Mar 28th, 10:10 AM - 11:00 AM

Autoethnographic Inquiry into Identity Transformation and Posttraumatic Growth Following (TBI) and (PTSD)

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Genetti, Dee Phyllis, "Autoethnographic Inquiry into Identity Transformation and Posttraumatic Growth Following (TBI) and (PTSD)" (2018). Lesley University Community of Scholars Day. 7.
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Abstract:

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) is a phenomenon of growth in the aftermath of suffering extreme life adversities that challenges one’s core beliefs and worldviews. Psychological well-being may be positively changed in domains of self-perception, relationships, and philosophy of life. Psychological growth, however, is not inevitable after trauma. My research is an autoethnographic inquiry into my journey of resilience, on-going recovery and identity transformation. I explore the phenomenon of PTG concurrently with my recovery as a survivor of a devastating traumatic brain injury (TBI) and co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a car crash. In the aftermath of TBI, skills and personal resources necessary to cope with disabilities caused are unavailable to the survivor. My research questions if PTG can occur in a survivor of TBI and PTSD, and if so, how is it characterized. I explore whether TBI and PTSD can co-exist as the question of loss of consciousness arises concerning the validity of the traumatic memory to be etched and recalled, as in flashbacks. I explore whether survivors can derive a coherent narrative into their autobiographical memory base. I also investigate whether PTG, which is growth can co-exist with PTSD, which is distress.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method of research that interrelates the concepts of culture, self and other, culminating into a narrative. Autoethnographies “show struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning.” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000p.433). Stories can move oppressed people to action. I have been compelled to be transparent in the reconstruction and truth telling of my own story/identity transformation and further will use leadership in both
activism and ethical witnessing to the social injustice of the underserved population of survivors of an acquired TBI and consequential PTSD, whom become relegated into the marginalized identity of the TBI disability culture.

Therefore, my objectives for this presentation are: (1) To examine and identify the process of autoethnography; (2) to assess the phenomenon of PTG for the welfare of self and others; and (3) to identify the hybrid diagnosis and efficacy for treatment of TBI and PTSD. As well, to raise awareness of disability identity through the development of this autoethnography.

Interested audiences will be other medical, rehabilitation and mental health professions, researchers, scholars, teachers, as well as advocates, family members, caretakers, friends, and most importantly, fellow survivors. The cultural attributes of the TBI experience has been demonstrated to be universal across all cultures.

My approach to the problem is innovative and original. Very little research has been done on the issues of TBI, PTSD and PTG by insiders. Therefore, I decided to pursue a study involving my own experience as a participant-researcher. Autoethnography portrays the struggle of people to overcome adversity. The fundamental values of autoethnography support product knowledge of normative, transformative, and emancipatory stories, giving voice to those who have unique and challenging experiences, are marginalized, and are vulnerable. Most narratives are accomplished in retrospect, similar to accounts of PTG, and in contrast my account and recovery are concurrent over a ten-year period. Moreover, there are not enough chronicled accounts of or by individuals with TBI and co-occurring PTSD to benefit as role models or case studies.

In conclusion I find that PTG is a paradox whereas losses have generated beneficial and valued gains. However, psychological growth is not inevitable after trauma. Those whose perception
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and beliefs are not challenged by extraordinary events report fewer benefits than those experience severe trauma. PTG elicits as a result of the struggle to reconstruct life after a traumatic event. It occurs from the interactions of coping, social support, personality variables and requires reflective rumination. The PTG model is for rebuilding assumptions so “they can move on with their lives, which no longer seems to be wholly defined by their victimization. Victims become survivors” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p.169). And “those who try to put their lives back as they were remain fractured and vulnerable. But those who accept the breakage and build themselves anew become more resilient and open to new ways of living” (Joseph, 2012b.p.817).

Short Description of my project:

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) is a phenomenon of growth in the aftermath of suffering extreme life adversities that challenges one’s core beliefs. Psychological well-being may be positively changed in domains of self-perception, relationships, and philosophy of life. My research is an autoethnographic inquiry into my journey of resilience, on-going recovery and identity transformation. I explore the phenomenon of PTG concurrently with my recovery as a survivor of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a devastating car crash.

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Format: Individual Presentation

Brief Bibliography:
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