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Deep Positive Psychology: A Sustainable Well-being Model from a Perspective of Transcendence

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a sustainable well-being model based on the integral perspective called Inclusive Positivity in the concept of deep positive psychology. Traditional positive psychology has a tendency to focus on the importance of positive emotion, optimistic attitude, intentional efforts, social personalities, and individual aspects of happiness. However this paper will show also the importance of the opposite side of these factors from the point of sustainability from a perspective of transcendence. First, I will show the empirical data of the survivors of the 311 Great Higashinohon Earthquake disaster, which shows the pessimistic people grow more than optimistic people. Second, I will report the Finnish tradition supporting the introverted Finnish well-being, investigated by participant observation. With these research outcomes, I will present the components of an alternative well-being, which is essential and specially cultivated through the trauma/ difficulty for survival from a perspective of transcendence. The concept of Inclusive Positivity is based on self-transcendence, and is promoted by the meditative and nature-friendly culture in Japan and Finland. I call this alternative and holistic field of approach, deep positive psychology. Deep positive psychology will integrate the traditional human-centered and universe-centered perspective, and enable to describe the sustainable well-being.

Key words : deep positive psychology, transcendence, inclusive positivity, sustainable well-being, PTG

1 . Introduction

1.1. Limits of the human-centered perspective in traditional psychology

Sustainable well-being is one of the most important topics of discussion in the interdisciplinary field in this time of planet crises. In order to provide the holistic solution we need universe-centered, not just a human-centered perspective. This paper introduces an alternative thought from the idea of deep positive psychology. Deep positive psychology is my naming for the positive psychology which emphasis inclusive positivity with universe-centered perspective,

which is realized through self-transcendence, more holistic and integral to cover the planet level sustainable well-being.

Traditional positive psychology has a tendency to focus on the importance of positive emotions (1), optimistic attitudes (2), self-controls (3), social connectedness (4), and individual aspects of happiness. Most positive intervention programs emphasize the control or modification of one's behavior, cognition, affection, or environment, which is dependent upon human strength or will.

Positivity for well-being are needless to say important, however it is also true that we cannot escape from the negativity. There are impossible

matters to control, and we cannot deny the social and environmental negative aspects when we consider the worldwide, sustainable well-being. As long as well-being is believed to be an act of overcoming and winning over our negative emotions, weaknesses, and difficulties, this outlook unfortunately will eventually fail. Because we are mortal and the world is consisted of yin and yang.

This is the limit of the human-centered perspective, and is the reason why we need a broader perspective as universe-centered, in order to consider the more holistic and sustainable well-being.

1.2. Universe-centered perspective and Inclusive Positivity

I will present the concept of Inclusive Positivity which covers the holistic issues with the universe-centered perspective. With the universe-centered perspective, sustainable well-being is explained the integrations such as;

1. Positive and negative emotions
2. Optimistic/utopian and pessimistic/ realistic views
3. Extrovert and Introvert personalities
4. Intentional efforts/ willingness and surrender
5. Hedonistic/ pleasurable and eudemonic/ meaningful lives
6. Human and nature standpoints

In this paper I will focus on the positive aspects of the pessimism and introverted personality, in other words the strength in weakness with the universe-centered perspective.

My hypothesis is as follows; Sustainable well-being is realized through the universe-centered, not human-centered perspective. This sustainable well-being is observed as altruistic/pro-social behavior, which appears instinctively upon the moment crisis. At the crisis in order to survive this mode brings an end fighting with others, as

well as ourselves, society, and nature so that minimizes energy consumption. This requires both intentional efforts and willingness to surrender whatever is destined. These elements of a sustainable well-being are realized through self-transcendence, described well with Inclusive positivity in deep positive psychology.

1.3. Self-transcendence/ the joy of being from the universe-centered perspective

I have developed a hierarchy of well-being model based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (5). Traditional positive psychology focuses at the level under self-actualization, which could be explained as the fulfillment of human needs, in other words, the joy of receiving or achieving something positive at each level, from "emotion" up to "meaning." Inclusive positivity includes the higher level, or so called self-transcendence from the universe-centered perspective. At that level well-being is explained as the joy of being or surrendering to whatever is destined with grace. Maslow mentioned that hierarchy of needs has two layers, the lower is called basic needs and the above level is called growth needs based on the value of being (5). However with the human-centered perspective, the growth needs could be said that is also based on human desire to fulfill self, in other words self-actualization.

Maslow's concept of self-actualization actually includes universe-centered perspective partly, mentioned as "transcendental self-actualization" referring the highly self-actualized people (6). However his perspective was still under the traditional psychology, which is human-centered. My suggestion is to transform the perspective fundamentally integrated with existential aspect to understand the human nature in order to discuss well-being. Naess uses the term Self-transcendence (upper case S) instead of self-transcendence (lower case s) in order to distinguish the standpoints of the selves (7). My deep positive psychology has the similar intension as Naess, which emphasis the holistic, universe-

centered perspective, using Self-transcendence.

1.4. Self-transcendence as a human basic nature

The self-transcendence is placed at the top level of the model of hierarchy of needs, if we apply it to the Maslow's Model. Although Maslow mentioned it very difficult to transcend and only the limited people can reach such developmental stage (6), the self-transcendence may be explained as a human basic nature. Because pro-social behavior, which is often mentioned as the attitude of self-transcendent people, is known as an instinctive act to preserve oneself, the species, the community, and even the planet.

The clue of the idea that self-transcendence is a human basic nature is also found in ecology and anthropology. In nature, as Imanishi a Japanese ecologist explains in his "Theory of Habitat Segregation (8)" which is developed as symbiosis that our lives are supported by mutual complements, not by the Law of the jungle. De Waal mentions in his book "The age of empathy; nature's lessons for a kinder society (9)" that even the animals display behavior that is based on empathy and cooperation. Pro-social could be human basic nature. Helping others is proved to contribute one's well-being (10).

V. Frankl mentioned meditative appreciation of beauty as the human ultimate attitude to survival. In his book on his observation of the concentration camp he wrote the beauty of nature were overwhelming and power to forget unbearable, miserable, and painful reality at the camp. (11). The experience can be called a peek experience which is the experience of transcendence.

These evidence suggest that the self-transcendence may be an element of our nature, an essential part of our biological need. It can be said that pro-social behavior and appreciation of beauty are human basic nature which erupt spontaneously specially at the moment of crises.

1.5. Posttraumatic Growth as self-transcendence

Being pro-social and transcendental growth are known to be realized after disaster so called disaster utopia (12) and Posttraumatic growth (PTG, 13). PTG is not just a matter of recovering from a given trauma but also concerns existential growth accompanied by the negative emotions. The research outcome of the positive correlation between PTG, Posttraumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD), and Sense of Coherence (SOC) (14) explains two important aspects of PTG. One is led by the positive correlation of PTG and PTSD, which is that PTG has strengths and pains at the same time. This also explains that PTSD has a possibility to foster one's personal growth through negative experiences. Another aspect is that PTG could be a strong stress buffering characteristic by the fact of positive correlation between PTSD and SOC, which is an index of the stress resistance.

The world top class well-being of Finland in the 21st century could be explained as a case of PTG. Finland is nominated the happiest country in the world in 2018 as well as 2017. This must be resulted heavily on its fair, clear and trustworthy social system, however their happiness also related to their subjective well-being. I assume that the characteristics of the Finnish, pessimistic and introverted personality, must contribute the national well-being in Finland. The Finnish difficulties, we see in the history of continuous wars even after the world wars, arising as well as from its climate and geometrical conditions may nurture their pessimistic character, which must be actually realistic at the difficult moment, adaptive features for survival. That's why the well-being of the country of Finland could be explained as a case of national PTG.

The concept of PTG is considered to be one of the example to describe that negative emotions/ experiences can be a mean of promoting one's well-being. PTG could be explained as one of the phenomenon which integrate negativity and

positivity, based on self-transcendence with universe-centered perspective as well.

1.6. Self-transcendence needs transcendence from the society

Here I would like to explain how the Japanese and the Finnish people need and realize transcendence from the society. Japanese hospitality, *omotenashi* shows strong concern for others and connectedness. However *hikikomori* people have been increasing and have become an enormous burden on the country (15). *Hikikomori* is a psychological condition which makes people shut themselves off from society. This phenomena suggests that social activeness and connectedness might not simply be the components of well-being. We need to reconsider the nature of connectedness and relationship which contribute well-being. As we see the description of the self-actualized person by Maslow (6) the independence from the society is also the important factor for self-transcendence.

The Finnish are widely known to their favoring to be alone and quiet, which looks the opposite of the characteristics of the standard theory of well-being in positive psychology. According to the world values survey (16), the Finnish appreciate most to be themselves, authentic, independent, and free from the society. Finnish lifestyle and traditions are worth researching to support the hypothesis that their well-being is based on their self-transcendence with meditative natural environment.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a sustainable well-being model, Inclusive Positivity, which emphasizes the meditative stillness with the integral point of view, universe-centered perspective with the hypothesis that self-transcendence is the essence. I would like to propose this alternative called deep positive psychology.

3. Methods

3.1. PTG study of the 311 Great Earthquake in Japan

I conducted an individual auto-descriptive survey asking personal experiences and psychological issues related to the disaster in the Tokyo-metropolitan area from September to November 2011, about 6 to 7 months after the 311- disaster. The participants were 321 students, and their average age was 27.67 (\pm 6.91). None of the students were direct victims of the disaster, however most of them did experience secondary trauma from the earthquake itself by media.

The questionnaires consisted of a face sheet asking for demographic data, psychological issues related to the disaster, such negative emotions as anger, helplessness, anxiety, and positive emotions such as hope for the situation. In addition, the two psychological tests were conducted; Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-J) (17) and Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (18). ASQ was used to assess the participants' pessimistic/optimistic attitude.

3.2. Field work for well-being in Finland

I conducted interviews and participant observation focusing the Finnish daily philosophy and traditional lifestyle related to well-being in Finland from August 2017 to March 2018, and from August 2018 to November 2018. The areas of research includes not just metropolitan areas as Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, but also other regional centers as Turku, Oulu and also local areas as Kuusamo, Kangasala, Mikkeli, Inari, Saariselka and Rovaniemi.

Professor Esa Saarinen at Aalto University introduced to me several people to contact, and the people I met also introduced other related people, altogether interviewed are 38 Finnish persons living in Finland. Age range is between

18 to 70, mostly middle-aged, with a female male ratio of 1:1. Their professions are various such as teachers, professors, students, therapists, social workers, medical doctors, authors, artists, CEOs, workers, and religious leaders. Interviews took about one hour in English, exceptions were three people who are fluent in Japanese. I had the interviews at my or their office, living room, café and were conducted in daytime on weekdays. The interviews were personal, most of the cases were one by one, two exceptions were two couples whom I met at the same time.

Participant observation includes visits to schools, universities, libraries, churches, public saunas, hospitals, city halls, national parks, forests, and private summer cottages. I also had several opportunities to stay with local Finnish families. The duration of the participant observation is 8 months, includes 21 days living with Finnish families.

4. Results

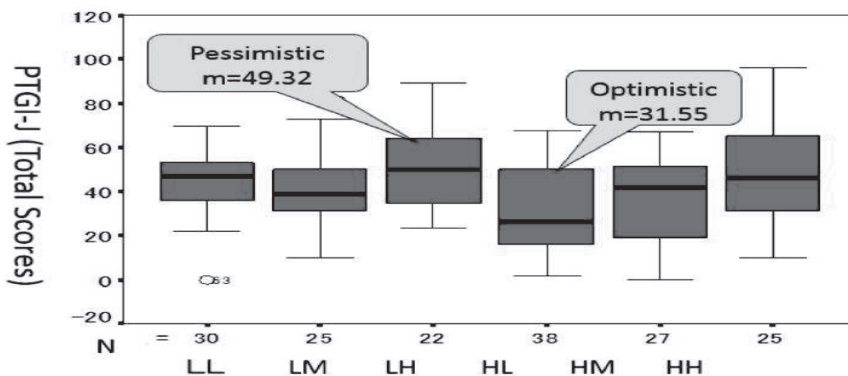
4.1. Negative feelings and pessimistic attitudes contribute to personal growth.

The outcome of the PTG study of the Japanese survivors of the 311 disaster showed the significant positive correlations between PTG and

negative emotions such as helplessness and anxiety. The figure shows that a cross analysis of PTG, hope, and attribution style. In this figure personalized attribution style means internal attribution for negative events, which is considered pessimistic (18). Those who had low hope, and high internal attribute (pessimistic) showed the highest level of PTG. By contrast, students having the lowest level of internal attribution for negative events, which is considered optimistic, exhibited the lowest PTG. Scheffe's multiple comparison tests show a significant difference between these two.

The rightmost rectangular in the figure demonstrates the high hope, high internal attributed students, and it has the most range of PTG score and the mean is almost the same level as the group of low hope and pessimistic. This outcome suggests that the students who have pessimistic view and high hope at the same time shows high score of PTG.

According to these data, it is proved that the attitude to take responsibility for negative events, which shows pessimism, contributes personal growth both with and without general hope.



Hope(Low/High) × Personalized(Internal)attribution(Low/Middle/High)

4.2. Appreciation of the nature and stillness cultivate mindfulness

In Finland, spending weekends and long vacations in nature is a tradition, it is common to own summer cottages located by lakes or in forests. One of the interviewers mentioned that the reason why the Finnish go into nature, such as to the forests often is to avoid people. The Finnish were observed to love spending time in stillness and in deep nature. The majority of their summer cottages are simple, often without Wi-Fi, electricity, gas, or running water, and require manual labor to obtain necessary water, fire, and food. They cherish maintaining a primitive, inconvenient lifestyle, and often enjoy a slower life on vacation. The people I stayed with did not keep plans for each day and did not have much conversation, but were just there. They got up when they awoke, and ate when hungry. They were not doing anything special, but watching birds in lakes, picking mushrooms, reading books, and mostly kept silent. They say that the more they become intimate, the less conversation.

The Finnish sauna is observed to be a holy place. The Finnish spend the cleansing time in a dark, meditative silence. Their daily custom of detoxing physically and mentally in such extreme heat was observed to be a transcendental experience. The Finnish stillness and appreciation of nature described above were observed to not have special religious or spiritual purposes, but simply practiced for health and comfort. Such healthy, nature-friendly, and mindful customs lead to deep relaxation, and contributes to their holistic health. As a result, the Finnish naturally reach the depth of the essence of existence, mindfulness, in other words, self-transcendence.

5. Discussion

5.1. Japanese PTG study shows the strength in surrender

I started off this PTG research hoping that optimistic people coped with their stress more effectively than those who tend to have negative perspectives. However my research proved the opposite. Roughly speaking, these results show that the pessimistic group was more adaptive to their situations than the optimistic group, which might be considered controversial vis-à-vis the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotion by Fredrickson (19). According to some researches optimistic survivors coped more successfully with their trauma (20). The difference of the outcome is explained partly because of the difference of social expectation of the country. Japanese society values the sympathy to the suffering people and people are hesitate to show the positive emotion at the negative events. On the contrary the hero in the US is the person who is always cheerful, hopeful and strong specially at the moment of difficulty. Therefor the people at the crisis in the two country have the opposite tendency to express negativity and positivity, which are socially expected. I suspect that the people in both country at crisis may have both negative and positive emotions at the same time, however they express their feelings differently according to the social expectations.

My Japanese research outcome shows that negative feelings and pessimistic attitudes contribute to personal growth, which is a strong characteristic of personal well-being. Pessimistic Japanese students, who have personalized attribution styles, were apt to view negative events as their own faults and felt responsibility and guilt. This attitude is considered unhealthy, for it could cause serious depression, however the feeling of responsibility for something beyond ourselves such as nuclear power plant explosions and environmental contamination to the whole

world must come from the feeling of unity as human beings from universe-centered perspective. I suspect that pessimists must have the fundamental trust for life, and that is why they could surrender reality and pain to take such enormous responsibilities. With this mature sense of acceptance and responsibility toward nature or the earth, they may have grown from the traumatic events.

The pessimistic survivors may not be aware of transcendence, however with grace they may find inner peace by just surrendering instinctively. They may take the natural survival mode instinctively to minimize the energy to go through difficulties, which is surrendering. The strength to be able to show pessimism with a deep sense of optimism, the fundamental trust for life/ universe, comes from the integration of self-transcendence and the basic survival instinct. As Maslow mentioned, transcendence is very difficult to achieve, however biological/ instinctive manners of surrendering associated with crises are open to all.

The optimistic people may have neglected to face reality by deceiving their fears and anxieties. Their surface optimism may have been from the result of the unconscious defense mechanism. Their failure of the recognition of reality is considered to be unhealthy and resulted the low PTG. On the contrary the pessimistic students in this study may have the fundamental trust for life to be able to face reality, which may be called deep optimism, contributing to their well-being. The Japanese pessimists or deep optimistic people could adapt to crises more effectively and maintain their well-being.

As a result of being realistic, observable negative feelings and pessimistic attitudes may not be the targets to be overcome. They may even be healthier attitudes than optimistic ones attained by neglecting the crisis.

5.2. Finnish stillness in forests promote mindfulness

In 2011, the Finnish Tourist Board ran a campaign that used silence as a marketing 'product'. Finland use silence as a selling point as silence may be becoming more and more attractive in the noisy world.

I see through the Finnish field work that its stillness is cultivated through its tough climate and historical difficulties. Such quiet environment creates the meditative climate in Finland. The Finnish traditional nature-friendly lifestyle such as periodic time spent in forests with the meditative stillness is observed to foster the people's mindful attitudes.

There are some evidence that stillness promotes better brain function. According to Bernardi's study about the effectiveness of music which causing relaxation, the pause between music stimulations was the most effective time for relaxation. Stillness has been proved to increase relaxation and healthy brain function than any musical stimulations (21). Mindfulness is known to decreases one's stress level and promote physical and mental health. The mindful in silence, clear consciousness makes brain function better and possible for one to integrate inner and outside world, which is realistic, open and rational (22).

Finnish mindfulness rooted in everyday life in stillness can be said to foster simple, rational, and realistic attitudes. These attitudes also lead to the open, straightforward, and transparent communication in the society in which people feel safe. With the sense of trust and safe, I assume Finland can construct the open and transparent social system. The trustworthy system gives the people the feeling of well-being and good circulation is realized. This mechanism is thought to support the Finnish world-top-level well-being.

The components of this alternative well-being are not simply the positive emotion nor an outgoing personality but explained to be fostered through stillness and not being active, separated from

people. Mindfulness, which leads their rational, realistic, simple and straight attitude fostered by Finnish meditative climate, could be explained as PTG after the national trauma/ difficulty in order to survive.

5.3. Inclusive positivity and its negative aspect

The pessimistic Japanese survivors and the introverted Finnish do not pursue happiness intentionally, but live everyday according to the flow of life/nature. They are observed to have negative feelings and pessimistic attitudes. However, they could be facing reality with the fundamental trust for life, which may be on unconscious level.

Fighting to get a positive emotion may not be necessary for well-being in these cases. Trying not to overcome but to surrender may be considered a weakness from a human-centered perspective. With a universe-centered perspective, it can not only be harmonious with nature, but minimize the energy consumption, which is an optimal strategy for survival. The inner strength of the ability to surrender could be one of the character strengths, especially at the time of crisis.

Compared to the Finnish world top-level well-being, the Japanese well-being level is rather low (23). The nature-appreciating and humble characteristics are common in both cultures, however the functions of the social systems are totally different. The disfunction of the Japanese social system may have been continued by the Japanese patient and quiet character (*gaman*). The Japanese place importance on harmony and peace in society, so fighting or striking to change situations is not welcomed in the society even if the movement is to restore basic human rights. People choose to surrender rather than to fight over difficulties, for they value appreciating whatever is disdained. I think this is the negative aspect of surrendering. Finnish people seem to successfully have the sense of balance for surrendering and acing out.

As I described above, the surrendering attitude has both positive and negative aspects. If one has a universe-centered perspective and follows the existential value, surrendering is the best solution for society as well as for the individual. However with human-centered perspective and the value to keep harmony only within one's own community, in other words to surrender to the unhealthy society, it could reinforce the real malfunction of the society. The key is what we surrender to; the essence of universe or just the social phenomenon. A self-transcended person, with mindful and clear cognition, understands when to intentionally act for change and to surrender to the flow.

5.4. How to develop Inclusive Positivity?

Inclusive Positivity is related to mindfulness and possibly promoted by the meditative and nature-friendly culture in Japan and Finland. A future assignment is to investigate how ordinary people can develop Inclusive Positivity, in other words a universe-centered perspective. Disaster utopia and PTG can be triggers to realize such a mutual helping world. Some people recommend mindfulness programs and spiritual training. However I wonder how many of them are really universe-centered? Mindfulness can be inhuman without self-transcendence. The purposes of commercial mindfulness programs are being successful with human-centered perspective and totally lack the essence of transcendence. They use the outcome of being healthier and stronger even to kill people by increasing the accuracy rate of guns, and also to keep inner peace despite the stress of such public crimes. Spiritual training also has a negative side, the danger to be ego-centric for enlightenment. I have emphasized the integration of positivity and negativity as inclusive positivity, and discussed the possibility of difficulty and pain to foster well-being. However not all people that experience negativity develop PTG, but end up with PTSD. Negativity itself has no power to make people happy, it can just be a trigger. What kind of characteristics do people have that lead to growth and not disorders after

trauma? The three components of SOC, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness may be the answer from a human-centered perspective. I still wonder how many people foster such kind of strengths which are relative to highly intelligent aspects after traumatic experiences. With a universe-centered perspective, surrendering is said to be another answer. Without understanding what is going on, one can laugh at his/ her own miserable situation with deep fundamental trust for life from a universe-centered perspective. Because the universe-centered perspective must be a basic nature of existence, I think a simple natural way is the best. A mindful daily life in nature/stillness which promote self-transcendence may be a key.

I am determined to rewrite psychology from a universe-centered perspective, so that we see our nature of empathy, supporting each other, which gives hope for the future and fundamental trust for life and the world. That is what Maslow mentioned as eupsychia.

6. Conclusion

Inclusive Positivity, a sustainable and an alternative well-being, is realized with the universe-centered perspective, which is essential and specially cultivated through trauma/difficulties in survival. The concept of Inclusive Positivity is based on self-transcendence, and is promoted by the meditative and nature-friendly cultures in Japan and Finland. Surrendering to the essence of the universe can be another human character strength to support well-being. I call this new holistic field of positive psychology “deep positive psychology.”

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