

Post-Traumatic Growth

Lecture 12
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What is trauma?

- Trauma is an event-person complex. The event involves actual or threatened death, or serious injury to self or others, or an experience of 'loss'.
- The person's response in the trauma involves intense fear, helplessness, and perceived lack of control (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).
- Only about 25% of people who face a traumatic event go on to develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (Morrow, 2004, p.168); therefore the perception of the event by individuals plays an important part in the experience of trauma.

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Trauma Growth

- Trauma growth "occurs when the trauma assumes a central place in the life story" (T&C,85). So it is quite different from coping (able to manage trauma), recovery (to come out of the shock), resilience (to emerge quickly out of the trauma), or adjustment (ability to return to baseline functioning).
- 'Growth' or transformation, following trauma, is marked by a paradigm shift in terms of one's schema that underlies one's way of understanding the self and interpreting the world around. The trauma gets integrated into the person's schema.

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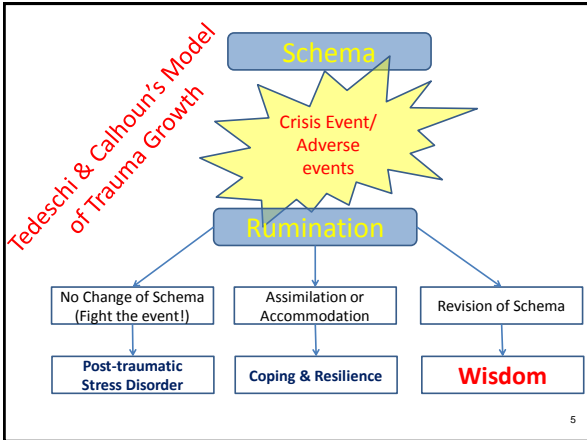
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Models of Trauma Growth

- Joyce (1993): trauma growth is similar to the stages of death and dying proposed by Kubler-Ross (1969).
- Spiegel - four stages of the grief process: shock (the impact of loss), controlled stage (social rituals of mourning), regression (marked by defence mechanisms), and adaptation (assimilation of the traumatic experience).
- Four universal elements of tragedy (Tedeschi & Calhoun's, 1995, p. 4 citing Krook): precipitant (a cause being set in motion), suffering, knowledge (of the worthwhile nature of human life) and affirmation (learning the lessons).

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Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Step 1: Rumination:

- Cognitive response (negative) in terms of reflection on the event! Questioning of existing schemas. Often this process could add to depression, but ultimately also to growth! There is a breakdown of assumptions about the self.
- In this stage there is a movement from *primary control* to *secondary control* (T&C, 1995, pp.62-63). That is, initially they attempt to put up with the loss caused by the trauma by finding an alternative to control the situation. When this proves futile they move to secondary control: "an adjustment of expectations to a difficult environment to reduce unpredictability, disappointment, and stress." But this could be a dysfunctional coping mechanism.

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Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Step 2: Initial Growth

- When a person does take a path towards transformation rather than just coping, the process takes the person to the next stage. At this stage, there is a process of reframing one's schema. The event becomes comprehensible in terms of the new schemas; emotions are now manageable; effective action re-emerges! There is a new way of seeing things.

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Long term internalized paradoxical wisdom

- Longer-term internalization is the integration of cognition and affect: in harnessing the lessons from life; sense of self-efficacy; the appreciation of paradox; and the development of wisdom. This stage is beyond manageability & comprehensibility. This process of evolving a system of meaning is work in progress.

Trauma Growth: Towards Wisdom in three steps

Rumination

Manageability

Initial Growth

Comprehensibility

Internalised paradoxical wisdom

New Meaning

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