Overcoming Adversity and Post-Traumatic Growth after Brain Injury

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Stop and Smell the Roses

How do people manage to do this?

• Something more than resiliency, and not everyone seems to experience it.
• Multi-faceted adversity – not exclusive to injury
• What is this “thing”.....??
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Post-Traumatic Growth
Positive change experienced as a result of the struggle associated with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.

It made us wonder...

How do people manage to do this?
What factors define this?
What factors make someone more successful in growing through adversity?
How can we as healthcare providers help foster this for persons served?

Post-Traumatic Growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun developed psychological framework in the 1990s, but the concept itself is ancient.

Existential Psychology
Described as both a process and an outcome
“If events divide life into “before and after” they may be traumatic, and also, growth-enhancing” – Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D.

Characteristics defined by Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory
• Appreciation of Life
• Relationships with Others
• New Possibilities in Life
• Personal Strength
• Spiritual Change
Post-Traumatic Growth

- Tedeschi estimates that 50-66% of people experience PTG after trauma
- Openness to Experience and Extraversion
- Men vs. Women
- Social Support
- Psychopathology
- Age
- Cognition may be a factor
- Time since injury

Our Process

- Videotaped interviews with former persons served
- Chose persons served with input from the OWL team
- Developed a set of questions but also included free-flowing conversation
- Gathered qualitative data
- Compared to literature and looked for additional themes

Participant Background

- **Paige**
  - 25 years old
  - CNA, student, MMA athlete
  - Stroke following fibromuscular dysplasia, required subsequent surgeries

- **Ethan**
  - 26 years old
  - Student, active
  - Stroke

- **Dusty**
  - 38 years old
  - Father of 2
  - Business owner
  - Stroke

- **Lizz**
  - 17 years old
  - High school student
  - Athlete (soccer)
  - TBI following car accident

- **Genevieve**
  - 21 years old
  - Recently high school graduate, moved out of state
  - Bacterial Meningitis w/ additional complications

**CONFIDENTIAL**
What did we find?

5 categories from PTGI
- Appreciation of life
- Relationships with others
- New possibilities in life
- Personal strength
- Spiritual change

Modified Personality
Clarity of Values and What’s Important
Redefining Success

Post-Traumatic Growth
What is this “thing”??
Appreciation of Life

Slow down, enjoy little things, relax, don’t stress as much, not take things for granted

Relationships with Others

Fostered connection, more altruistic, non-judgmental, aware of others’ struggles, less ego-centric view of the world
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New Possibilities in Life

Overcoming previous adversities in life and moving forward
Unexpected doors opened
Challenges created new interests, new career path
Personal Strength

"Take more advantage of the things I CAN do"
Newfound trust in their ability to persevere and overcome.

Spiritual Change

Created or strengthened religious bond
Developed new aspects of their spirituality
"God allowed me to get over my negative feelings and blessed my new life"
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Modified Personality

Altruistic, non-judgmental, desire to help others, goal-oriented, aggressively pursue opportunities, more determined, compassionate, patient, and humble
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Clarity of Values and What's Important
• Living with a purpose
• Focus on improving the things I care about
• Opened my eyes, gained perspective
Redefining Success

- Conceptualization of success changed, more value-based
- Higher emphasis on charting goals and progress post-injury
- Completing what you set out to do, no matter what that is
What Can Healthcare Providers Do?

Support inherent strengths and characteristics:

- **Appreciation of Life** – small things are big things
- **Relationships with Others** – trimming and cultivating
- **New Possibilities in Life** – hard to see without help - Rec Therapy!
- **Personal Strength** – EDSO, rehab IS strength
- **Spiritual Change** – particularly if important pre-injury

**Goal Setting**

- Acknowledge incremental progress
- Offer opportunities to see potential positives or to view injury/trauma differently
- Two seemingly disparate things can coexist
  - Not necessarily oppositional

Use Humor

Allow people to be vulnerable
What Can Healthcare Providers Do?

- Educate families about this concept
- Help create a narrative
- Talk to someone who knows
  - Peer mentoring, former persons served, groups, connect past and present family members
- Don’t be too eager, can’t push it!
  - “My injury was a gift”.....?
- It takes TIME

Support inherent strengths and characteristics
Where are they now?

Paige
Continuing to work on her healthcare condition
Finding new ways to be active/healthy

Ethan
In his last semester at ISU, impressive GPA
Working
Living independently

Dusty
Living independently
Helping raise his boys
Planning fishing trips
New career aspirations

Lizz
Transporter at OWL
Driving
Loving life as a “dog mom”

Genevieve
Back to work (before COVID)
Companion for aging grandmother
Enjoying reading fiction

Final Thoughts

O N  W I T H  L I F E .

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