Grit and Gratitude: Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) in Trans Communities

Sean Moundas (they/them), PsyD
University of Pittsburgh
University Counseling Center

“It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist” - Laverne Cox

“Like racism and all forms of prejudice, bigotry against transgender people is a deadly carcinogen. We are pitted against each other in order to keep us from seeing each other as allies. Genuine bonds of solidarity can be forged between people who respect each other’s differences and are willing to fight their enemy together. We are the class that does the work of the world and can revolutionize it. We can win true liberation.” - Leslie Feinberg

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Overview
-Moments of Silence
-Presenter’s Identify-Informed Perspectives and Privileges
-Guidelines
-Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG): Theory and Practice generally and in trans communities
-Hypothetical Clinical Scenario Discussion
-Questions and Conversation
Presenters’ Identities and Perspectives

Guidelines

- Respectful language
- Confidentiality
- Self-Care
- Naming if impact of language/silence felt challenging
- Speaking from our own experiences
- Co-learning
- Participation by choice in discussion/exercises
- Others?
Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG): Theory and Practice

What is Trauma/Post-Trauma Response?

“Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.” - American Psychological Association (APA)

- What type of unique traumas do trans people face?

What is PTG?

The experience of meaningful, often positive changes, resulting from working through the experience of trauma.

These are the following PTG elements:

- Appreciation of life - increased gratitude
- Relationships with others - increased enjoyment and possibly new relationships as well
- New possibilities in life - in one or multiple domains
- Personal strength and resiliency
- Spiritual change - content and/or process
What is PTG?

Also related to the future-oriented concepts and experiences of:
- finding benefits
- stress-related growth
- thriving
- adversarial growth
- positive psychological changes

(Affleck & Tennen, 1996; O'Leary, Aday, & Ickovics, 1996; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Yalom & Lieberman, 1991 as cited in Chowdhury, 2020)

How is PTG different from resilience?

- PTG is not viewed as a trait
- Resilience can be viewed as absence of symptoms, and can be less about transformation

(Counselman-Carpenter & Redcay, 2018)

How does PTG occur?

Per outcome theory,
- PTG results from and demonstrates resilience via positive transformational coping (TC).
  TC brings out survival urges, which cultivates further strength to manage adversity (Schaefer & Moos, 1992). When positive effects result, we grow from this active mechanism (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).
  - TC entails:
    - perceiving problems as potential opportunities and solutions
    - having a broad perspective (i.e., imagining "the bigger picture")
    - drawing upon skills and resources (Chowdhury, 2020; Mosley & Laborde, 2016)
- How does TC connect with multicultural worldview?

Examples? Barriers?
How does PTG occur?
Per the Model of Life Crisis and Growth (Schaefer and Moos, 1992), situational experiences and environmental aspects have a large impact on the effects of trauma and other stressors:
- Family of origin and/or choice
- Friends
- Colleagues and supervisors
- Teachers or mentors
- Community organizations
- Financial resources

What and who else? What if these factors are not as present?
These factors intersect with personal factors to determine the existence and degree of PTG.

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How does PTG occur?
Cognitive Adaptation Theory (CAT) - after a traumatic event(s), we try to find meaning; this meaning can be positive (Taylor, 1983 as cited in Dibb, 2018)
The Organismic Valuing Theory (OVT; Rogers, 1959 as cited in Dibb, 2018) posits that when trauma occurs, we can assimilate and accommodate new information, reshaping our sense of selves. Social support can facilitate this greatly.

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PTG Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)
21 items using a 0-5 point Likert scale containing the following factors:
Factor I – Relating to Others
Factor II – New Possibilities
Factor III – Personal Strength
Factor IV – Spiritual Enhancement
Factor V – Appreciation

Sample items: “I put more effort into my relationships,” “New opportunities are available which wouldn’t have been otherwise,” and “I have changed my priorities about what is important in life.”
PTG: Empirical Support in Adults

In a qualitative study, Slade et al. (2011) found that PTG was experienced in the majority of the 77 participants (i.e., 64%) experience recovery from mental health challenges. Participants included people of color and trans individuals in the UK.

Using a quantitative survey design, Dibb (2018) found that among 71 individuals living with HIV, there was a positive correlation between PTG and life satisfaction even when accounting for disclosure regret and stigma experiences. The majority of the participants identified as being either gay or bisexual.

Yu, Chen, Li & Lin (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 14 individuals, the majority of whom identified as gay, in China living with HIV, and found that PTG was positively associated with a positive view of adversity, with resilience as a mediator.

PTG: Empirical Support

The research just described did not focus on the experiences of transgender identified individuals.

Taube & Mussap (2020) quantitatively surveyed 125 trans and gender diverse (TGD) people of color and 625 white TGD identified individuals (18 to 68 years old, M = 26.0, SD = 9.2). Results showed that TGD people of color experienced greater growth regarding relating to others and more personal strength than did white TGD participants.

TGD people of color indicated having greater sense of well-being at high levels of PTG though less sense of well being at lower levels of growth compared to white TGD.

Cultivating PTG therapeutically

Factors to consider:
- Clients' social and multiple identities
- Abilities, supports and resources
- Existing strengths
- Modality, duration and setting
- Safety and triggers
- Others?
Cultivating PTG Therapeutically

- Focus on
  - Strengths finding and building
  - Transformational coping with effects of trauma
  - Cognitive and emotional flexibility
  - Creativity

Cultivating PTG Therapeutically

- Radical acceptance
- Meaning making
- Self compassion and empathy building
- Others?

Cultivating PTG Therapeutically


Deal - focus on narrative
Feel - exposure and reprocessing work
Heal - focusing on freedom of choice, emaning meaning and Hero (i.e., strengths) archetype
Seal - “mind as filing cabinet.” - organizing and incorporating trauma and growth
Cultivating PTG Therapeutically

Another helpful resource:
The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook:
Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression (Singh, 2018)

Hypothetical Scenarios

The following scenarios are not based on any actual individuals, and are hypothetical. As you respond to them, consider:
- What other information about the individuals are needed, including about their identities?
- How would you begin to work with the individual to cultivate PTG?
  - What would facilitate this?
  - What would be barriers?
Scenario 1
A Filipino American 38 year-old queer identified gender fluid individual has just experienced employment discrimination, resulting in firing, and a friendship ending due to betrayal. They have moderate social support and have achieved much professionally. They are concerned about their finances and where they might live next.

Scenario 2
An African-American transmasculine individual who uses he and they pronouns has experienced rejection from their religious community where they used to be a faith leader. His partner is supportive and some other family members are as well. They have also experienced access challenges where they volunteer and work, and have a history of trauma. They are trying to make sense of these life changes, are insightful, and creative.

Scenario 3
A Latinx gender diverse individual who identifies as femme has experienced a hate crime. She is uncertain of what to do next, has limited social support, and is struggling with basic needs. She has been resourceful prior in life and has been a support to others.
Scenario 4

A White gender fluid individual experienced military-related trauma, and are trying to determine which resources they have available to them to cope. They have some support within and outside of the military though experienced discrimination prior including in their earlier workplace. They tend to be a hopeful person.

Questions and Conversation

Thank you!!