

Predicting Posttraumatic Growth in Veterans: The Role of Coping Mechanisms and Personality

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Introduction

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is positive psychological change that may occur post-trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). It doesn't occur directly because of trauma; the struggle with a new post-trauma reality drives PTG; how you cope with trauma has a major impact on PTG.

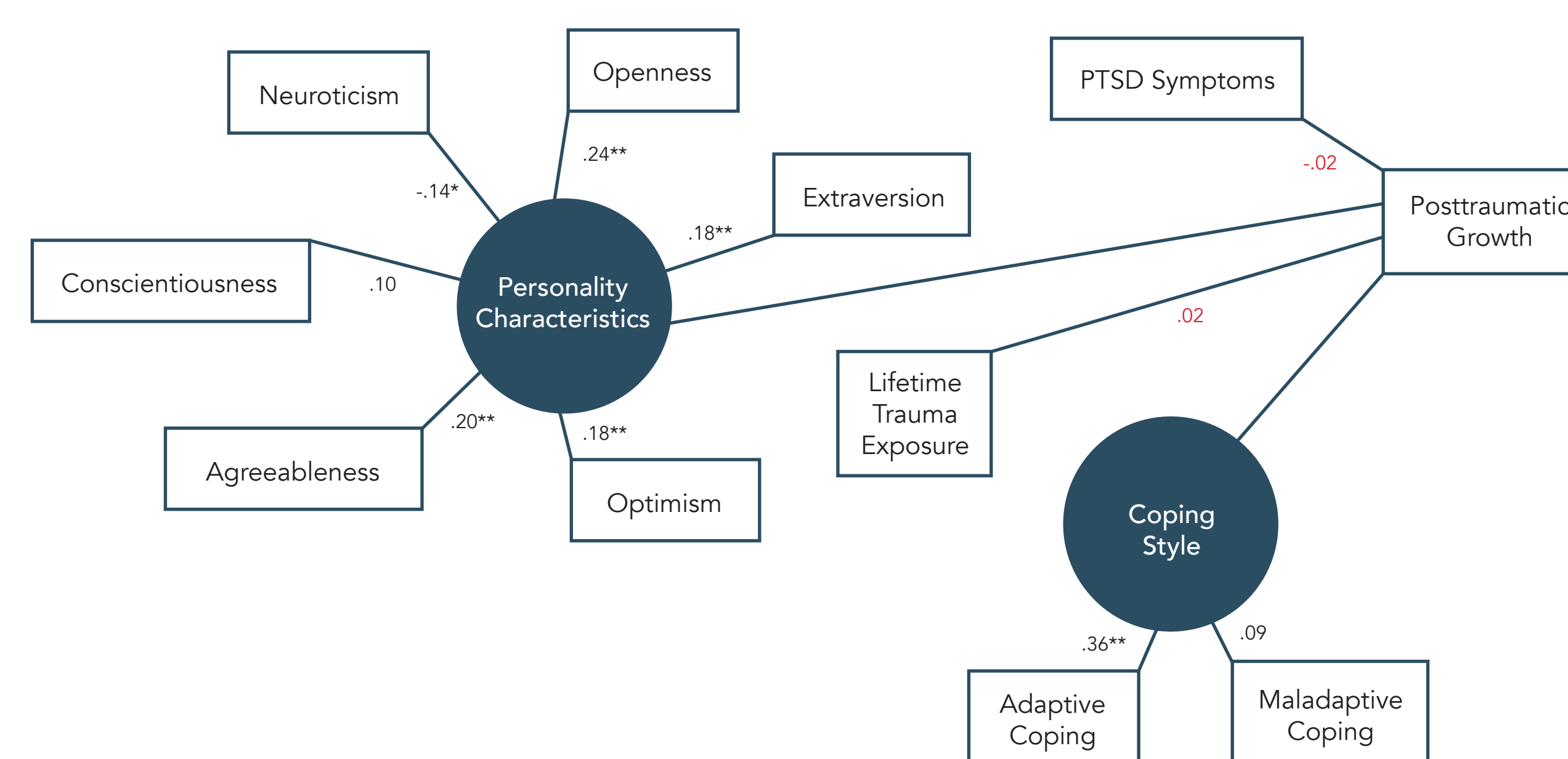
We evaluated the impact of coping, personality, and PTSD on PTG in a sample of OIF/OEF veterans. We predicted that Adaptive (active) Coping would lead to greater PTG, whereas Maladaptive (avoidant) Coping would do the opposite. Also, we predicted that both PTSD and Lifetime Trauma Exposure (LTE) would lead to less PTG. The stable personality traits of Optimism and others were expected to predict PTG.

Methods & Materials

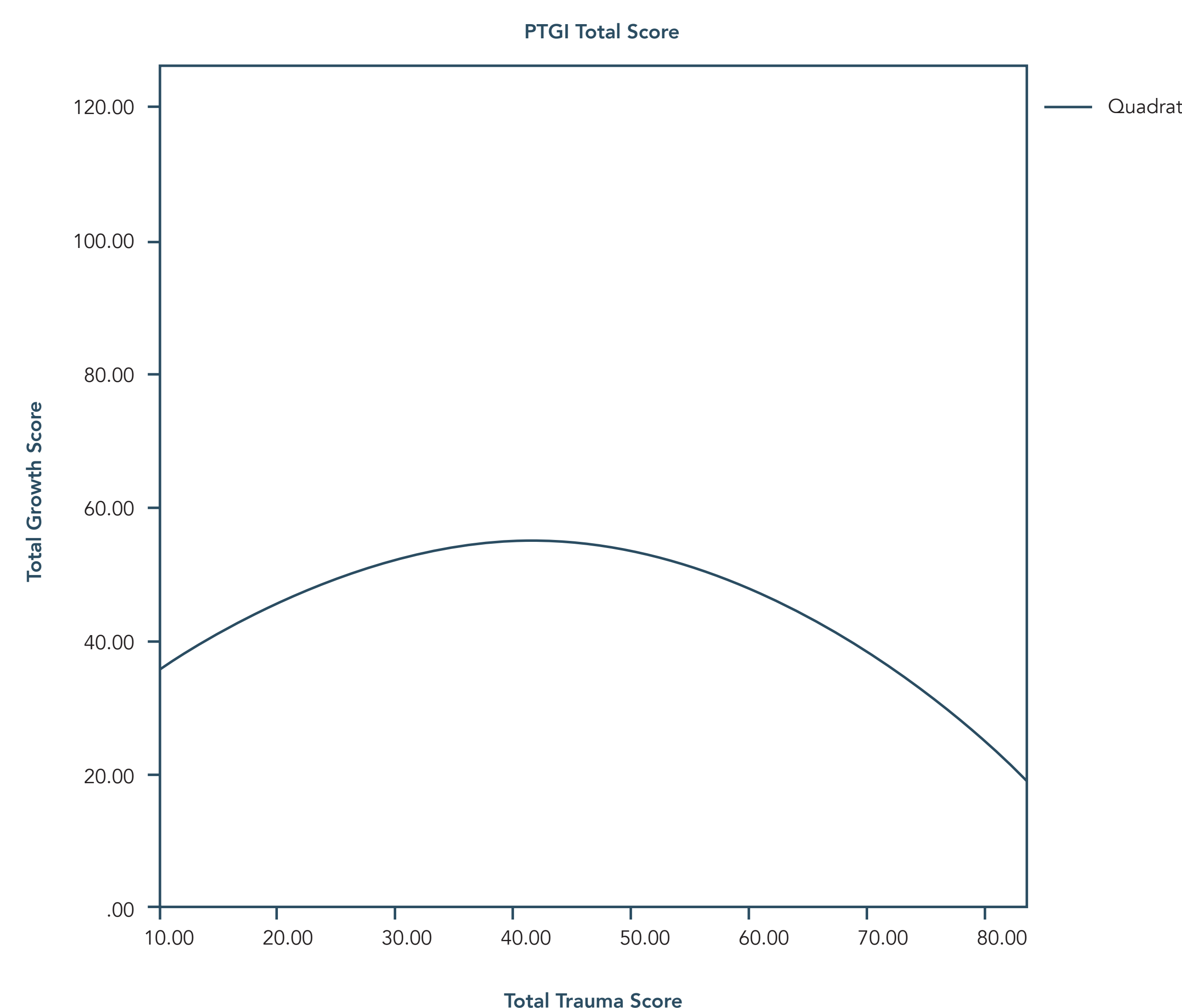
271 OEF/OIF veterans registered for VA health care were surveyed an average of 6 months post-deployment. They were 85% male with an age range of 19-58. They were 68% Caucasian (28% did not specify ethnicity). 33% had combat duty, 46% provided combat support, and 18% had noncombat duty.

We calculated correlations among Coping, LTE, PTSD, personality (BIG 5), Optimism (LOT-R), and PTGI scores to identify predictors of PTG. We used Coping, LTE, PTSD, BIG 5, and LOT-R in hierarchical multiple regressions to predict PTG. Regressions were also conducted testing the linear, quadratic and cubic effects of PTSD on PTG.

Predictors of Growth



Posttraumatic Growth vs. Trauma



Results & Conclusions

- Correlations are in Figure 1
- Adaptive Coping predicted PTG; Maladaptive Coping was unrelated to PTG
- Optimism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness predicted PTG
- Neuroticism negatively predicted PTG
- LTE and PTSD did not predict PTG
- PTSD and PTG had a curvilinear (inverted-U) relationship
 - Moderate PTSD severity predicts the highest PTG levels
 - Others have reported this: Tsai et al. 2014; Kleim & Ehlers 2009; Shakespeare-Finch & Lurie-Beck 2014.

While many of our results square with common sense, the curvilinear relationship between PTSD and PTG was noteworthy: PTG is more likely to occur when PTSD severity is moderate. Our results also highlight the importance of Adaptive Coping and positive personality in promoting PTG. Anything we can do to enhance active coping and a more positive outlook (such as reducing depression levels) should help reduce PTSD symptoms and promote PTG in our veterans.

References

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- Shakespeare-Finch J, et al (2014)** A meta-analytic clarification of the relationship between PTG and symptoms of PTSD. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 28(2) 223-229
- Kleim B, et al (2009)** Evidence for a curvilinear relationship between PTG and post-trauma depression and PTSD in assault survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 22(1) 45-52
- Tedeschi R & Calhoun L (1996)** The PTGI: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9(3) 455-471



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