Cognitive processes of posttraumatic growth in Chinese culture: a conceptual framework

Chim, K, Dubrow-Marshall, LJ, Eachus, P and Tang, A

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Background

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to psychological positive changes which occur as a result of struggling with a range of highly difficult life circumstances. PTG can be manifested in five major domains, including 1) increased appreciation of life, 2) increased sense of personal strength, 3) improved important interpersonal relationships, 4) changed priorities and recognition of new possibilities, and 5) richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Current models of PTG (e.g., Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2010; Joseph and Linley, 2005) conceptualize that a challenging life event can initiate critical bipolar cognitive processes known as intrusive rumination (uncontrollable, unwanted event-related thoughts) and deliberate rumination (controlled, constructive event-related thoughts).

PTG is not conceptualised as an increase in well-being or a decrease in psychological distress. Paradoxically, PTG and distress are thought to coexist as two separate, independent constructs since continuing levels of effectively managed distress may fuel PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Understanding PTG: The Yin Yang Approach

Taoism emphasises “way of life”. The Chinese word “tao” (道) literally means “the way”. The Taoist perspective recognises the way nature changes, and all things are interconnected and interdependent in the universe.

The Taoist concept of Yin Yang represents the idea that opposite things are complementary and inseparable, and they give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. There exists neither absolute black nor absolute white.

Psychological Distress (Unprocessed)
Psychological Distress (Processed)

Impact of cultural, religious and philosophical belief system of human emotions and life on both distal and proximate influences on the PTG process (Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2010).

The relationships among core beliefs challenge, intrusive rumination, deliberate rumination, distress, and PTG are not necessarily sequential but are all interdependent and interconnected through fluidity and stability.

Some Main Issues in PTG Literature

• A paucity of literature on the specific aspects of socio-cultural elements in affecting the PTG process.
• Although cross-cultural studies are scarce, previous studies have shown cultural differences in both levels of PTG and the role of deliberate rumination in PTG among Japanese and U.S. college students (Taku, Cann, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2009; Shimamoto & Pignatelli, 2012).
• The Taoist perspective gives a holistic, dynamic, and paradoxical worldview which is seen as different from the dualistic, reductionist, and dialectical thinking which influences every aspect of life in Western cultures (e.g., Zheng & Gray, 2015; Abramson, 2003).

Diagram illustrating the proposed Yin Yang approach to understanding the Western conceptualisation of the process of PTG.

Literature Cited