

- WESTERN CANADA MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT -

IMPROVING SKILLS & COMPETENCIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2023 – FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2023

Best Western Premier Calgary Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre
1316 33 St NE, T2A 6B6, Calgary, AB

JONAH PAQUETTE, PSY.D.

WORKSHOP #27

Fostering Well-Being: A Strength-Based Approach to Change

Day Three | 12:45pm – 4:00pm



Jonah Paquette, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist, international speaker, and author. He is the author of *Real Happiness* (PESI Publishing, 2015), a self-help book in which he distills the key findings in the field of happiness research, and offers user-friendly tools to achieve lasting well-being. His second book, *The Happiness Toolbox* (PESI Publishing, 2018), a research-based self-help workbook, provides easy-to-use handouts and worksheets designed to increase happiness and life satisfaction.



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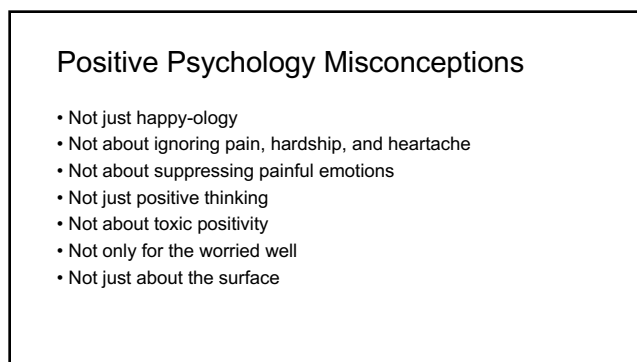
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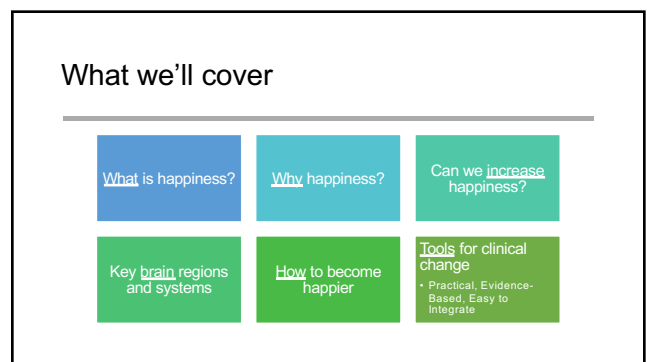
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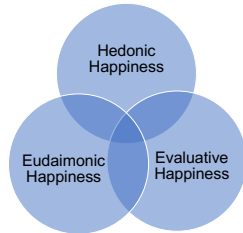


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What is Happiness?



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What is happiness?

- Hedonic Happiness
 - Positive emotions about the past, present, and future
 - A greater proportion of positive emotions versus negative emotions*
- Evaluative Happiness
 - Essentially equates to Life Satisfaction
- Eudaimonic Happiness
 - A sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging

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Barriers to Happiness



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Barrier #1:
Hedonic
Adaptation

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"People are exposed to many messages that encourage them to believe that a change of weight, scent, hair color (or coverage), car, clothes, or many other aspects will produce a marked improvement in their happiness. Our research suggests a moral, and a warning: Nothing that you focus on will make as much difference as you think."

– Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D.

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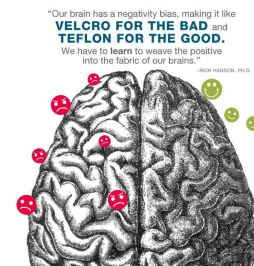
Barrier #2: Genetics



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Barrier #3: A “Negative” Brain

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Barrier #4: The Way We Pursue Happiness



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Barrier #5: External Circumstances



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Core Habits of Well-Being After Hardship

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| ❖ Give Thanks | ❖ Awe and Wonder |
| ❖ Be of Service | ❖ Be Good to Ourselves |
| ❖ Make Meaning | ❖ Mindful Awareness |
| ❖ Deep Connections | ❖ Savor the Good |
| ❖ Cultivate Optimism | ❖ Psychological Richness |
| ❖ Cultivate Growth | |

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Embrace Awe and Wonder



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What do you feel when you...

- Gaze up at the Milky Way?
- See a beautiful sunrise or sunset?
- Witness an act of great compassion or courage?
- Watch a child learn to walk?
- See a mind-blowing work of art?
- Attend an incredible performance?

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Reflection

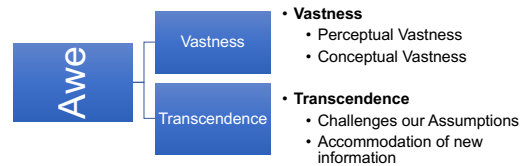
- *What have been some of your most awe-inspiring experiences? Take a moment and identify one that comes to mind.*
- *How did you feel during and after the experience?*

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Defining Awe



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Who Experiences Awe?

- Personality factors
 - Extraversion, Openness to New Experiences
- Character Traits
 - Optimism, Gratitude, Creativity, Love of Learning, Appreciation of Beauty
- Spirituality and Religion
 - Conflicting data; sources of awe differ
- Socioeconomic Studies

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Cross-Cultural Research

- Universal human emotion found across all cultures
- Differences in frequency of experiencing awe (Razavi, 2016)
 - Comparison of US, Poland, Malaysia, Iran
- Differences in sources of awe (Bai, 2017)
 - US/Europe: more likely to experience awe through nature or through themselves
 - East Asia: more likely to experience awe through another person

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Psychological Benefits of Awe

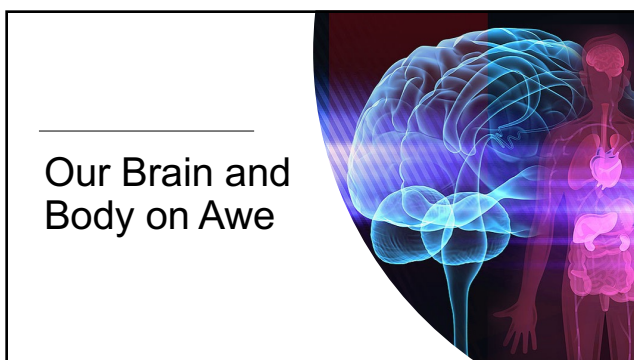
- Enhances Positive Emotions (Joye, 2015)
- Increases Life Satisfaction (Rudd, 2012)
- Lastingly Boosts our Mood (Stellar, 2017)
- The “Small Self” Effect (Bai, 2017)
- Decreases Materialism (Jiang, 2018; Rudd, 2012)
- Lowers Stress (Anderson, 2018)
- Decreases PTSD symptoms (Anderson, 2018)
- Expands our sense of time (Rudd, 2012)
- Increases Humility (Stellar, 2018)

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Reflection

- *Beyond increased connection, compassion, and curiosity – what other benefits might you expect to see from the experience of awe?*

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Awe and Inflammation

DPES Subscale	IL-6	IL-6
Awe	-0.33***	-0.33**
Amusement	-0.02	0.16
Compassion	-0.09	0.05
Contentment	-0.20*	0.04
Joy	-0.23*	-0.11
Love	-0.10	-0.07
Pride	-0.21*	-0.009

Note. β values for positive emotions predicting IL-6 and controlling for participant's BMI. In column 1, emotions are separately entered into regressions and in column 2 they are simultaneously entered.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Your Brain on Awe

- Activation in areas linked to interpersonal bonding and release of oxytocin
- Decreased activation of Default Mode Network (DMN)
- Decreased activation in the parietal lobe
 - Contributes to sense of self, orients us to world around us
 - May explain the "out of body" experience many report during moments of awe
- Decreased activation of subgenual prefrontal cortex
 - Linked to anxious rumination

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Awe and the Brain

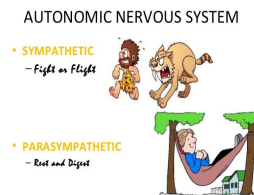
- Sixty audience members wearing electroencephalogram (EEG) headgear
- Able to detect unique and specific brainwave "signatures" during particular awe-inspiring moments during the performance



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Awe and our Nervous System

- Typically work in reverse of each other (like a hot and cold faucet)
- Awe appears to be a rare state in which both branches are activated simultaneously

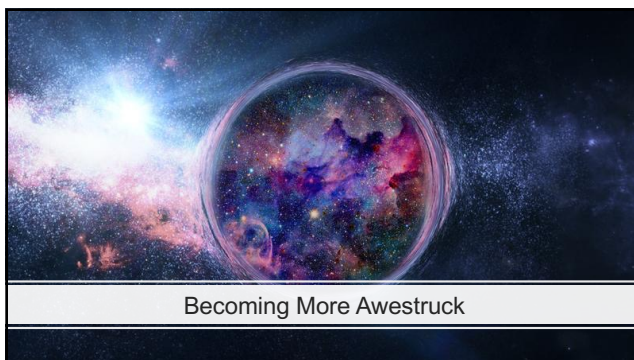


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Incorporating Awe in Clinical Work

- Link Awe to the presenting problem
 - E.g., discuss the effects of awe on mood, stress, social belonging
- Explore past experiences the patient has had that we can see through this lens
- Assign realistic "awe homework" assignments in line with client preferences
 - E.g., short visits to nature, reading about awe-inspiring people, learning about topics of interest, connecting to art
 - Encourage journaling and savoring practices to accompany this
- Review and consolidate experience in next session

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Becoming More Awestruck

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Reflection

- *What something you often take for granted but is actually awe-inspiring?*
- *What is one step you can take towards seeking more wonder in the week ahead?*

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Gratitude

"He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for that which he has." –Epictetus



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What is one thing you feel thankful for in this moment?



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Gratitude

"A sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life."
– Robert Emmons

"An antidote to negative emotions, a neutralizer of envy, avarice, hostility, worry, and irritation."
– Sonya Lyubomirsky

"Gratitude is an attitude, but it is much more. Gratitude has also been depicted as an emotion, a mood, a moral virtue, a habit, a motive, a personality trait, a coping response, and even a way of life."
–Robert Emmons

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The Gratitude 2-step

- 1) We recognize the presence of something good in our lives
- 2) We recognize that the source of this goodness lies outside of ourselves

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Benefits of Gratitude

Psychological

Lower Depression, Anxiety, Stress (Seligman, 2005)

Joy, enthusiasm, happiness, love, optimism (Emmons, 2007)

Increased well-being, life satisfaction (Wood, 2010)

Recovery from PTSD (Kashdan, 2005)

More able to forgive (Luskin, 2010)

Improved perception of social support

Other Benefits

Overall health improved (Emmons, 2007)

Better sleep (Wood, 2009)

Increased immune system functioning

Exercise (Emmons, 2007)

Decreased physical pain

Romantic relationships (Algoe, 2010)

Social Bonds (McCullough, 2002)

More forgiving (Rye, 2012)

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The Grateful Brain

- Left Prefrontal Cortex (Zahn, 2009)
- Anterior Cingulate Cortex (Fox, 2015)
 - Interpersonal bonding
- Pregenuel Anterior Cingulate Cortex (pgACC) (Wong, 2016)
 - Links emotional and cognitive centers of brain
 - Lasting differences months later
- Hypothalamus
 - Sleep, Stress, Metabolism
- Increased gray matter functioning
- Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex (reward circuitry)
- Serotonin, Dopamine (Zahn, 2008)

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Practices to Cultivate Gratitude

- 3 Good Things
- Gratitude Letter/Visit
- The Hidden Helpers
- How Far You've Come
- Your Inner George Bailey
- Grateful Reminiscence
- The Things We Take for Granted
- Thanks for where we are

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Foster Connection

"Happiness is love. Full stop." –George Vaillant



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Alarming Trends

- Increased loneliness across time
- Influence of technology
- Impact of social media
- Decreased volunteerism
- Fewer close friends

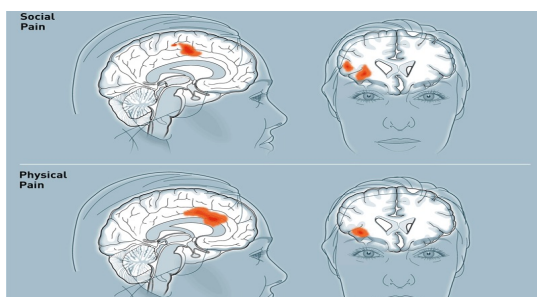


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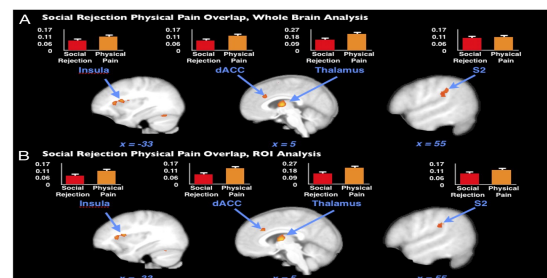
Lessons from "Cyberball"



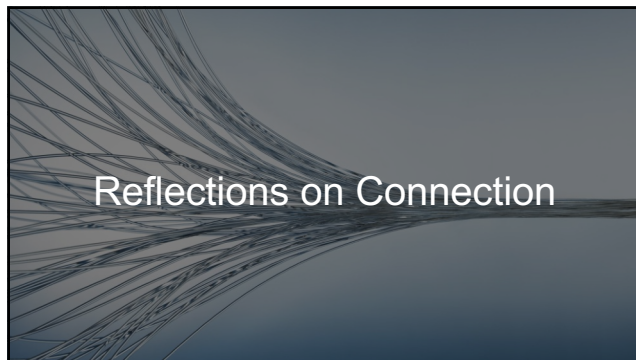
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Benefits of Connection

Psychological

- Happiness and Well-Being (King & Diener, 2005)
- Bi-directional relationship
- Lower levels of depression and anxiety (Lyubomirsky, 2007)
- Decreased anxiety (Cohen, 2004)
- Improved sleep (Cohen, 2004)

Physical

- Improved physical health/immune systems (Pressman, 2005)
- Longevity (House, 1988)
 - On par with smoking, substance, exercise
- "Blue Zone" findings (Beutner, 2010)
 - Sardinia, Okinawa, Loma Linda, Icaria, Nicoya

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Our Brain and Body on Connection

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor Social Support linked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activation of the pain centers of our brain • Cingulate gyrus activation in social pain experiences • Increased activation of amygdala • Telomere shrinkage (Epel, 2009) • Cortisol dysregulation • Seeing others' pain activates our own pain centers (Botvinick, 2005) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Social Support linked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased cardiovascular reactivity (Lepore, 1993) • Decreased blood pressure (Spitzer, 1992) • Decreased cortisol (Kiecolt-Glaser, 1984) • Improved immune system functioning (Cohen, 2003) • Slows cognitive decline (Bassuk, 1999) • Vagus nerve stimulation • Increased release of oxytocin |
|---|---|

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Prioritizing Connection

- Felt-Sense of Connection
- Gratitude Letter and Visit
- Loving-kindness meditation
- Reminders of Connection
- Mental Subtraction of Relationships
- Best Possible Self for Relationships
- Leveraging technology for good

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A 4th Happy Life?

- However, 10-15% of people resonate more with something else



- Psychological Richness:
 - A life marked by "interesting experiences in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective." (Oishi, 2020)

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Reflection

What experiences have you had that were novel or complex, that resulted in a peak experience or change in perspective?

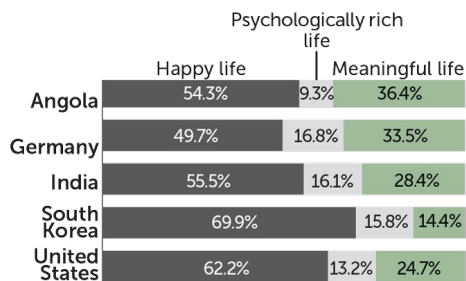
What are some experiences or activity that have made you feel alive, pushed your comfort zones, or sparked your passion?

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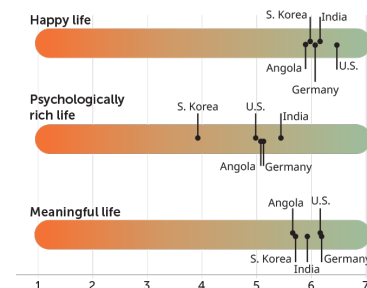
Psychological Richness (Oishi, 2020)

- An alternative to the hedonic vs. eudaimonic model
 - Psychometrically distinct from these as well
- 9-country cross-cultural study found that 17% (and even higher in some countries) preferred the psychological rich life over the hedonic or eudaimonic life
- Characterized by variety, novelty, and interest

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Psychological Richness



Some link to trait characteristic of Curiosity



Linked to individuals who experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely



Linked with individuals high in Openness on Big-5



Linked to lower levels of regret in surveys

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Strategies to Enhance Psychological Richness

- Learning new skills
- Seek activities that yield flow states
- Undo a regret
- Stretch beyond your comfort zone
- Become a lifelong learner
- Foster curiosity
- Write your obituary
- Travel if able to; if not, seek small adventures
- Lean into things that scare or intimidate you

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Strengths and Flow



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Signature Strengths

- 24 Signature Strengths, 6 core virtues (Seligman & Peterson)
- Character Strengths and Virtues – Classification Handbook (Peterson & Seligman)
- Assessing/Testing strengths
 - VSI (Values and Strengths Inventory)
 - BST (Brief Strengths Test)

www.viacharacter.org

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Examples of Items

- Love of Learning
 - Do you feel an adrenaline rush from learning new things?
- Kindness
 - Have you done good deeds for strangers on a regular basis?
- Appreciation of Beauty
 - Does a sense of awe sweep over you as you contemplate the vastness of nature?
- Creativity
 - Is your mind constantly challenging the status quo and looking for a better way?

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wisdom	courage	humanity	transcendence	justice	moderation
//creativity //curiosity //judgement //love of learning //perspective	//bravery //persistence //honesty //zest	//love //kindness //social intelligence	//appreciation of beauty //gratitude //hope //humour //spirituality	//teamwork //fairness //leadership	//forgiveness //modesty //prudence //self-control

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Identifying Signature Strengths

- Is it authentic?
- Does it show up often?
- Do others notice it?
- Does using it energize me?
- If unable to express it, would I feel empty?

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Reflection

- Which of the above strengths resonate for you most? Which do you see in yourself, or have others in your life noticed in you?

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Benefits of Incorporating Strengths

- Decreased depression among those who regularly use their strengths (MacDougall, 2018)
- Higher rates of overall well-being (Blanchard, 2019) and happiness levels (Schutte, 2018)
- Increased levels of optimism (Uliaszek, 2020)
- Buffers against pandemic related stress (Waters, 2021)
- Stronger social and romantic relationships (Kashdan, 2017)

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Practices for Strengths Work

- Identify your strengths
 - Take the free VIA survey at viacharacter.org
- You at your best
 - Craft a new narrative through a strength perspective
- Identify ways you currently use your strengths
- Strengths during hard times
- Using Strengths in new ways

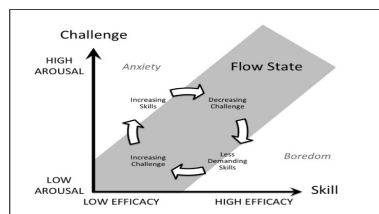
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Identifying and Using Signature Strengths

- Take test to identify core strengths
 - Ensure that identified strengths resonate with the individual
- Identify 3-5 core "signature" strengths that are both resonant and high scoring
- Choose 1 signature strength per day
- Use it in a way that is outside your normal routine

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Flow (Csikszentmihalyi)



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Flow

- A state of complete absorption in what one does
- Moments of peak performance
- Matching skills to challenge
- How to Increase Flow
 - Activities that engage our skills and strengths
 - Using Signature Strengths in new ways

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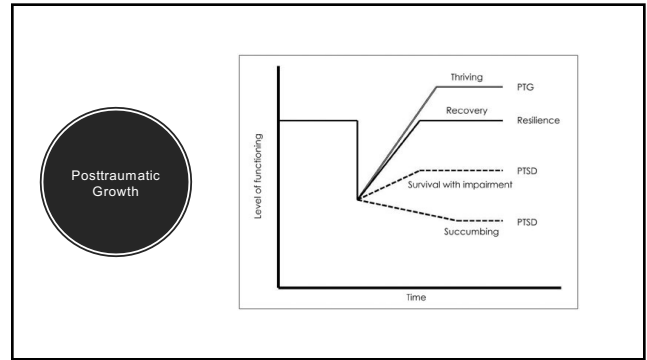
Flow and the Brain

- Neuroanatomical changes
 - transient hypo-frontality
 - temporary deactivation of the prefrontal cortex
- Neurochemical Changes
 - Large quantities of norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, anandamide
- Neuroelectrical Changes
 - Increased alpha waves to enhance focus & concentration

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Not so rare?

(Bonanno, 2005; 2012)

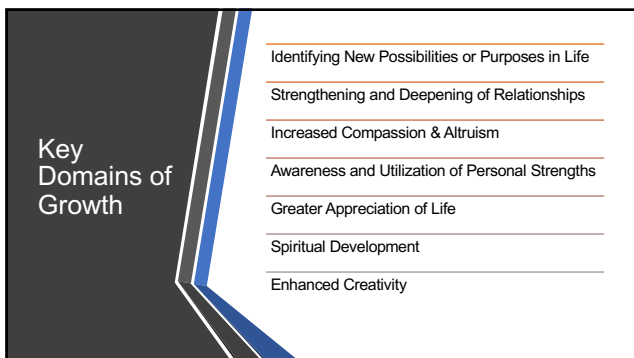
- Following trauma, on average:
 - 10-15% will experience chronic symptoms of trauma following the event (impairment)
 - 25% will experience symptom remission (recovery)
 - 60% report growth following trauma (PTG)
- A cross-cultural phenomenon
 - PTG has been studied across numerous cultures/countries including Turkey, Germany, Japan, China, Bosnia, Australia, Israel, and others (Taku & Tedeschi, 2021)
- Well established
 - research base has existed since the Vietnam war.
- More common than we might expect:
 - Pietrzak, 2010: 72% of Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans with PTSD report moderate/high growth
 - Tsai 2015: 72% of all veterans with PTSD reported moderate/great PTG

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Predictors of PTG

- Age at the time of trauma
 - Late childhood-onward = greater likelihood to experience PTG
- Coping style
 - More likely among those with active coping strategies
- Tendency towards rumination
 - Inverse relationship with PTG
- Acceptance vs. Resistance

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Posttraumatic Growth as an Intervention

- Compatible with previously discussed research-backed approaches for PTSD
- Integrative in nature:
 - Elements of cognitive, narrative, behavioral, and existential approaches



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5 Stages of PTG as Intervention

Education

Emotion Regulation

Constructive Self-Disclosure

Creation of Trauma Narrative

Service

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Education

Psychoeducation on the impact of trauma

Understanding symptoms and reactions in the context of trauma

Increasing understanding and compassion for one's own struggles

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Emotion Regulation

Helping the client to manage sympathetic nervous system arousal

- Reinforce that SNS hyperactivity is normal in response to trauma, but must be unlearned in the aftermath

Skills to cope with intrusive thinking

Decrease negative rumination

Learn to accept rather than react

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Constructive Self-Disclosure

- Sharing the story of the trauma but with an emphasis on the aftermath following trauma
- Aim is not to desensitize (like in Prolonged Exposure) but to focus explicitly on the aftereffects following the trauma
- Come to see the trauma as a catalyst for change
- Explore how the person has changed in the key domains
 - New possibilities
 - Changes to relationships
 - Personal Strengths
 - Compassion & Altruism
 - Creativity
 - Appreciation for Life
 - Spiritual Growth

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Creation of Trauma Narrative

- Reconsider life narrative in the aftermath of trauma
- Organize a coherent narrative with trauma as the turning point leading to growth
- Observe and reinforce the presence of growth elements in life narrative
- Help client to see the paradoxes between:
 - Gain and Loss
 - Grief and Gratitude
 - Vulnerability and Strength

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Service



- Finding ways to give back
- Helping to guide others sharing a similar journey
- Engaging in meaningful activities for others in line with one's own values

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Self-Compassion

"If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete."
—Jack Kornfield



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Self-Compassion

Key Concepts:

- 3 components (Neff, 2011)
 - Mindful Awareness
 - Common Humanity
 - Self-Directed Kindness
- Self-Compassion vs. Self-Esteem
 - "Contingent self-worth"
 - Unstable concept

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Barriers to Self-Compassion

- "It will make me weak"
- "It's selfish"
- "I won't achieve my goals"
- "A pity party"
- Others?

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Benefits of Self-Compassion

Psychological

Lower rates of depression & anxiety (Neff, 2011)
 Recovery from PTSD (Thompson & Waltz, 2008)
 Eating Disorders (Leary & Adams, 2007)
 Cigarette Smoking (Kelly, 2010)
 Greater compassion towards others

Other

Alleviates chronic pain
 Improved lower back pain (Carson, 2005)
 Chronic Acne (Kelly, 2009)
 Closer relationships (Germer, 2009)
 Increased altruism (Crocker & Canavello, 2008)
 Romantic Relationships (Neff, 2011)
 School & Work (Neff, 2011)

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The Physiology of Self-Compassion

Self-Criticism

- Increased amygdala response
- R Prefrontal Cortex
- Cortisol increases
- Adrenaline released

Self-Compassion

- L Prefrontal Cortex
- Increased PNS activation
- Breathing slows
- Insula activation
- Decreased cortisol
- Increased oxytocin

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Fostering Self-Compassion

- Self-Compassion Break
- Identifying Needs
- How I'd treat a friend
- What you admire about yourself
- Give someone, or yourself, a hug
- Check in with yourself
- Appreciate your strengths
- Drop the shoulds and comparisons

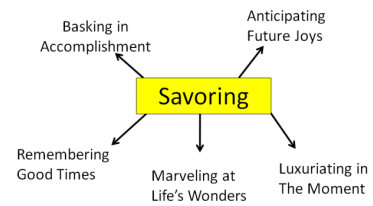
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Savoring the Good



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5 Paths to Savoring



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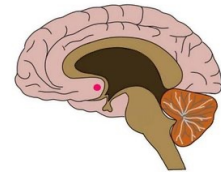
Savoring

- | <u>Why</u> | <u>How</u> |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negativity Bias • Positive experiences come and go • Using the mind to change the brain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased neural firing • Long-term changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 A's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice or Create • Amplify* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrich the experience • 5-10 seconds or more • Absorb <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let it sink in |

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Savoring and the Brain

- Ventral Striatum
 - Linked to sustaining positive emotions and reward
- Left Prefrontal Cortex
- Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex
- Decreased Cortisol
- Increased serotonin, dopamine



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Tips for Savoring (Fred Bryant)

- Share the Experience with others ("Capitalizing")
- Memory Building
 - Mental Notes, Photos/Souvenirs
- Self-Congratulate
- Pay attention to our senses
- Avoid multitasking
- Absorption
- Ruminant on the Good

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Get in Touch!

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Instagram: @jonahpaquettepsyd

Books: Happily Even After, Awestruck, Real Happiness, The Happiness Toolbox

Newsletter: Three Good Things Thursday

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