

Personal Growth, Coping, and Well-Being in College Adults' Self-Defining Memories

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Background: Personal growth is a process involving self-transformation, often from a place of hardship or insufficiency to a place of redemption and strength (Pals, 2004). Researchers posit that a focus on positive aspects of life can promote psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Personal growth can be measured through evaluations of shared autobiographical narratives, such as self-defining memories (Singer, 2004). In this study, we rated individual differences in displayed personal growth. We expected personal growth to be positively associated with coping and well-being. We also expected coping to partly explain ties between growth and well-being.

Method: Two-hundred eighty-eight college adults (M age = 18.43 years, $SD = .88$; 68.4% women) participated in a broader online study that occurred over two monthly sessions. Participants completed questionnaires including reports of coping strategies (Greenglass et al., 1999) at baseline and well-being (Su et al., 2014) at baseline and one-month follow-up. Participants also completed the Self-Defining Memory task (Singer & Blagov, 2004) at baseline, sharing a vivid memory that helps define how they understand themselves. These self-defining memories were rated for displays of personal growth and positive autobiographical reasoning (Mansfield et al., 2015).

Results: Displays of personal growth in self-defining memories were positive correlated with reports of coping strategies and well-being at baseline. Reports of coping strategies were positively correlated with reports of well-being at baseline and one-month follow-up. When modeled simultaneously, both growth and coping informed baseline well-being, but only coping

informed one-month follow-up well-being. An indirect model was supported between baseline growth and later well-being, given reports of coping.

Discussion: Collectively, the results suggest that people who tend to find positive meaning in important life events also have more psychological resources for coping and well-being. Future work would benefit from longitudinal designs to consider the implications of personal growth for young adults.