

**Posttraumatic Growth:
Psychological Reconstruction
in the Aftermath of Disaster**

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Reconstruction Needed



Trauma--Broadly defined

- **Threat to physical integrity--perception of life threat**
- **Threat to cognitive or psychological integrity-- a severe challenge to individuals' past ways of understanding the world and their place in it, e.g. separation (that is not part of the typical life cycle) and abandonment.**

Trauma & Cognition

- **Challenging or shattering the assumptive world: How**
 - benevolent
 - predictable
 - and controllable it is
- **Forcing attention to assumptive world**
- **Sense of vulnerability and self-esteem**
- **Leading to cognitive reassessment**

Trauma and narrative

- **Trauma is a turning point in the life narrative, the watershed event.**
- **If an event divides life into “before and after” it may be traumatic, and also, growth-enhancing.**

PTG: Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic Growth is both a process and an outcome: The experience of positive changes in oneself as a result of the struggle with traumatic events.

Christianity and Suffering

- **“Christianity transmutes the tragedy of history into something that is not tragedy” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 193).**

Christianity and Suffering

- **“Suffering, on the other hand, tends to plow up the surface of our lives to uncover the depths that provide greater strength of purpose and accomplishment. Only deeply plowed earth can yield bountiful harvests.” (Graham, 1981, p. 27).**

Islam and Suffering

- **In a passion play in which the seventh century Shiite martyr Husain, about to be killed states: “Trials, afflictions, and pains, the thicker they fall on man, the better, dear sister, do they prepare him for his journey heavenward.”**

Buddhism and Suffering

- **The Noble Truths are organized around the issue of suffering:**
 - **Do not make it personal and react to it in a habitual way.**
 - **Accept the suffering, embrace it rather than just react to it.**
 - **When you have actually practiced with suffering - looking at it, accepting it, knowing it and letting it be the way it is - then "Suffering has been understood."**

Existential Psychology and Suffering

- **Rollo May, Erich Fromm, Victor Frankl:**
 - **Human condition or facts of existence: Suffering, guilt, and transitoriness.**
 - **By engaging these, we can develop meaning in our living.**
 - **Suffering doesn't have to be *mere* suffering. It can produce individuation (not necessarily happiness).**

Resilience vs. PTG

- **Resilience: "The ability to *recover* readily from illness, depression, adversity or the like." The ability to regain shape.**
- **Also, *resistance* to adversity.**
- **Versus PTG: a new level of functioning and perspective--*transformative* responses to adversity.**

**Is PTG an “American”
concept?**

- **There are reports of PTG across cultures--Israel, China, Turkey, Germany, Bosnia, Japan, Holland, Australia, Switzerland, and others.**
- **Culture is also proximate-- consider the influence of the primary reference group on trauma survivors.**

From the sufferers

“I am a more sensitive person, a more effective pastor, a more sympathetic counselor because of Aaron’s life and death than I would ever have been without it.

And I would give up all those gains in a second if I could have my son back. If I could choose, I would forego all of the spiritual growth and depth which has come my way because of our experiences, and be what I was fifteen years ago, an average rabbi, an indifferent counselor, helping some people and unable to help others, and the father of a bright, happy boy. But I cannot choose.”
Rabbi Harold Kushner in Viorst, J. (1996) *Necessary Losses*. New York: Fawcett, p. 295.

From the sufferers

[Trauma forces a person] "to be somebody else, the next viable you-- a stripped-down whole other clear-eyed person, realistic as a sawed-off shotgun and thankful for air, not to speak of the human kindness you'll meet if you get normal luck."

Price, R. (1994). *A Whole New Life*. New York: Antheneum, p. 183.

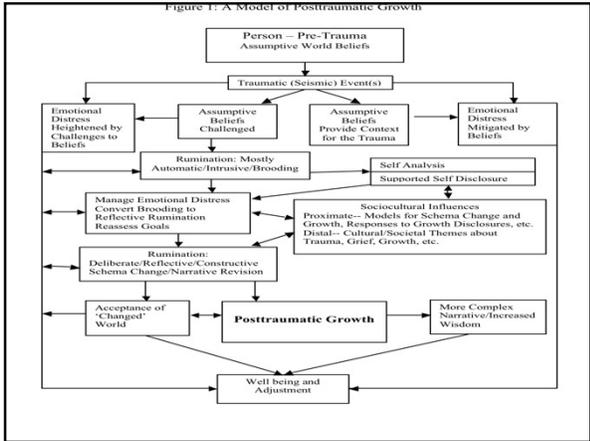
From the sufferers

"This is the one thing that happened in my life that I needed to have happen, it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. On the outside looking in that pretty hard to swallow, I'm sure, but hey, that's the way I view it.

If I hadn't experienced this and lived through it, I likely wouldn't be here today because of my lifestyle previously--I was on a real self-destructive path. If I had it to do all over again I would want it to happen the same way. I would not want it not to happen."

Tedeschi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (1995). *Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p. 1.

Posttraumatic Growth Research
 Concepts, measures, data



PTG Assessment

- **Tedeschi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (1996). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9*, 455-471.**

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

- **Empirically derived domains: New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Appreciation of Life, Spiritual Change.**
- **CFA N=926: 5 first order factors, 1 second order. (Taku, Cann, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2008)**

Relating to Others

- 6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble. (I)**
- 8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others. (I)**
- 9. I am more willing to express my emotions. (I)**
- 15. I have more compassion for others. (I)**
- 16. I put more effort into my relationships. (I)**
- 20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are. (I)**
- 21. I better accept needing others. (I)**

New Possibilities

- 3. I developed new interests. (II)**
- 7. I established a new path for my life. (II)**
- 11. I am able to do better things with my life. (II)**
- 14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise. (II)**
- 17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing. (II)**

Personal Strength

- 4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance. (III)**
- 10. I know better that I can handle difficulties. (III)**
- 12. I am better able to accept the way things work out. (III)**
- 19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was. (III)**

Spiritual Change

- 5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters. (IV)**
- 18. I have a stronger religious faith. (IV)**

Appreciation of Life

- 1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life. (V)**
- 2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life. (V)**
- 13. I can better appreciate each day. (V)**

9/11 did not shake me. After surviving the Murrah bombing, I can handle anything now. I was already “changed” by my experience of 4/19/95.

The events of 9/11/01 only reaffirmed for me that you never know what life may hold in store. In some ways I have a greater appreciation of life.

It has caused me to think about my responsibilities as a world citizen in a different way. I have been reminded of my mortality—a poignant reminder to embrace each day and each person in my day with passion and compassion.

In some ways, though, having been through the Murrah bombing was helpful in that I was able to be much more empathetic with my friends living in NYC and DC. I had a sense of the depth of feeling experienced on 9/11 and immediately after but also that it would slowly get better.

Since the bombing I have been so much more aware of my mortality and that of others and the preciousness of every day. As time has passed, I don't want to forget that as there are "should" and "ought" pressures, many aren't all that important in the long term.

9/11 has changed me in terms of more preparedness, as well as reminding me again, life is short and precious.

PTG & Dispositional factors

- **Extraversion appears related to PTG among emergency responders, $r=.38$ with PTGI (Smith & Paton, 2002).**
- **Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Self-efficacy, optimism, hope related to PTG in ambulance officers, but mediated by coping—emotional support and expression (Shakespeare-Finch, 2002).**

Cognitive Processing & PTG

- **56 disaster response workers provided data at two times over 6 months.**
- **PTG related to experience of fear, horror and helplessness, and higher levels of intrusion.**
- **Fear, horror, and helplessness and avoiding thinking about death exposure related to negative changes.**
- **Greater experience of fear, helplessness and horror combined with an approach or acceptance attitude toward death associated with increasing PTG over time. (Linley & Joseph, 2006)**

Cognitive Processing & PTG

- **In recent amputees, PTG was only related to positive cognitive processing vs. Intrusive thinking**
- **PTG predicted by positive cognition, distress predicted by negative cognition. (Phelps, et. al, 2008)**

Neural correlates of PTG

82 survivors of severe motor vehicle accidents

- **Greater relative left baseline prefrontal activation (EEG measure) corresponded with higher PTGI scores.**
- **Greater positive affect (on PANAS) was also related to PTG reports, but when this variable was controlled, the relationship between left prefrontal activity and PTG remained significant. Rabe, et al., (2006).**

Backwards benefit

- **Female police officers who had been survivors of sexual assault prior to police training, showed dramatic declines on IES scores after training— "imposing meaning" on the experience (Paton, Huddleston & Stephens, 2003).**

Organizational Variables

- **Low bureaucratic constraint**
- **Rewarding performance in adverse circumstances**
- **Supportive posttrauma environment**

- **Organizational factors may be more crucial in posttrauma outcomes than incidents themselves (Dunning, 2003)**

Organizational Variables

- **Police officers (N=512) t1 (entry into service) and t2 (1 year later). Traumatic stress exposure contributed to both IES and PTGI scores. Organizational hassles related to IES, organizational uplifts (having responsibility, recognition for good work, empowerment) to PTGI. (Paton, et al., 2003).**

PTG & Military Medicine

- **253 Air Force medical personnel recently redeployed from Iraq. Stress: Combat & Combat-healthcare.**
- **Both types of stress exposure were uniquely associated with increased PTSD**
- **Both forms of stress exposure showed an inverted U-shaped relationship with posttraumatic growth. (McLean, et al., 2011)**

PTG in Displaced Children of Hurricane Floyd

- **PTGI-C scores varied from 37 to 84 (minimum possible = 21, maximum = 84), with a mean of 65.11 (SD =11.87).**
- **Rumination & Competency Beliefs r =.38.**
- **Social Support & Competency Beliefs r = .35**
- **Competency Beliefs & PTG r= .55. (Cryder et al., 2006)**

PTG in Parents & Children

- **105 6- to 17-year-olds (M =11.9 years, SD = 3.3) and their parents (N = 67) were interviewed approximately 10 months and 2 years 5 months after direct exposure in Thailand to the 2004 tsunami. The parents' self-reported PTG was a significant predictor of PTG in their children. (Hafstad, et al., 2010)**

PTG in Parents & Children

- **Parents and children were interviewed 2 years 5 months after direct exposure in Thailand to the 2004 tsunami. Disaster exposure, caring for children during disaster, and PTSS in parents and children directly related to PTG. (Siqueland, Hafstad, & Tedeschi, in press)**

PTG & Sichuan Earthquake

- **2080 adult survivors of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake at one year later**
- **Prevalence rates for PTG and PTSD sx were 51.1% and 56.8%, respectively.**
- **Best predictors of PTG: female, younger, higher education, higher degree of earthquake-related exposure, PTSD symptoms, including intrusion and hyperarousal. (Xu, Liao & Xu, 2011).**

PTG Lessons

- **It's not the trauma, it's the struggle.**
- **People first struggle to survive, not grow.**
- **Psychological fitness and PTG: It's curvilinear.**
- **Illusions: Yes and No.**
- **PTG and distress coexist, likely have a curvilinear relationship, have varying relationship with time.**

***Being a Growth-oriented
"Expert Companion"***

Applying research and trauma survivors' wisdom

Practice *humility*, and a new way of *listening*...

- **Focus on listening, without necessarily trying to solve.**
- **Listen in a way that allows change in yourself, rather than being intent on doing the changing.**

Tolerance: Cultural and individual considerations

- **Respect and work within the trauma survivor's framework.**
- **Tolerate "positive illusions." Don't underestimate survivors' capabilities**
- **Be willing to explore spiritual or religious views.**

Be integrative

- **Expert companionship that facilitates PTG can be integrated in standard trauma treatment**
- **Integrate existential, cognitive, narrative/constructivist approaches.**

Enjoy the personal benefits that come from the work

- **If you approach the trauma survivors with whom you work *humbly, attentively,* and with *respect* your reward will be**
- **Vicarious posttraumatic growth--wisdom for everyday life and your own traumas.**

Trauma and Transformation

Tedeschi, R.G. & Calhoun, L.G.
(1995). Thousand Oaks, CA:
SAGE.

Facilitating Posttraumatic Growth

Calhoun, L.G., & Tedeschi, R.G.
(1999). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence
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The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice

Calhoun, L.G., & Tedeschi, R.G.
(2006). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence
Erlbaum Associates

***Meeting the Needs of
Children, Families, and
Communities Post-Disaster:
Lessons Learned from
Hurricane Katrina and Its
Aftermath.***

**(Kilmer, Gil-Rivas, Tedeschi &
Calhoun, American Psychological
Association, 2010)**

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