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Opportunities & Possibilities: Posttraumatic Growth in Research & Practice (Pt.1)

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Opportunities & Possibilities:
Posttraumatic Growth in Research & Practice (Pt.1)

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3

4 Today's Presenter

- **Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D.**
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- *Subject matter expert for the U.S. Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program



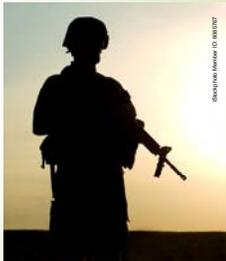
5 An Overview Including:

- A little history
- Conceptual review
- Recent developments
- Application



6 The History Part

- Each generation has its war, and the task of reintegrating service members into civilian life.
- And we seem to keep having trouble getting this right.
- We recognized "shell shock" in WW1, and PTSD after Vietnam.
- Now we need to recognize posttraumatic growth (PTG), and see more clearly the promise for veterans and other trauma survivors.



7

Can We Recognize the Strengths of the Veteran?

- Can we see the veteran as strong rather than broken while acknowledging the struggle?
- Can we acknowledge that the struggle sometimes is about combat and sometimes about other traumas?
- Can we recognize that military service and combat experience can strengthen veterans for civilian life?
- Can we see the possibility of growth in the aftermath of trauma?
- Can we find ways to facilitate this growth, identify the strength, and turn this to further service in our communities?

8

Conceptual Review

- What is trauma?



9

DSM-5 Definition

- DSM-5 describes traumatic stress involved in PTSD as exposure to actual or threatened death or serious injury, or sexual violence
 - directly
 - or witnessing in person
 - or learning about violent or accidental event experienced by a family member or other close friend
 - Repeated exposure or extreme exposure to aversive details of events

10 Trauma--Redefined

- Threat to **physical** integrity--perception of life threat
- Threat to **psychological** integrity
 - if it represented a severe challenge to individuals' past ways of understanding the world and their place in it.
- A **moral injury**
 - acting in ways that seem counter to previously held moral codes, core beliefs.

11 Trauma & Core Beliefs

- **Cognitive reassessments**
 - Challenging or shattering the **assumptive world**: Core beliefs about
 - How benevolent people are
 - How predictable events are
 - How controllable the world is
 - How vulnerable I am
 - How capable I am
 - Who I am, what kind of person am I

12 Trauma & Narrative

- A turning point in the life narrative, the watershed event, changing perspectives, assumptive world.
- If events divide life into "before and after" they may be traumatic, and also, growth-enhancing.



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13 Reconstruction Needed



14 Posttraumatic **Growth** (PTG)

- PTG is both a process and an outcome: The experience of positive changes in oneself as a result of the struggle with traumatic events.
 - New Possibilities
 - Relating to Others
 - Personal Strength
 - Appreciation of Life
 - Spiritual and Existential Change

15 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.



16

Existential Psychology & Suffering

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

17

Christianity & Suffering

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



18

Christianity & 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).



19

Islam & 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."

20

Buddhism & Suffering

- The Noble Truths are organized around the issue of suffering:
 - "There is suffering." Do not make it personal and react to it in a habitual way.
 - "Suffering should be understood."
 - Accept the suffering, stand under or 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 it is understood.

21

The Existential Dilemma of PTG

- "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 Vorst, J. (1996) *Necessary Losses*. p. 295.)

22

PTG & Wisdom, Resilience, Gratitude...

- [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*. p. 183.)



23

Trauma as a Gift

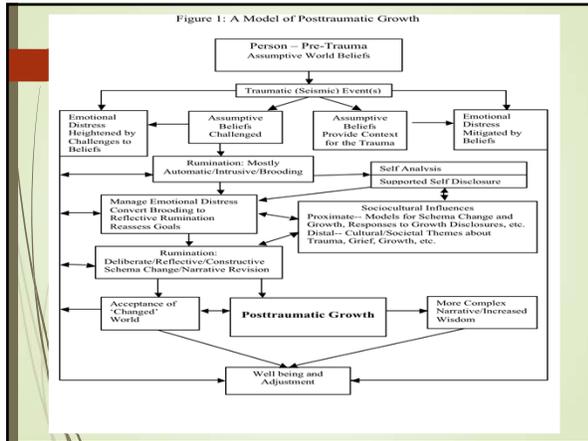
- "This is the one thing that happened in my life that I needed to have happen, it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. On the outside looking in that pretty hard to swallow, I'm sure, but hey, that's the way I view it. If I hadn't experienced this and lived through it, I likely wouldn't 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*. p. 1.

24

A Model of PTG

- Attempts to describe the *process* of posttraumatic growth, incorporating person variables, and environmental influences.
- Primary vehicle is *cognitive processing of challenged core beliefs*.





26 Recent Developments

- Measurement
 - Posttraumatic Growth Inventory Expanded (Adult version with expanded items measuring existential themes of growth)
 - Posttraumatic Growth and Depreciation Inventory (Mirrored 50 items assessing both positive and negative change)
 - Core Beliefs Inventory (Degree of challenge to core beliefs about predictability, control, benevolence, etc.)
 - Event Related Rumination Inventory (Intrusive and deliberate rumination)

27 Some Things to Remember About PTG

- It's not the trauma, it's the struggle.
- People first struggle to survive, not grow.
- Psychological fitness, distress and PTG: It's curvilinear.
- There are different PTG trajectories, but stability is the norm.
- PTG and PTSD coexist.
- There are various routes to growth.

28

Using the PTG Model to Create Interventions

- An Existential, Cognitive, Narrative Integration--Can be integrated with other approaches to PTSD
- Based on the perspective: "It's not what's wrong, it's what happened"
- Therapy, education, self-help approaches can be derived from the model
- The facilitator is an Expert Companion

29

5 Elements of PTG Intervention/Facilitation

- First described by Tedeschi & McNally (*American Psychologist*, 2011)
- Expanded by Calhoun & Tedeschi into book (*Posttraumatic Growth in Clinical Practice*, 2013)
- A Self-Help version by Tedeschi & Moore in the *Posttraumatic Growth Workbook*, 2016

30

Pt.1: Understanding trauma response as a precursor to PTG

- Shattered beliefs form the foundation for later posttraumatic growth.
- Basic physiological and psychological responses are *normal* in trauma. For example, combat stress:
 - Combat stress is perceived as greatest before and after battle--dread and fatigue.
 - During fighting, soldiers practice controlled mental and emotional disengagement, becoming as numb and unaware as possible to survive--an emotional and physiological reaction to extraordinary stress of an entire deployment or one firefight.
- These reactions do not indicate a defect in one's character, or identity as a soldier.

31

Pt.2: Emotion Regulation Enhancement

- Managing dysregulated sympathetic nervous system responses and intrusive thinking
 - Responses that are adaptive for survival in combat can provoke long-term maladaptive functioning:
 - behavioral and emotional effects of circulating norepinephrine, epinephrine and cortisol (stress hormones) sustain the body's alarm reaction
 - jitteriness, hypervigilance, sleep disruption, appetite suppression, etc.
- Encouraging reflective rumination in contrast to brooding.

32

Pt.3: Constructive Self-Disclosure

- Allowing emotional support, coherent trauma narrative, models for healthy trauma response and posttraumatic growth.
- *Telling the story* of the trauma, but especially the experience of the *aftermath* of trauma.
- Learning how to use social connections and establish new ones.

33

Pt.4: Creating a Trauma Narrative with PTG Domains

- Organizing the story of trauma into a coherent narrative with the trauma as a catalyst, turning point;
- Appreciating paradox—"opposites" can coincide
 - loss & gain
 - support & individual strength
 - control & lack of control
 - grief & gratitude
 - vulnerability & strength
- Referring to the five domains of posttraumatic growth, with stories of others to illustrate the possibility of change.

34

Pt.5: Developing Life Principles that are Robust to Challenges

- Finding ways to serve, be altruistic;
- Accepting growth without guilt as benefiting others. Honoring deceased comrades can mitigate guilt;
- Accepting social identity as a trauma survivor, or compassionate, wise person, somewhat separate from others, but more closely connected to the human condition;
- Considering the ancient Greek/Roman concept of the hero as an ordinary person who experiences an extraordinary event, survives it, and returns to the everyday world to express an important truth about life.

35

Now Applied in a Non-Clinical Veterans Program for Military to Civilian Reintegration

- Emphasizing PTG as a natural process that can be facilitated
 - Let trauma survivors know that this can be the outcome
 - Help people with the strategies that will facilitate this process for themselves posttrauma
 - Help people become expert companions, serving others



36

Now Applied in a Non-Clinical Veterans Program for Military to Civilian Reintegration

- Four important healing factors:
 - Place
 - Philosophy
 - People
 - Program



37

Now Applied in a Non-Clinical Veterans Program for Military to Civilian Reintegration

- Three important healing factors:
 - Place
 - People
 - Program
- The place is Boulder Crest Retreat, Bluemont, VA
 - The people are veterans and civilian trainers in meditative and recreational practices, working with 6 person groups of veterans
 - The program is Progressive and Alternative Training for Healing Heroes: Warrior PATHH

38

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CEU Credit & Certificate

One Survey, two different ways to receive a certificate

- MFLN is offering 1.5 CEU credit from the UT Austin, Steve Hicks School of Social Work to credentialed participants.
- MFLN Certificate of Completion for providers interested in receiving general training.

To receive a CEU credit OR certificate of completion, please complete the evaluation survey found at:
https://vte.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aWg1YoO4LWjCvfn

39

Upcoming Event

- **Title:** Opportunities & Possibilities: Posttraumatic Growth in Research & Practice (Part 2)
 - **Time:** 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Eastern
 - **Date:** Wednesday, August 8, 2018
 - **Location:**
<https://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/event/21552/>
- For more information on MFLN webinars go to:
<https://militaryfamilieslearningnetwork.org/mfln-events/>

40



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