk behaviors (i.e., substance use and delinquent behaviors) and depression, as well as (moderately) increased levels of contribution to the common good (the “6th C” of positive youth development) in sixth grade.

Furthermore, Lerner et al. (2007) found that urban girls exhibit signs of thriving, and provided further confirmation of the developmental hypothesis that presence of the 5 Cs not only predicts thriving behaviors, but also contribution to the common good. Notably, in this study the authors distinguish “thriving” from “well-being” by claiming that well-being is embedded in a time and place (namely, at the time of measurement), while thriving occurs “across time” and signifies being on the path to an idealized personhood. While Lerner et al. (2007) do not explicitly explore the relations between thriving and well-being, they do speculate that when a young person exhibits thriving behavior, when coupled with adult support, negative outcomes and risky behaviors will be diminished.

Here, Lerner et al. (2007) appear to depart from previous thriving research, which has typically explored predictors of thriving (i.e., thriving as the outcome variable; e.g., Scales et al., 2000), in that thriving (operationalized as the presence of the 5 Cs) is used to predict contribution to the common good as the outcome variable of interest (see also Lerner et al., 2005). Empirically, as in all of the research stemming from the 4-H longitudinal study, the 5 Cs were measured using a collection of items from four instruments: the Search Institute’s PSL-AB survey, the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1982), the Peer Support Scale (Armsden & Greenberger, 1987) from the Teen Assessment Project Question Bank (Small & Rodgers, 1995), and the Eisenberg Sympathy Scale (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, Karbon, Smith, & Maszk, 1996). Depression and risk behaviors (which they also incorporated into their outcome variables) were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977) and the PSL-AB, respectively. Also, it is worth noting that because they used open-ended questions in their assessment, Lerner et al. (2007) were able to uncover that some subgroups (such as urban girls) use many other terms for and indicators of their thriving beyond the 5 C’s, leading them to

suggest that further research may be necessary to provide a more robust understanding of thriving and set of thriving indicators.

Tying this contemporary approach to the study of thriving to the life-span development literature, Gestsdottir and Lerner (2007) explored the relation between thriving (again operationalized as the 5 C's) and self-regulation, as conceptualized by Baltes's (1997) SOC model of selection, optimization, and compensation. This approach marks another advance in Lerner and his colleagues' work related to thriving: the hypothesized relation between two well-established models of positive human development from different stages of the life span. Gestsdottir and Lerner (2007) concluded that young adolescents (in 5th and 6th grade) are still learning to self-regulate, but that the SOC approach to development in these years is in fact adaptive as evident in the significant and positive relations between their measures of self-regulation and all five C's. Further, the authors found evidence that the 5 Cs are orthogonal, and that a young person may develop positively in some of the Cs while not in others. This may inform thriving research by suggesting that a young person need not have all the indicators of thriving to be on a path to a hopeful future.

Though the current PYD-inspired conceptualization of thriving has not been broadly investigated beyond adolescence, there is much research related to positive development emerging in the adulthood years. While conceptually distinct from thriving, the concepts of flourishing and character strengths in the domain of positive psychology speak directly to kind of understanding researchers of thriving in adolescence seek, yet from a broad social/personality rather than developmental psychology perspective. These constructs, along with another related (but also distinct) usage of the term "thriving", are reviewed in the following section. We would like to again note that, as with resilience and competence, these phenomena are not restricted to

one phase of life (i.e., the adult years); however, it is the life stage at which the bulk of the research on the topic has been conducted, and thus the life stage at which they are best understood.

Thriving and Positive Development in Adulthood

The term “thriving” shows up in a strand of psychological research which appears to have evolved separately from the pediatric medical research on “Failure to Thrive” as well as the PYD literature on thriving, but has a genealogy which can be traced back to the resilience literature reviewed earlier. In their work studying female adults who have overcome significant adversity (such as divorce, disability, or severe illness), O’Leary and Ickovicks (1995) encountered many who not only fully recovered but appeared to have actually improved psychologically (and perhaps even physically) from where they were before experiencing the trauma. The authors termed this phenomenon “thriving” in the face of adversity.

Within this perspective, Ickovics and Park (1998) define thriving as “the effective mobilization of individual and social resources in response to risk or threat, leading to positive mental or physical outcomes and/or positive social outcomes.... [it is] an adaptive response to challenge [which] represents something more than a return to equilibrium" (p. 122). This conceptualization of thriving is essentially synonymous with the notions of “stress-related growth” and “post-traumatic growth” seen in this same research tradition (e.g., Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1996).

Carver (1998) makes the distinction between resilience and this definition of thriving explicit, noting that the former should be “reserved to denote homeostatic return to a prior condition” (before an adverse event) while thriving refers to “the better-off-afterward experience” (p. 247). Following from the resilience model, he restricts the word “thriving” to

refer to a response to adversity; the term cannot apply to a person who has never faced a significant trauma, threat or risk (even if he or she is developing quite positively). Further, thriving is a particular type of response (“better-off-afterwards”) to a particular type of stimulus (trauma). Carver (1998) categorizes the responses an individual could have to significant life trauma into four groups: succumbing (which entails a long-term loss of normal functioning), survival with impairment (in which one could maintain a functional life, only at a lower level than before the trauma), resilience (return to normal functioning), and thriving (see Figure 3). It follows from this conceptualization that thriving and resilience are mutually exclusive – a person may be said to be thriving or resilient, but not both (at least not in the same domain).

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Some of the empirical research on thriving from this perspective has demonstrated the breadth of the phenomenon, and its relation with other similar psychological characteristics such as mental health. Research employing Tedeschi, Park and Calhoun’s (1996) Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, a measure of growth following a significant adverse life event, has cataloged a variety of circumstances in which such growth can occur, such as following war, heart problems, arthritis, cancer, and more (see Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 2006, for a review). Park (1998) found a consistent relation between this model of thriving and psychological well-being, and others have found associations with other personal strengths such as existential wisdom, empathy, and strong interpersonal relationships (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1989-90).

Interestingly, according to this conceptualization thriving and poor mental health can coexist. Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) cite a case study of a woman who they considered to be both thriving and depressed at the same time. In this particular example, several months after her husband was murdered in a robbery this woman was depressed and still experiencing significant grief, yet she also reported growth in “her sense of strength, her ability to live independently, and her general sense of being closer to something transcendent” (p. 363). As this example demonstrates, a thriving individual in this framework may experience growth in some domains of his or her life while at the same time suffering in others—this suggests in this model, thriving need not be domain-general, which is contrary to how the current chapter defines thriving. We will return to the issue of the domain-general vs. domain-specificity of thriving later in the chapter.

The “better-off-after-trauma” model of thriving clearly differs from the definition put forth in the current chapter, but it does share the perspective that thriving should refer to something that goes beyond what is expected (homeostasis and competence, respectively). It focuses on the strengths that emerge from difficulties, rather than the absence of loss or other negative outcomes following trauma. However, as noted, and again similar to the concept of resilience, this model of thriving is by definition tied to the experience of adversity; in fact, it requires a specific traumatic event, which is even more limiting in scope than some of the perspectives on resilience which consider adversity to include general backgrounds of vulnerability/risk (such as SES or race; see Spencer, 2006). This is because, according to O’Leary (1998), thriving is (in her model) representative of a “transformational” process (from initial state before the trauma, to significantly worse directly following the trauma, to better than the initial state following recovery from the trauma), and such a process requires an event that

“shakes the foundations of one’s life . . . because these are the ones that provide the opportunity for a heroic response” (p. 430).

Also unlike the current chapter’s conceptualization of thriving, the “better-off-after-trauma” model does not represent a full model of positive development. Furthermore, it fails to embrace the relational developmental systems theory approach—while it acknowledges the interaction of person and environment and implies plasticity, it does not integrate the notion of relational bidirectionality (the focus is about a direct *effect of* the traumatic context *on* the individual). Additionally, at no place in this model is there any consideration of the relational enhancement of person and context, or following from that the opportunity for one to positively impact one’s environment as part of the reaction to the adversity (e.g., one might devote oneself to making sure others do not suffer the same trauma). Moreover, thriving from this perspective has no particular relevance to one’s unique talents and skills—perhaps, if coupled with the idea that a thriving response to adversity might include a commitment to improving the conditions related to the trauma or some other related contribution to society, we might see one employing one’s talents and skills to that end and thus a closer conceptual link between the two definitions.

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the role of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) in advancing the strengths-based approach to psychological research. Though most of the positive psychological research is focused on individual well-being, and very little directly addresses development (cf., Park, 2004), it has produced a number of relevant (and some very similar) perspectives on human functioning which inform the current perspective on thriving (see also Benson & Scales, 2009). Indeed, some of the more prominent frameworks in the positive psychological literature, such as flourishing (Keyes, 2002) and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), posit models of optimal

human functioning which, on many levels, overlap and can coexist with—indeed, mutually inform—thriving research.

Before delving into a review of the positive psychology literature, it is important to recognize that the positive, strengths-based approach to psychology in general, and lifespan human development in particular, shares roots with the work of earlier developmentalists, including Piaget, Werner, and Lev Vygotsky; humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers; and one of the founding fathers of personality (and social-cognitive) psychology, Gordon Allport.

As presented earlier, Piaget's adaptation and equilibration processes and Werner's orthogenetic principle speak directly to the presence of human strengths (namely cognitive capacities) in development, and do not focus on the mere absence of weaknesses. Piaget further revealed an orientation toward the positive in his book *Six Psychological Studies* (1967), in which he not only elaborates on his cognitive developmental theories but also discusses human capacities such as cooperation and personal autonomy. Another of the classic developmental theorists, Vygotsky was also interested in the development of a child's capacities. His theory of the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) addresses the potentialities of the child; he described it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 85).

Though humanistic theories have been criticized for their dubious methodologies and sparse databases (Geller, 1992), they too succeeded in orienting psychological research and practice away from human inadequacies and toward human potential. In his exploration of human motivation, Maslow (1968) placed atop his hierarchy of human needs the notion of "self-

actualization.” He defined striving toward self-actualization as one’s “desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1970, p. 22). His notion focuses less on an end-point to be attained and more on the process of ongoing striving toward the maximization of one’s individual full potential. He suggested many attributes he thought to be characteristic of the self-actualized person, including: acceptance of self and others, spontaneity, autonomy, appreciation of life, having peak experiences, feeling of kinship or connectedness with others, strong interpersonal relations, a sense of morality, creativity, and the ability to transcend one’s culture and biases (Maslow, 1970). Rogers (1961) likewise sought to understand the pursuit of human potential and optimal functioning in his notion of the “fully-functioning person.” He theorized the existence of an underlying “actualizing tendency” in all humans, which serves to motivate them to develop all capacities in the pursuit of autonomy, positive regard from others, and positive self-regard. Rogers’ (1961) fully functioning person represents the optimal human condition, described by the characteristics of openness to experience, the capacity to live existentially, trust, self-expression, independence, and creativity. This fully functioning person seeks to live “the good life,” which Rogers (1961) insightfully (and consistent with the position taken in this chapter) considers to be “a *process* not a state of being... it is a direction, not a destination” (p.186, emphasis in original).

This dialectic between being and becoming was also addressed by Gordon Allport. Allport is well-known for his work as a personality and social-cognitive psychologist; however, it is often overlooked that beyond his investigations of basic human traits, motives, and biases, he sought to understand personality from a decidedly positive perspective. This was perhaps most on display in his book *Becoming* (Allport, 1955); in which he suggested “the process of

becoming is governed... by a disposition to realize [one's] possibilities, i.e., to become characteristically human at all stages of development" (p. 27). These notions of possibilities and potential, capacities and becoming are at the core of the thriving process.

The concept of "flourishing" in many ways represents a contemporary version of the humanists' orientation toward the maximization of human potential. Broadly speaking, flourishing is a universal model of optimal human functioning. Keyes (2003) has defined flourishing as "a state in which an individual feels positive emotion toward life and is functioning well psychologically and socially" (p. 294). It lies at the positive end of a continuum of functioning that has "languishing" as its opposite. Flourishing describes individuals who are not only doing well in many areas of life, but are also largely free of negative indicators of health such as mental illness. In other words, flourishing considers well-being to include both the presence of the positive as well as the absence of the negative.

The concept of flourishing emerged out of, and is largely based in, Ryff's (1989) conceptualization of psychological well-being along with Keyes's (1998) notion of social well-being. Ryff helped to usher in the era of positive psychology through her efforts to reconceptualize well-being and devise an instrument to measure her theoretically-derived constructs of psychological well-being. Picking up where Jahoda (1958) left off over forty years prior, Ryff was interested in exploring the positive side of mental health, and in her approach addressed the theoretical literature on mental health/illness, humanistic psychology, identity, maturity, and life-span development. She found a set of core themes in this literature, and reformulated them into her six dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; see also Ryff and Keyes, 1995). These dimensions include positive evaluations of oneself and one's life (self-acceptance), a sense of personal growth and development (personal growth), the ability to

effectively manage one's life and world around them (environmental mastery), a sense of self-determination (autonomy), the sense that one's life has purpose and meaning (purpose in life), and engagement in positive relationships with other people (positive relations with others).

This sixth dimension of Ryff's psychological well-being model segues conceptually into Keyes's (1998) overall conception of social well-being. Social well-being also comprises multiple dimensions, including social coherence, social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, and social actualization. Seeking a more comprehensive model of positive human functioning, Keyes (2002) combined the notions of psychological and social well-being, and integrated a third component he called "emotional well-being" to formulate a theory of human flourishing. According to Keyes (2007), while psychological well-being and social well-being represent the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia*, emotional well-being aligns with Aristotle's *hedonia*. Emotional well-being thus includes one's experiences of positive and negative affect (Watson et al., 1988) and what Keyes (2007) referred to as one's "avowed quality of life," which is akin to subjective well-being (Diener, 1984).

 INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

It should be noted that subjective well-being, while considered here primarily under the umbrella of flourishing, has enjoyed a long and deep history of research in its own right (Diener, 1984, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) recognized the importance of the study of positive subjective experience by advancing it as the first area of investigation within positive psychology. Happiness, high positive affect and low negative affect, and life satisfaction are generally considered the major components of subjective well-being, which has itself been

shown to have many desirable correlates (e.g., strong relationships, physical health; see Diener, 1984, 2000; Myers, 2000) and has been advanced by some as an indicator of positive development (e.g., Park, 2004; Shultz et al., 2006).

However, Ryff (1989), Keyes (1998), and others have argued that subjective well-being, while an essential piece of the larger well-being puzzle, is limited in its ability to capture the full breadth of “the good life”—this is where Aristotle’s distinction between *eudaimonia* and *hedonia* is particularly important. Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) suggest that while *hedonia* refers to a certain kind of happiness characterized by pleasure-seeking pursuits, *eudaimonia*, though often also translated to mean *happiness*, “is more accurately characterized as the striving toward realization of one’s true potential” (p. 1018; cf. Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is from the well of this humanistic pursuit of self-actualization that these authors (as well as the current authors) believe the good life more fruitfully springs. Importantly, Keyes et al. (2002) acknowledge that the demands of such striving “may compromise contentment or more hedonic aspects of well-being” (p. 1009)—this is highly consistent with the thriving conception presented in this chapter that at any given point in time one may not be especially happy or joyous, but this temporarily reduced well-being is in the service of a greater developmental benefit.

Research on flourishing has substantiated the component structure of the construct, and demonstrated a variety of desirable associations (e.g., Keyes, 2002, 2005). Empirical studies of flourishing and languishing have explored their relations with, among other things, sociodemographic variables such as gender and age, depression, work productivity, and physical health. The results of this work showed significant relations between flourishing and increased psychosocial functioning, as well as between languishing and psychological impairment, greater

chronic physical health problems, emotional distress, and more lost work days (see Keyes, 2007 for a summary).

Notably, the measurement of flourishing does not follow the traditional additive scale score approach. Keyes (2002, 2005) believes that mental health can be diagnosed in a manner analogous to how mental illness has been traditionally diagnosed using rubrics such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed., text rev.; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), since mental health and mental illness both consist of sets of symptoms. For example, in the case of depression, the symptoms include unhappiness, emotional distress, and maladaptive behaviors; on the flip side of this coin, symptoms of flourishing include happiness, emotional vitality, and engagement in positive relationships. Specifically, according to Keyes (2005), “to be diagnosed as flourishing in life, individuals must exhibit high levels on one of the two scales of hedonic well-being and high levels on 6 of the 11 scales of positive functioning” (p. 540).

Though flourishing stands alone as a model of complete mental health, a number of researchers in the positive psychology tradition have explored and discussed various constructs that may be individual components of flourishing, some of which are particularly relevant to the understanding of the current definition of thriving. In Keyes and Haidt’s (2003) recent compendium on flourishing entitled *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, many of the foremost scholars in the positive psychology movement weighed in on some of these theorized components. Baltes and Freund (2003b) explain the relation of flourishing to wisdom (especially in later adulthood, to which we will return later in this chapter), which they define as “an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics . . . and conduct and meaning of life” (p. 252). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003b) address the role of

creativity in flourishing, employing creativity exemplars to better understand how meaning arises in people's daily lives through what they call "vital engagement," defined as "participation in an enduring relationship that is at once enjoyed and meaningful" (p. 86). They are careful to point out that flourishing is not simply a string of flow-like experiences, and go on to put forth a theory of emergent meaning that is derived from their research on flow (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Another concept considered to be a component of flourishing (as well as thriving) is optimism. Importantly, the old notion that optimism and pessimism are simply ends of the same continuum is challenged by Peterson and Chang (2003); these authors suggest that much of the existing research provides an incomplete understanding of the construct because the measures used typically do not assess *both* negative and positive outcomes. However, these authors do not distinguish between realistic and unrealistic optimism, a point that might have bearing on the prospect of positive outcomes (Schneider, 2001). Schneider defines realistic optimism as "the tendency to maintain a positive outlook within the constraints of the available 'measurable phenomena situated in the physical and social world' (DeGrandpre, 2000, p. 733)... [that] involves enhancing and focusing on the favorable aspects of our experiences... and hoping, aspiring, and searching for positive experiences while acknowledging what we do not know and accepting what we cannot know" (2001, p. 253). Along these lines, taking a developmental perspective, Damon (2008) points out the benefits of a combination of optimism, ambition and "realistic humility" toward the fruitful pursuit of one's purpose. On the other hand, unrealistic optimism includes processes such as self-deception, wherein one seeks out only information that confirms one's desired beliefs, and may undermine positive development (see Baumeister, 1993).

Meaning and purpose in life are also components of flourishing, as explained by Emmons (2003). Establishing and pursuing personal goals, or what he calls “personal strivings,” plays a central role in mental health. Emmons (2003) proposes four categories of life meaning, derived from across three different perspectives in meaning research: 1) achievements/work, 2) relationships/intimacy, 3) religion/spirituality, and 4) self-transcendence/generativity, which have much conceptual overlap with the current definition of thriving. One source of meaning and an opportunity for self-transcendence come from what Piliavin (2003) refers to as “doing good,” which may take the form of community involvement and volunteerism. Another moral component related to flourishing is what Haidt (2003) calls “elevation,” which in moral-emotional terms refers to the opposite of disgust.

Further empirical work by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) addressed flourishing by incorporating the idea of a “positivity ratio.” One’s positivity ratio is simply one’s level of positive affect in relation to one’s level of negative affect. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) propose that in order to flourish, individuals (or groups) must achieve a certain minimum positivity ratio (approximately 3:1 positive affect to negative affect). Interestingly, their results also suggest that there is an upper limit to the beneficial effect of the positivity ratio on flourishing (signs of disintegration of flourishing emerge at a positivity ratio of 11.6:1), and that a certain level of “appropriate negativity” may in fact be important toward flourishing. These authors conclude by suggesting that they believe flourishing is primarily characterized by four key components, including goodness (indexed by happiness, satisfaction, and superior functioning); generativity (indexed by broadened thought–action repertoires and behavioral flexibility); growth (indexed by gains in enduring personal and social resources); and resilience (indexed by survival and growth in the aftermath of adversity).

Similar to flourishing, character strengths comprise a set of personality attributes that are together thought to provide a virtuous path to overall well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In this research tradition, the concept of character is considered a “multidimensional construct comprised of a family of positive traits manifest in an individual’s thoughts, emotions and behaviors” (Park & Peterson, 2006b). After an extensive review of Western and Eastern philosophical and theological traditions, Peterson and Seligman (2004) proposed twenty-four character strengths and grouped them into six categories: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (see Table 3). These character strengths may be assessed via a self-report questionnaire known as the Values in Action Inventory (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and have been investigated through a number of both theoretical works and empirical studies (e.g., Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Park, 2006a, 2006b; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006; Biswas-Diener, 2006; Peterson, 2006; Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, & Seligman, 2008).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The category of wisdom and knowledge represents the cognitive strengths that involve the acquisition of information and use of this understanding of the self and the world; examples include open-mindedness, curiosity, and the love of learning. Courage is the domain of emotional strengths such as persistence and bravery, which help to enable one to accomplish goals in the face of challenges. Humanity involves kindness, love, and social intelligence, which are interpersonal strengths and reflect aspects of Keyes’s notion of social well-being. Justice

involves moral reasoning and civic duty—examples include fairness and leadership. Temperance refers to the capacity to resist excess and regulate the self, and involves strengths such as forgiveness, humility, and prudence. And transcendence can be seen as “strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning” (p. 18, Peterson, Park, and Seligman, 2006), such as spirituality, hope, and gratitude. Character strengths have been linked to a number of different positive outcomes, including recovery and growth after illness (Peterson, Park & Seligman, 2006), which fits with the research on the conceptualization of thriving as growth following trauma (Carver, 1998).

As in the emerging research tradition of flourishing, the burgeoning work on character strengths has also been celebrated in a recent book compilation, entitled *A Psychology of Human Strengths: Fundamental Questions and Future Directions for a Positive Psychology* (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003). As in *Flourishing*, this edited volume provided an opportunity for leading psychologists to contribute to the conversation regarding human strengths, expanding on the strengths enumerated in Peterson and Seligman’s (2003) seminal work in this new tradition.

Many of the topics in this volume overlap directly with notions covered *Flourishing*, including wisdom, resilience, and meaning/purpose (see Sternberg, this volume, for an extended discussion of the life-span development of wisdom). Wisdom and the SOC model are again addressed by Baltes and Freund (2003a), who suggest they combined represent an “important facet of human strengths that can be viewed as an ideal outcome of development” (p. 27). Carver and Scheier (2003) explore one specific task of wisdom, as it relates to goal selection and perseverance. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the authors suggest that despite almost universal accord about the positive value of continued perseverance toward one’s goals, “giving up” is often the most adaptive decision and reflective of the SOC process. Ryff and Singer (2003b)

allude to the role of resilience as a character strength that is necessary toward the appreciation of all aspects of human experience, both positive and negative. According to these authors, the “challenges of ‘engaged living’ are the essence of what it means to be well” (p. 282). Larsen, Hemenover, Norris and Cacioppo’s (2003) conceptualization of resilience mirrors O’Leary and Ickovics’s (1995), Carver’s (1998), and others’ takes on thriving, as growth following adversity. They address both the affective and cognitive components of resilience, showing that the activation of both positive and negative emotions predicts positive adjustment, and the ability to imagine positive coping with a stressful event predicts increased actual engagement coping (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Larsen et al. (2003) conclude that “beneficial health outcomes are associated more strongly with coactivation [of positive and negative emotions] than with neutrality.” And as in *Flourishing*, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003a) again take on the construct of meaning and its motivational power. These authors suggest that having a sense of purpose or vocation in one’s career might organize and provide meaning to daily work, and as a result one becomes motivated to continue that meaningful pursuit.

However, this volume highlights a number of additional psychological constructs beyond those that overlap flourishing and character strengths. The importance of self-regulation as a human strength is evident in *A Psychology of Human Strengths*, as four of its 23 chapters are allotted to covering it (see McClelland, this volume, for an extended discussion of the life-span development of self regulation). Caprara and Cervone (2003) suggest the self-regulatory system serves several functions: it evaluates one’s actions; plans and sets goals; assesses one’s efficacy for challenges, and motivates after self-evaluation. As such, this approach accords closely with the SOC model. They further argue that an individual’s perceived self-efficacy is related to their self-regulatory system, insofar as self-efficacy beliefs influence motivation, goal choice,

performance, strategy choice, and attributions, and therefore development. Eisenberg and Wang (2003) also advance their thinking about self-regulation as a human strength. They consider it in terms of optimal levels of self-control, which is similar to Block and Block's (1980) personality attribute of ego-resiliency. Individuals who exhibit appropriate levels of self-control are more likely to be resilient and cope effectively (Asendorpf & van Aken, 1999; Eisenberg et al., 2000). Further, the authors note, people who regulate themselves tend to experience more positive and fewer negative emotions (Derryberry & Rothbart, 1988). Mischel and Mendoza-Denton (2003) describe self-regulation as involving willful and strategic mental representations to achieve homeostatic affective conditions. In this model, self-regulation is a cognitive process employing strategies such as re-imagining stimuli to control the less-cognitive systems in one's mind. Cantor (2003) also suggests that the ability to strategically imagine situations, which she calls "constructive cognition," is a strength that can lead to more efficient goal pursuit. This human strength is useful in goal selection, such as in social situations in which an individual might imagine the probable actions of others; or toward a personal life goal pursuit, when an individual imagines creative probable outcomes from his or her behavior.

The notions of intelligence and judgment also come into play in the conceptualization of character strengths. Sternberg (2003) calls for a re-conceptualization of the traditional notion of intelligence to be more in line with his principles of positive psychology, which state that: 1) people's definitions of success does not always correspond to societal ones; 2) people adapt to, select, and shape their environments; and 3) people do so most effectively when they capitalize on other human strengths. These principles lead him to advance the notion of "successful intelligence" (Sternberg, 1996) as a more befitting of a character strength than the traditional definition. Sternberg (2003) defines successful intelligence as "the set of skills needed to achieve

success in life, as defined by the individual within his or her sociocultural context, in order to adapt to, shape, and select environments by identifying and capitalizing on strengths and identifying and compensating for or correcting weaknesses through a balance of analytical, creative, and practice skills” (p. 321). This definition seems to nicely encapsulate the individual qualities that underlie one’s ability to adaptively regulate one’s development and individual \longleftrightarrow context relations, and thus ought to be considered as a possible competency of thriving.

The literature reviewed in this section makes clear the conceptual overlap between the notions of optimal human *functioning* put forth in the models of character strengths and flourishing, and the model of optimal human *development* advanced in the current theory of thriving. However, as pointed out at the beginning of this section, there are many ways in which these social/personality- and cognitive-oriented research traditions of character strengths and flourishing differ from the developmental notion of thriving. Most obviously, as noted earlier character strengths and flourishing are models of well-being, which primarily view human functioning as one’s current status on some continuum or a desired end-state; while they might be explored developmentally, such explorations are rare and do not claim to focus on the process of, or attempt to explain, development. Additionally, the focus of both character strengths and flourishing is generally on the individual, one’s personality characteristics or traits; rarely do they fully consider person-environment interactions and contextual variation. While character strengths at their core do address human virtues and morality, flourishing does not incorporate moral well-being into its psychological, social, and emotional framework. However, it is worth noting that a few recent studies have endeavored to fill some of these conceptual gaps.

Park (2004) reviews some of the literature which demonstrates linkages between character strengths and positive youth development. She points out that many youth development

programs (in- and out-of-school) promote character strengths such as kindness, altruism, and personal responsibility, and touts the research-validated benefits of such programs (see Larson, 2000; Piliavin, 2003). She refers to the work of Catalano and his colleagues (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller 1992; see also Catalano, Hawkins, et al., 2002) to highlight the salubrious effects of promoting the character strengths of self-control and social intelligence. She concludes her review by declaring there is “consistent evidence that character strengths play important roles in positive youth development as enabling conditions that *facilitate thriving*,” but is careful to point out that “just how character strengths . . . work as buffers against problems and contribute to thriving is not clear” (p. 50; emphasis added).

Additionally, Park and Peterson (2006b) uncovered some possible developmental differences in their cross-sectional study comparing adolescents’ and adults’ scores on the Values in Action survey measure of character strengths. They show that the character strengths of hope, teamwork, and zest are relatively more common in adolescence, and appreciation of beauty, authenticity, leadership, and openmindedness are relatively more common among in adulthood. They note that these latter strengths may require more advanced maturation. The authors also explore some differences in the relation between character strengths and life satisfaction in the adolescent versus the adult years. Results show that while life satisfaction is highly correlated with the strengths of zest, hope, love, wisdom, social intelligence, self-regulation, and perseverance across all ages, teamwork and prudence are more powerful predictors of life satisfaction in young people than in adults, and curiosity and spirituality are better predictors of life satisfaction for adults than for young people. Following from these findings, Park (2004) suggests that positive youth development programs should strategically target those strengths which have demonstrated associations with life satisfaction.

The emergence of these developmental studies of character strengths and the prospect of similar studies integrating flourishing signal the potential for the advancement of the field's understanding of the nature of thriving in adulthood. While there are clear differences between the approaches taken by those studying thriving as a value-added response to adversity, those taking the more personality-oriented perspective on optimal human functioning, and the conceptualization of thriving presented in this chapter, it is important to note that these perspectives seem to have more in common than they do in distinction. For example, it is likely that the capacities that enable one to achieve better-than-baseline outcomes following trauma likewise contribute to adaptive developmental regulation; the characteristics of a thriving orientation integrate many of the character strengths, and the core components of flourishing. (Indeed, it would seem those in the positive development movement would benefit from a greater integration of these concepts into its understanding and research agenda on the thriving orientation.) In these ways, thriving in adulthood may look quite similar to thriving in adolescence. Though the time horizon of a hopeful future may appear different in adulthood compared to the teenage years, it is nonetheless quite adaptive to continue looking forward, planning for whatever is next, to continue to explore one's identity and life purpose and the ways in which one might contribute to the world beyond the self. Alternatively, these psychosocial markers of thriving in adulthood might be thought to function as developmental goals or benchmarks toward which optimal adolescent development points. Regardless, insofar as it is the case that people are developing at every stage of life, it follows that a set of principles of thriving apply at every life stage... including later life.

Thriving and Positive Development in Later Life

Until recently, the developmental literature on late adult development has focused on the identification and, namely in the medical and nursing literature, remediation of losses, especially in the physical and cognitive domains (Rowe & Kahn, 1987); however, there has been a shift in the last 20 years toward understanding positive development in late adulthood (e.g., Baltes, 1987). While this is encouraging, for the purposes of the current review it is perhaps ironic that, as in infancy, the primary usage of the word “thrive” in the research literature on later life development is deficit-centered, again in the form of a medical diagnosis of “Failure to Thrive” (FTT). Symptoms of FTT in late adult populations, such as nutritional problems and severe weight loss, surfaced in the medical/geriatrics literature in the late 1980s (Robbins, 1989; Verdery, 1990), and FTT has been further explored in the gerontological nursing literature in recent years. In its 1991 report on late adult development in the United States, the Institute of Medicine described Failure to Thrive in late adult patients (a.k.a., “inanition”) as “a syndrome of weight loss, decreased appetite and poor nutrition, and inactivity, often accompanied by dehydration, depressive symptoms, impaired immune function, and low cholesterol levels” (Lonergan, 1991, p. 60). Late adulthood FTT is now recognized in the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification under the code “783.7—Adult failure to thrive.”

Newbern and Krowchuk (1994) provide an oft-cited summary of FTT literature which addresses both infant and older adult FTT, and offer a conceptual analysis of the proper application of FTT to late adult populations. Building on the notion that FTT includes both anthropomorphic and psychosocial indicators, these authors propound seven “critical attributes” of FTT in older populations. These attributes are broken into two categories: 1) “problems in social relatedness,” which include disconnectedness, inability to give of oneself, inability to find

meaning in life, and inability to attach to others; and 2) “physical/cognitive dysfunction,” including consistent and unplanned weight loss, decline in cognitive function, and signs of depression. They additionally provide a list of five antecedents to FTT in late adult populations, including loss; dependency; feelings of exclusion, shame, helplessness and worthlessness; loneliness; and inadequate nutritional intake.

In contrast to the infant FTT literature, research on failure to thrive in late adult populations, especially that in the nursing literature, emphasizes psychosocial factors on an equal plane with biological ones (Newbern & Krowchuk, 1994; Kimball & Williams-Burgess, 1995; Walker & Grobe, 1999; Bergland & Kirkevold, 2001). Bergland and Kirkevold (2001) assert that, with regard to physically frail nursing-home residents, “to be useful, the concept of thriving must integrate physical and psychosocial aspects” (p. 431). While others assert that FTT should be viewed as the negative end of single thriving continuum (where the positive end is defined by high level of psychosocial and nutritional well-being; see Walker & Grobe, 1999), these authors propose that failure to thrive and thriving should be addressed separately. Thriving, in their conceptualization, is a theoretical concept that integrates “the perspective of growth and development and the psychological perspective” (p. 431), while failure to thrive should be viewed as more akin to how infant FTT is generally considered, with a greater emphasis on physical factors.

At the same time, some believe the lack of definitional consistency and coherence in the late adult FTT literature is grounds for abandoning it as a medical diagnosis altogether. Sarkisian and Lachs (1996) assert “the label ‘failure to thrive’ promotes an intellectual laziness that needs to be balanced by a considered and thoughtful deconstructionist approach, wherein the areas of impairment would be carefully identified, quantified, and, most importantly, scrutinized for

potential interactions” (p. 1074). They believe it is impractical to attempt to diagnose late adult patients under a single pathophysiologic process such as FTT, and call for a more measurement-oriented approach to declining health in older populations that takes into consideration what they call the “four major contributor domains”: impaired physical functioning, malnutrition, depression and decreasing socialization, and dementia (i.e., cognitive impairment; see also Robertson & Montagnini, 2004). Though Sarkisian and Lachs (1996) claim FTT is “a stigmatizing label [that] distracts the clinician from a systematic evaluation” employing these four domains and thus not a useful diagnosis in geriatric populations (p. 1075), their domains nonetheless largely reflect the indicators to which much of the late adult FTT literature adheres, and the preponderance of the literature supports FTT as a clinically meaningful diagnosis in late adult populations.

However, while the term “thrive” only appears in the late adult development literature in this context, many aspects of the current notion of thriving are nonetheless well-represented in the literature on what has been dubbed “successful aging” (referred to here as *successful late adult development*; see p. 616 in Baltes, 1987; see also Rowe & Kahn, 1987; Baltes & Baltes, 1980; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). Paul Baltes and his colleagues (Baltes & Baltes, 1980; Baltes, 1987, 1997) are credited with laying the groundwork for much of the theory and research on positive development in the late mature years. Previously, the psychosocial and medical literature on late adult and life-span development had largely grouped the late mature years into two groups: “normal,” which represented the typical late adult development where losses are expected, and “diseased,” an unfortunate but functional categorization of those who suffered from sub-normal development. Baltes (1987), Rowe and Kahn (1987), and others observed the significant variability of functioning among those in the “normal” category, and challenged the

idea that the two categories captured all of the meaningful differences in development during the late adult years. From this, normal late adult development was bifurcated into “usual” and “successful” late adult development. “Usual” might be thought of as akin to the notion of “adequate” development or “competence” in the youth development literature; it represents what is expected, no worse and no better. However, “successful” late development described those who developed along trajectories “above the curve”—they were more vibrant, in better physical health, demonstrated above-average cognitive skills, and felt in more control of their lives. “Successful” late adult developers were also found to have stronger systems of social support. According to Rowe and Kahn (1998), there are three main characteristics of successful late adult developers: 1) low risk of disease and disability, 2) high cognitive and physical functioning, and 3) active engagement with life (p. 53).

The Baltes’ and their colleagues (e.g., Baltes, 1987; Baltes & Baltes, 1980) work on successful late adult development stemmed from their exploration of cognitive development during this life period. They posited their theory of “selective optimization with compensation” to help explain the relation of gains and losses that naturally accompany the developmental process; in this early iteration of what is now known as the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) model, Baltes (1987) acknowledged the potential for continual development (i.e., plasticity) throughout the late mature years (albeit decreasing with age), along with the role of one’s selective and compensatory efforts to deal with age-related loss.

The Baltes’ and their colleagues (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Freund, 2003; Baltes, Lindenberger & Staudinger, 2006) have since updated and refined this model for a broader application to phases across the life span. In this model, “selection” involves choosing and committing to goals that give direction and focus to the developmental journey, “optimization”

refers to the acquiring and refining of expertise needed to accomplish the goals one has selected, and “compensation” involves finding alternative means when existing means are lost in order to maintain a given level of functioning.

By way of this model, Baltes and his colleagues remind us that in our contemporary world, adulthood and late adulthood, like the developmental stages before them, continue to be about not just “being” but “becoming” (Allport, 1955), as development across the life span is perpetually marked by transitions and the ongoing process of selection, optimization, and compensation. According to Baltes and Freund (2003a), “it is arguable that the modern world accentuates a condition where the central point is not the definition of a particular end state, but the delineation of a behavioral system that promotes as a ‘whole’ the continued adaptation to and mastery of new life circumstances” (p. 25). Gestsdottir and Lerner (2007) refer to the SOC model as it applies to adolescence as one of “intentional self-regulation” (p. 508). Such self-regulatory capacities have been shown to predict higher levels of functioning (Freund & Baltes, 2002) and moderate one’s actions (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006) (see McClelland, Ponitz, Messersmith & Tominey, this volume for an extended discussion of self-regulation theories, including Baltes and Heckhausen). An outgrowth of this model explores the construct of wisdom in adulthood and late adulthood, as noted in the earlier discussion of theories of positive psychology.

Heckhausen and her colleagues (1999; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996) build from Baltes’ and colleagues (Baltes, 1987; Baltes & Baltes, 1980, 1990) SOC model, particularly the selectivity and compensation dimensions, and advance their own conceptualization of successful late adult development. They posit two keys mechanisms of developmental regulation: primary and secondary control. Primary control is directed toward

influencing and shaping the external world, to bring it in closer accord with one's desires; in this way, it is thought to be instrumental, or *primary*. If the primary control strategies fail to change the environment, secondary control kicks in; this control mechanism is instead focused internally, and involved changing one's goals or individual standards, or perhaps drawing on self-protective strategies. According to Heckhausen and Schulz (1995), adaptive functioning and development occurs when primary control is operational; simply put, people are better off being able to change their environments to suit them than having to change themselves (e.g., their goals, priorities, attributions) to suit their environments. However, in late adulthood, for most people primary control becomes more difficult as a function of normal age-related decline in functioning, so secondary control strategies become more salient and more important.

Heckhausen and her colleagues (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Wrosch & Heckhausen, 1999) further break down these types of control by the selection and compensation components of the SOC model, resulting in four forms of control: selective primary control, which is aimed at goal achievement; selective secondary control, which denotes an allocation of internal resources toward the goal(s) selected; compensatory primary control, which entails the gathering of external resources to achieve one's goal(s); and compensatory secondary control, which enables internal buffering strategies against the potential negative effects of failure to achieve one's goal(s). According to Heckhausen and Schulz (1995), successful late adult development does not privilege any one of these forms over the others; instead, one must be capable of employing any combination of these them in varying degrees contingent on the constraints of the goal(s) one has selected and the environment.

Before moving on from this discussion of concepts related to thriving and positive development, it is important to highlight one additional conceptualization of optimal

development and functioning which has helped inform our and others' (e.g., Lerner, 2004) thinking about the nature of thriving. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1998) quite elegantly present a set of guidelines for optimal development by way of six "conditions for complex adulthood" (p. 640). They view these conditions as the ontological endpoints toward which optimal development might point, and thus reflecting many of the hallmarks of successful late adult development, and to a degree, thriving. These conditions include: 1) health and physical fitness (though they are careful to stipulate that physical well-being is not a precondition of successful late adult development); 2) the preservation of an alert and vital mind; 3) continuity of a vocation (by which the authors simply mean continued involvement in a meaningful activity, not necessarily a career); 4) keeping up with family and friends (that is, having a strong social network and support system); 5) continued involvement in the community (which entails not just the personal benefits of social support but also opportunities to remain engaged in purposeful pursuits and contribute to society), and 6) wisdom (following, in part, from Sternberg, 1990; see also Sternberg, this volume). They suggest this final condition includes the following attributes: the ability to get at the essence of problems, holistic thinking rather than specialized knowledge, virtue or behavior toward the common good, and joyful engagement in everyday life (p. 642). Taken together, these characteristics represent the kind of "idealized personhood" toward which the thriving process aims. Life's quest to achieve such idealized personhood is never-ending; as human beings, we can—and should—constantly strive to improve ourselves and the conditions in the lives of others and the world around us. There are no age limits to such noble and vital pursuits.

TOWARD A SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF THRIVING

We have suggested that adolescence marks a formative period in the development of the psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional capacities necessary for thriving. Though the current approach to thriving has only explicitly been tackled in the research literature covering the adolescent years, it may apply as a model of optimal development from this life stage (if not childhood) through late adulthood. Only recently has one of the literatures reviewed herein, in positive youth development, begun to articulate a solid research agenda that will advance our scientific understanding of thriving. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to review the methodologies best suited to thriving research (see [Nesselroade & Molenaar, this volume and McArdle](#), this volume, for extended methodological discussions), some methodological principles central to conducting empirical research on thriving are worth noting.

As suggested earlier, adaptive developmental regulation is considered a hallmark of positive youth development and the basis for optimal growth (Lerner, 2004). However, what constitutes the “optimal environmental conditions” for such development is likely to vary, perhaps substantially, among individuals and across time (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Thriving may thus be reflected in the process of an individual simply making the best of his or her environment. For example, we know that youth in disadvantaged settings generally have fewer opportunities for developmentally rich activities, such as volunteer service, compared to those living in less impoverished communities (Atkins & Hart, 2003). Still, individuals may thrive in this setting by making the most of the opportunities they do have. This observation leads to many questions: Might what is considered thriving in some settings, such as high-risk neighborhoods, not be considered thriving in others, such as communities with ample resources? In what ways might thriving appear different in these different contexts? Which external developmental assets (e.g., family, friends, community resources) best support the thriving process, and under what

conditions might these relations differ? These kinds of questions reflect but a few of the unresolved issues in the study of thriving.

Conceptual and methodological issues stemming from distinctions between thriving *within* one's context and thriving *despite* one's context are among these unresolved issues. As noted earlier in this chapter, it is also important to consider whether thriving ought to be construed as domain-general or domain-specific. Can one be thriving in school or at work, but not in one's family life? We would suggest that the answer to this question is "no." Thriving represents the integration of all relational individual \leftrightarrow context interactions over time across all environments. Supporting this view, Benson and Scales (2009) offer that "implicit in a conception of thriving as a more global construct is the acknowledgement of countless paths of adolescent thriving whose integrity derives from the ongoing negotiation of each individual's unique bidirectional relations with her or his contexts" (p. 9).

Along these lines, there has been some discussion in the literature regarding the role of culture in thriving (see Benson & Scales, 2009). Lerner, Dowling, and Anderson's (2003) understanding of thriving is based on the notion that a young person over time makes *culturally appropriate* contributions to their society; it is implied that while the specific ways in which one may contribute may differ across cultures, the *idea* of contribution is universal to thriving. However, Eisenberg and Wang (2003) caution that what is conceptualized as a strength or positive may differ across cultures. For example, individualism and uniqueness are prized in many Western contexts (and implicitly celebrated in the notion of the "spark"; Benson, 2008), but may not be perceived as strengths in collectivist societies. Empirical cross-cultural explorations of thriving, such as one ongoing study conducted by researchers at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, are necessary to address this critical issue.

There is also the question of whether the application of label “thriving” should entail a certain developmental baseline across all domains of life. Benson and Scales (2009) suggest that “*adequacy* in the social, conduct, and academic dimensions is a necessary foundation for thriving” (p. 14, emphasis added). If thriving in fact takes into consideration all relational individual \longleftrightarrow context interactions over time and across all environments, and it is unreasonable (as we believe it is) to expect all of those interactions across every context to always be mutually enhancing, do we allow for decline in some of those areas? Or do we set “baselines” of functioning and development that must be minimally achieved to consider one thriving? Keyes (2005) has taken an approach akin to setting baselines in his diagnosis method for applying the labels “flourishing” and “languishing” to people; however, the diagnosis approach may not be appropriate for a developmental process such as thriving. And what are we to make of the person who is already functioning very highly in all areas and on an upward developmental trajectory... is there a ceiling effect where growth cannot be expected (or necessary) so as to warrant the label “thriving?” These are among the many issues in this field which require more research and greater theoretical consideration.

Perhaps the most elusive (yet arguably most important) goal of thriving researchers has been that of establishing a well-defined and consensual set of behavioral and psychosocial indicators of thriving. As alluded to earlier, this is due in part to the fact that the developmental principles of temporal embeddedness and diversity would suggest an expectation of somewhat different indicators of thriving by life stage and by context (including culture), even by historical time (e.g., what might have indicated thriving in the early 20th century might not in the present day). However, we should also expect there to be some indicators of thriving which transcend these categories; indeed, efforts have been made to establish a functional set of these indicators

(e.g., the Thriving Indicators Project and the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development; see below). At present, the two most prominent sets of indicators of thriving are those put forth in the 6 Cs model of positive youth development from Lerner and his colleagues (2004, Lerner et al., 2003; Theokas et al., 2005), and the recent “Measurement Markers of Thriving” advanced by Benson and Scales (2009), both reviewed earlier. While the efficacy and theoretical fit of these models are still in the process of being tested, each is instrumental toward advancing our understanding of thriving as both a process and an orientation. Research should be encouraged to employ both frameworks and assessment tools at the same time, for purposes of comparison as well as because the complementary strengths of the models (such as the focus on process in the Lerner model—wherein the 5 Cs of PYD predict the 6th C of contribution—and the focus on orientation toward thriving and the “spark” in the Benson and Scales model).

Though we do not undertake endorsing or advancing a new a list of thriving indicators here, there are three issues on this point which warrant particular attention. First, the role of subjective well-being in the process of optimal development has been debated among thriving scholars. While it is clear that being happy or more generally satisfied with one’s life is not necessary at all times to ensure optimal development—indeed, according to Ryff and Singer (2003b), “‘interpersonal flourishing’ is profoundly about the mix of positive and negative emotions” (p. 279)—it is much less clear to what extent happiness and life satisfaction must exist over time to allow for the thriving process. At any given point, happiness may or may not be an indicator of thriving; however, over time, one might expect it to be, on average, present. If a person is perpetually unsatisfied with her or his life but appears to be on an upward developmental trajectory marked by mutually beneficial relationships with others, can we consider this person to be thriving? One approach might follow from Fredrickson and Losada’s

(2005) notion of a positivity ratio, wherein an optimal range or moderate oscillation of subjective well-being over time might function as an indicator of thriving.

Second, there is much inter-individual diversity in the degree to which people know and understand both themselves, and their environments. The literature on self-understanding, self-knowledge, and self-concept is vast, and we do not review it here; however, the role of self-knowledge is key to self-regulation (see Higgins, 1996; Markus & Wulf, 1987), and thus integral to the thriving process as well. All normally developing people eventually have the capacity to appraise their goals (including purposes and sparks) and abilities via self-appraisal; the extent to which people actually engage in accurate self-appraisal may have important ramifications toward their ability to thrive (see Bandura, 1989). Analogously, context appraisal addresses the degree to which one can accurately assess his or her environmental assets and risks. Though the field has largely overlooked these capacities, the thriving process may be predicated upon their development.

Finally, scholars of thriving have commonly addressed the roles of psychological, social, and emotional development, but there remains little consensus on the roles of spiritual and physical development. Increasingly across the human sciences, scholars are recognizing spirituality as an intrinsic component of the human condition. As noted earlier, some theoretical models of thriving and positive development advance spiritual development as essential (e.g., King & Benson, 2005; King & Furrow, 2004), while others do not (e.g., Lerner et al., 2007); to date, empirical explorations have been inconclusive (e.g., Shultz et al., 2006). Similarly, some positive youth development scholars suggest aspects of physical development—such as “maintenance of physical health” (Scales et al., 2000), “positive health perceptions” (Benson & Scales, 2009), and “good health habits” and “good health risk management skills” (Eccles &

Gootman, 2002)—are important indicators of thriving, while others pay little attention to the role of physical development (e.g., Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2003, Theokas et al., 2005; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007). Some take a middle stance; Jelicic et al. (2007) note the importance for young people to “maintain their health and fitness,” not as an explicit indicator of thriving but instead so as to avoid “being a physical burden to others [thus] enabling effective interactions with their social world” (p. 271). As suggested earlier in the chapter, it may be the case that physical development takes a more prominent position in thriving at different life stages: the “failure to thrive” perspective in infancy is based on proper physical development, and the maintenance of physical health from adulthood into late adulthood is viewed as an essential indicator of successful late adult development (Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996; Baltes & Smith, 2003). Further, the interaction of psychological and physical capacities may come into play; for example, successful late adult development entails the ability to appropriately psychologically cope with and compensate for physical losses (Stern & Carstensen, 2000). While we strongly believe that the presence of physical ailments (such as a physical disability, chronic medical disease, etc.) in no way precludes thriving, it is important that the role of physical health—be it actual health or engagement in healthy habits (such as proper hygiene maintenance, wholesome eating habits, etc.)—is explored more deeply in these conceptualizations and assessments of thriving.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The driving philosophy behind the positive youth development movement—and many of its cousins in the positive psychology, cognitive development, and successful late adult development perspectives—hold that individuals, cultures, and nations ought to believe, and act on the belief, that all humans, young and old, are (to paraphrase Benson, 1997, and Resnick, 2000), resources to be nourished and developed, not problems to be solved and managed. Damon

and Lerner (2008) assert that “the potential for and instantiations of plasticity legitimate an optimistic and proactive search for characteristics of individuals and of their ecologies that, together, can be arrayed to promote positive human development *across life*” (p. 8; emphasis added). Taking these statements together, we submit that a more positive, strengths-based view of development—as embraced in the concept of thriving presented in this chapter—is not only warranted, but essential for fully understanding ontogeny across the human lifespan.

Furthermore, the perspective espoused by “applied developmental science” (Lerner, 2002), and shared by scholars of thriving, emphasizes the applied nature of relational developmental systems theory in which the current concept of thriving is rooted. As such, additional scholarly work is needed not only toward the construction and validation of research assessments for a better scientific understanding of thriving, but also the development of practical tools for parents and communities to put into these principles of thriving into action. It is one of the tasks of developmental inquiry to seek an understanding of optimal human development, and to communicate this understanding to both the research community and the broader public.

Investigators in this area also need to partner with organizations and practitioners who are in the position to deliver on the promises of thriving and positive development. There are already numerous examples of such collaborations currently in progress, many focusing on the formative developmental stages of childhood and adolescence. For example, a research initiative known as the Thriving Indicators Project has partnered researchers of thriving in the PYD tradition (including Peter Benson, Peter Scales, and their colleagues at Search Institute, Pamela King and her colleagues at the Fuller Theological Seminary, and William Damon and his colleagues at Stanford University) with members of the Thrive Foundation for Youth and practitioners of thriving such as Friends of the Children (a national non-profit organization that provides

mentoring for at-risk teens) to help better understand positive youth development in practice. Similarly, the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development is a joint initiative between Richard Lerner and his colleagues in the Institute of Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University and the National 4-H Council which aims to “to conduct good science that enhances the abilities of practitioners, parents, policy makers, and young people themselves to promote positive human development” (Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2008). Furthermore, Search Institute has over the years partnered with thousands of communities across the country as well as America’s Promise Alliance to advance the positive youth development agenda. Damon and his colleagues’ are working hand-in-hand with non-profit organizations to explore avenues for fostering purpose and thriving in schools both in the United States and abroad. Child Trends, an independent, nonpartisan research center in Washington, DC, has conducted significant research on positive youth development and is dedicated to putting their findings directly into practice to improve the lives of children and their families. These are but a few of the many examples of such positive collaborations.

At the outset of this chapter, we noted that despite the growing knowledge base and the excellent work by many scholars in the field of positive youth development and fields adjacent, the construct of thriving remains by and large ill-defined and ill-understood. We have sought to remedy these conceptual ills by proposing a synthetic definition rooted squarely in relational developmental systems theory, and have laid the groundwork for advances in the existing knowledge base to be built around a set of core principles we have distilled from the literature. These principles are designed to highlight the fundamentally developmental nature of thriving, focus on optimal (not merely adequate) development, acknowledge the whole person across all life domains, consider the relational multidirectional (and inherently moral) nature of mutually

enhancing interactions among people and their environments, and integrate the humanistic notion of maximizing one's full potential. While each of these principles may act as stand-alone guidelines for thriving-related research and practice, they must be considered en bloc for thriving to be truly understood in all its complexity. Indeed, the greater this understanding we can achieve, the greater the likelihood that we can help people at all stages of life to thrive.

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APPENDIX A.

Table 1. Benson and Scales’ (2009) Theoretical Measurement Markers of Thriving in Adolescence

<u>Elements of Thriving</u>	<u>Measurement Markers of Thriving</u>
1. Young Person	1. Spark identification. Young person can name, describe talents and interests that give them energy and purpose.
	2. Positive emotionality. Young person is positive and optimistic.
	3. Stability/growth of spark. Young person reports growth in developing and pursuing sparks over the last 12 months.
	4. Motivation. Young person has intrinsic desire to pursue their sparks and enjoys challenges.
	5. Purpose. Young person has a sense of purpose and a goal to make a positive difference in the world.
	6. Hopeful future. Young person sees self as on the way to a happy and successful future.
	7. Prosocial orientation. Young person sees helping others as a personal responsibility, and intends to volunteer in the next year.
	8. Spiritual development. Young person affirms importance of a sacred or transcendent force and the role of their faith or spirituality in shaping everyday thoughts and actions.
2. The Young Person’s Developmental Contexts	<p>Opportunities. Young person experiences chances to grow and develop their sparks from multiple individuals and life contexts.</p> <p>9. Family.</p> <p>10. Friends</p>

	<p>11. School</p> <p>12. Neighborhood</p> <p>13. Youth organizations</p> <p>14. Religious congregations</p>
	<p>Supports: Young person experiences encouragement and support in pursuing their sparks from multiple life contexts.</p> <p>15. Family</p> <p>16. Friends</p> <p>17. School</p> <p>18. Neighborhood</p> <p>19. Youth organizations</p> <p>20. Religious congregations</p>
	<p>Positive pressure. Young person is pushed to develop their sparks by people in multiple life contexts.</p> <p>21. Family</p> <p>22. Friends</p> <p>23. School</p> <p>24. Neighborhood</p> <p>25. Youth organizations</p> <p>26. Religious congregations</p>
<p>3. Young Person's Active Role in Shaping Contexts</p>	<p>27. Action to develop and pursue sparks. Young person seeks and acts on adult guidance, studies or practices, and takes other actions to develop their sparks.</p>
<p>4. Developmental Contexts Act on the Young Person</p>	<p>28. Frequency of Specific Adult Actions. How often adults do concrete things to motivate, enable, and push young people to develop their sparks and connect</p>

	<p>them to others who can help.</p> <p>29. Adult Role Models of Sparks. Young person has several adult role models who have sparks like theirs and who inspire young people to develop their sparks.</p>
<p>Additional Constructs Measured in Thriving Youth Survey</p>	
<p>Positive Developmental Outcomes</p>	<p>Life satisfaction. Young person feels good about their life.</p>
	<p>Positive health perceptions. Young person feels strong and healthy.</p>
	<p>Contribution to social good. Young person volunteers or does things to make their world a better place.</p>
	<p>School success. Young person earns a B or higher average in school.</p>
	<p>Values diversity. Young person considers it important to know people of different races.</p>
	<p>Leadership. Young person has been a leader in a group or organization in the last 12 months.</p>
<p>Other Correlates of Thriving</p>	<p>Personal power/confidence. Young person feels confident about reaching goals.</p>
	<p>Competence:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Social. Young person is good at making friends and cares about others' feelings.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Behavioral (Self-control). Young person can control emotions and delay gratification.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Academic. Young person is confident about ability to do school work.</p>
	<p>Moral compass/character. Young person says others would describe them as respectful, responsible, helpful, and hard working, among other virtues, and says</p>

	they live their values.
	Fulfillment of potential. Young person takes the initiative and takes advantage of opportunities.
	Personal growth. Young person sets goals and seeks the help needed to reach them.
	Resourcefulness. Young person adjusts and meets challenges well.

Source: Benson & Scales (2009).

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Table 2. Keyes's (2007) Components of Flourishing

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Positive emotions (i.e., emotional well-being)	
Positive affect	Regularly cheerful, interested in life, in good spirits, happy, calm and peaceful, full of life
Avowed quality of life	Mostly or highly satisfied with life overall or in domains of life
Positive psychological functioning (i.e., psychological well-being)	
Self-acceptance	Holds positive attitudes toward self, acknowledges, likes most parts of self, personality
Personal growth	Seeks challenge, has insight into own potential, feels a sense of continued development
Purpose in life	Finds own life has a direction and meaning
Environmental mastery	Exercises ability to select, manage, and mold personal environs to suit needs
Autonomy	Is guided by own, socially accepted, internal standards and values
Positive relations with others	Has, or can form, warm, trusting personal relationships
Positive social functioning (i.e., social well-being)	
Social acceptance	Holds positive attitudes toward, acknowledges, and is accepting of human differences
Social actualization	Believes people, groups, and society have potential and can evolve or grow positively
Social contribution	Sees own daily activities as useful to and valued by society and others
Social coherence	Interested in society and social life and finds them meaningful and somewhat intelligible
Social integration	A sense of belonging to, and comfort and support from, a community

Source: Adapted with permission from Keyes (2007), Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: A complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist*, 62, 95-108. Published by the American Psychological Association.

Table 3. The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

<p>1. Wisdom and knowledge—cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creativity</i>: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things • <i>Curiosity</i>: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience • <i>Love of learning</i>: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge • <i>Open-mindedness</i>: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides • <i>Perspective</i>: Being able to provide wise counsel to others
<p>2. Courage—emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Authenticity</i>: Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way • <i>Bravery</i>: <i>Not</i> shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain • <i>Persistence</i>: Finishing what one starts • <i>Zest</i>: Approaching life with excitement and energy
<p>3. Humanity—interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kindness</i>: Doing favors and good deeds for others • <i>Love</i>: Valuing close relations with others • <i>Social intelligence</i>: Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
<p>4. Justice—civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fairness</i>: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice • <i>Leadership</i>: Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen • <i>Teamwork</i>: Working well as member of a group or team
<p>5. Temperance—strengths that protect against excess</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Forgiveness</i>: Forgiving those who have done wrong

- *Modesty*: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
- *Prudence*: Being careful about one's choices; *not* saying or doing things that might later be regretted
- *Self-regulation*: Regulating what one feels and does

6. **Transcendence**—strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

- *Appreciation of beauty and excellence*: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
- *Gratitude*: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
- *Hope*: Expecting the best and working to achieve it
- *Humor*: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
- *Religiousness*: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Source: Adapted from Park & Peterson (2006b).

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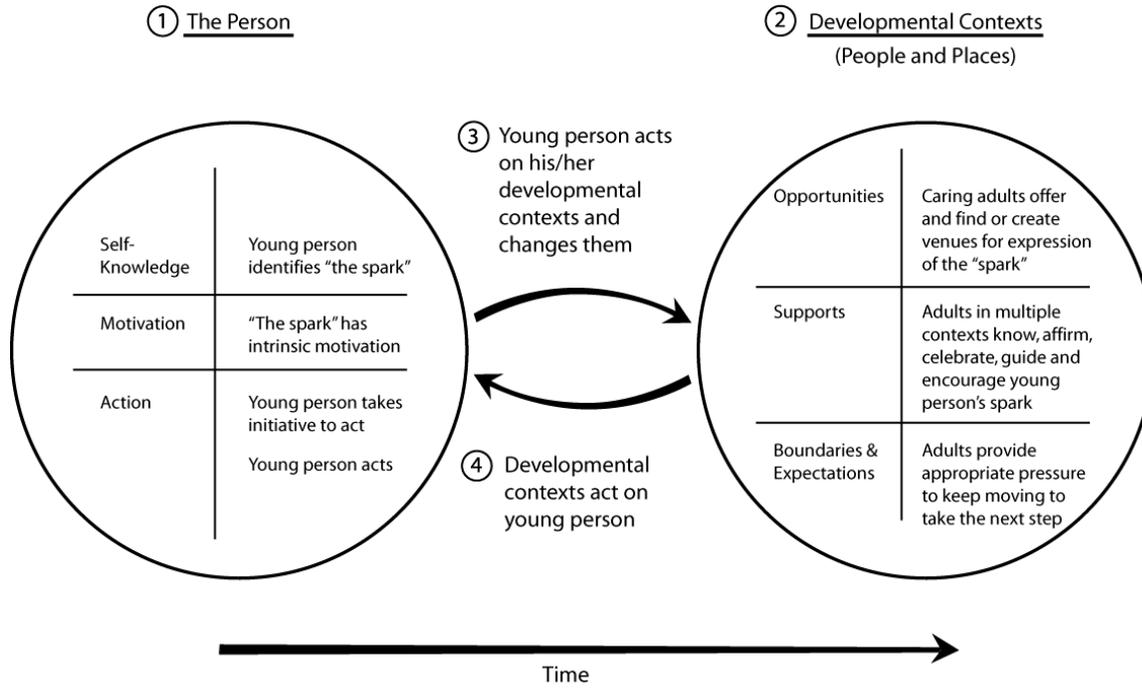
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Benson and Scales' (2009) Dynamic Process of Thriving in Adolescence

Figure 2. Lerner and colleagues Model of Thriving and the 6 Cs

Figure 3. Carver's (1998) Possible Responses to Adversity, Including Thriving

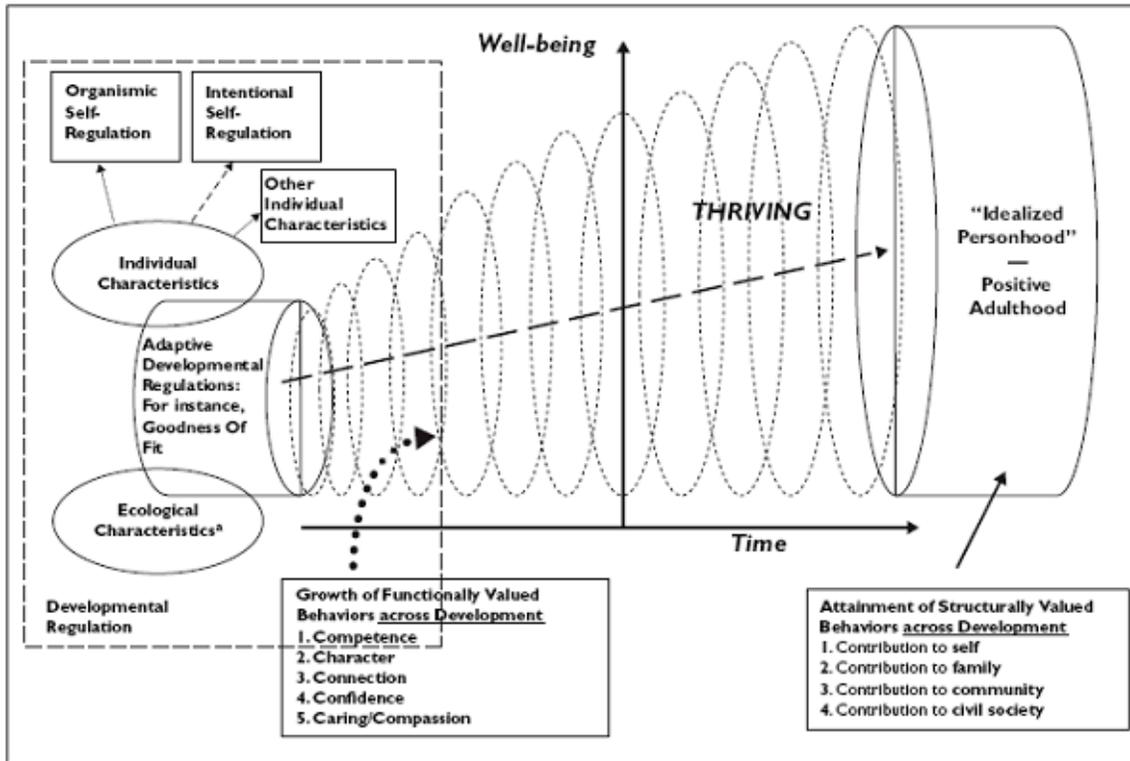
Figure 1.



Source: Benson and Scales (2009).

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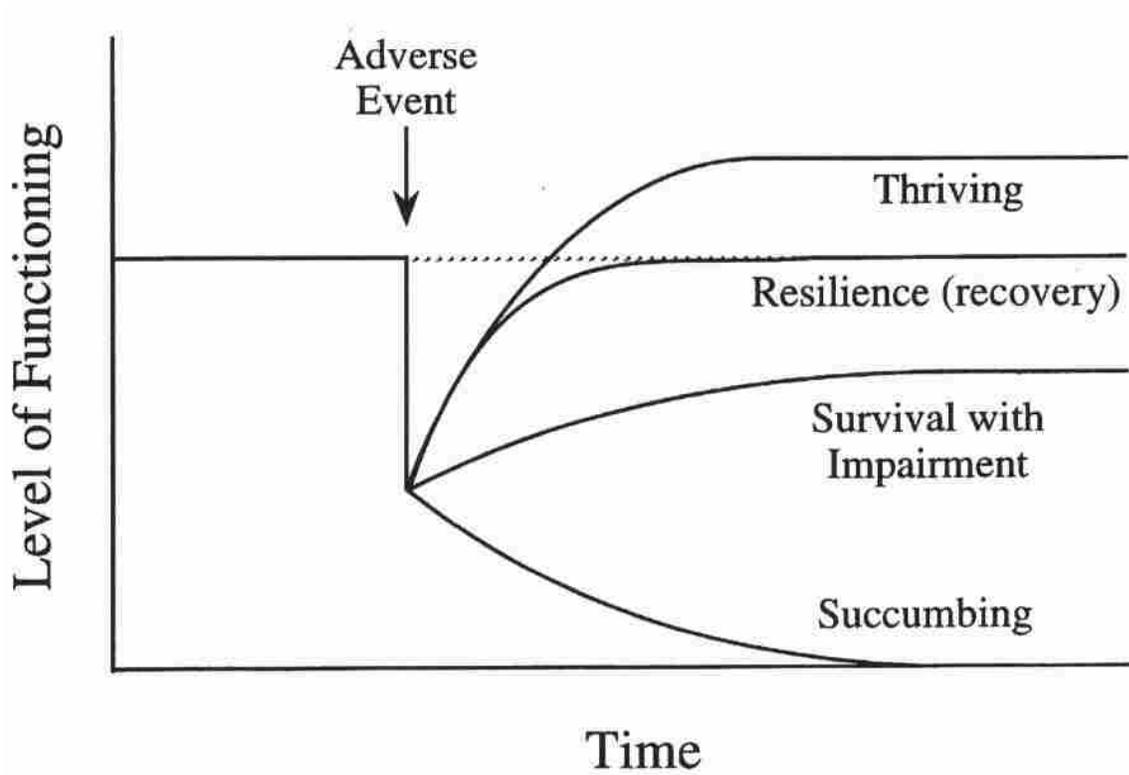
Figure 2.



Source: Reprinted with permission from Gestsdottir and Lerner (2007), Intentional self-regulation and positive youth development in early adolescence: Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(2), 508-521.

Published by the American Psychological Association.

Figure 3.



Source: Reprinted with permission from Carver, (1998). Resilience and thriving: issues, models, and linkages. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 245-266. Published by Wiley-Blackwell.