



Abstract

The possibility of positive psychological changes as the result of struggling with highly stressful life events, known as posttraumatic growth (PTG), has received considerable attention since the 1990s. The purpose of this study was to simulate a conversation between a trauma survivor and examine if the trauma survivor would report higher PTG if they knew that the listener had also experienced PTG after being through a similar stressful life event. This examination was conducted using a randomized priming experimental method focusing on two types of highly stressful life events: death and romantic relationships. The results of a two-way factorial ANOVA showed that there were non-significant main effects of priming or type of event on PTG. However, there was a significant interaction effect. Priming effect was not observed in people who experienced death of a loved one; yet, the effect was significant for people who experienced romantic issues. People in the PTG-prime condition showed higher levels of PTG than those in the non-PTG-prime condition. These results showed that PTG was affected for individuals who experienced a romantic issue by priming the imaginary listener's traumatic experiences, but not for people who lost their loved ones. There is a possible indication that the effect of the individual to relate to the listener's experience may vary depending on the event's circumstances.

Research Question

Would people report higher PTG when they know that their listener has also experienced PTG?

Introduction

- ❖ Posttraumatic Growth (PTG): The positive psychological changes experienced as a result of a stressful life event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).
 - Factors that influence the process of PTG •
- ❖ **Sociocultural influences:** Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun & Tedeschi (2011) predicted that exposure to growth themes will influence PTG; no relationship was found. However, 98% of the sample reported exposure.
- ❖ **Disclosure:** Whether desired to or not, disclosing and having a supportive other both aid the process of PTG (Taku, Tedeschi, Cann & Calhoun, 2009; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).
 - **PTG** is possible for traumatic event survivors and/or listeners in relation to disclosure (Weiss, 2004).
- ❖ **Characteristics of the listener:** Knowing that the listener has “been there” builds credibility (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Methods

Participants

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (N = 642)				
	Romantic Issues(N = 105)		Death (N = 110)	
	n	%	n	%
Male	25	23.80	35	31.80
Female	80	76.20	75	68.20
PTG priming condition	56	53.30	58	52.70
Non-PTG priming condition	49	46.70	52	47.30
Mean age (SD)	19.21		18.89	

Measures

- ❖ **Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)-Modified:** 21 item questionnaire that measures personal growth experienced after a stressful event. The statements were changed to questions to further simulate a conversation between the imaginary listeners and participants.

Effects of Priming the Shared Traumatic Experiences on Posttraumatic Growth

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Procedures and Measures

•Participants identified their **most stressful life event** experienced within the last 5 years and answered a series of questions regarding this event.

Questionnaire

Priming Scenario

•Participants conversed with an imaginary person who experienced a stressful event similar to their own.

•Non PTG-prime: Imaginary listener experienced psychological pain as a result of the event, and no positive change.

•PTG-prime: Imaginary listener experienced psychological pain, but also has changed in a positive way.

Randomly Assigned

Results

- ❖ 2 (Prime) x 2 (Type of Event) factorial ANOVA was conducted.
- ❖ Non-significant main effects of priming and type of event.
- ❖ **Significant interaction effect**, $F(1, 201) = 4.36, p < .05$.
- ❖ Priming effect was only observed in those who experienced **romantic issues**.
- ❖ **PTG-prime condition** > Non-PTG-prime condition.

Type of Event	Non-PTG	PTG
Death	~62	~60
Romantic Issues	~60	~68

Discussion

- ❖ PTG was affected for individuals who experienced a romantic issue only by priming the imaginary listener's traumatic experiences.
- ❖ Differences may be due to event characteristics.
- ❖ Listener does contribute to the process of posttraumatic growth.
- ❖ **Positive implications:** Proximate socio-cultural factors guide individuals in experiencing PTG.
- ❖ **Negative implications:** Pressure to merely express experiencing PTG.
- ❖ **Limitations:** No control group, type of events selected, priming activity.
- ❖ **Future directions:** Test in younger age group, develop new priming activity.

References

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