Overview

1. The Current Mental Health Crisis.
2. A reformulation of clinical psychology and mental health in terms of existential suffering.
3. The new paradigm of existential positive psychology.
4. Integrative meaning therapy.
1. The current mental health crisis
Current existential crises

- Humanity is facing many existential crises—the pandemic, climate change, polarization, nuclear war, and the evil use of digital power.
- Egotism and the dark triad are the sources of much human suffering.
- What one does can affect humanity because we are all connected.

- Self-transcendence is the antidote to the existential crises. That's the trumpet call of existential positive psychology.

Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead
The myth of Sisyphus

• The myth of Sisyphus provides a prototype of the absurdity of “everyday suffering.”
• He constantly fought an uphill battle, but was never able to reach the top.
• What gave him the strength to continue this unrelenting struggle?
• He might have thought about inspiring countless others with his defiant attitude.
Existential suffering is the main source of psychological disorders

- Existential anxiety is an inescapable part of the human experience.
- No one is immune to existential anxiety from the pandemic.
- Symptoms stem from the unconsciousness.
- Four primary sources of existential anxiety: meaninglessness, loneliness, fear of death, and freedom of making wrong choices (Yalom, 1980).
- Existential suffering needs existential competencies, not CBT
2. A reformulation of clinical psychology and mental health in terms of existential suffering
The need for a new understanding of mental illness

- Mental illness is not a brain disease.
- It is due to failure to meet our basic mental health need for relationships, meaning, and faith.
- It is also due to failure to cope with stress and existential suffering.
- Most suffering is an inescapable aspect of existence.
- It comes from both external and internal sources.
A more complete model of the golden triangle

The Self-transcendence Paradigm of Global Wellbeing & Flourishing

- **FAITH** (Spirituality): Connecting with God, a higher power, or nature by transcending doubts and disbelief.
- **AGAPE**: Connecting with one's soul, calling, or authentic self by transcending one's limitations and egotism.
- **LOVE** (Communion): Connecting with others and loved ones by transcending relational conflict and frustrations.
- **HOPE** (Agency): Connecting with one's innate capacity for connections in 3 life domains in spite of hardships.

*Dr. Paul T. P. Wong*
Is meaning the key to existential suffering and happiness?

• How can one lead the good life when bad things keep on happening?
• Is there a complete answer to why we suffer?
• Is meaning or lack of it the key to suffering and happiness?
FUTURE DIRECTION: TOWARD INTEGRATION
MEANING THERAPY BASED ON PP 2.0

PRESENT STATUS: 3 SEPARATE DISCIPLINES

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Happiness could be bad for us

• What we want for our happiness is often not good for us.
• Sweet and salty foods are health hazards.
• To much food, drink, and pleasure may do us more harm than good.
• The desire for worldly happiness often leads to frustration and suffering.

Free & Happy

Only a free person can be a happy person. The amount of happiness that you have depends on the amount of freedom that you have in your heart. Freedom here is not political freedom. Freedom here is freedom from regret, freedom from fear, from anxiety and sorrow.

Thich Nhat Hanh
We must hurt in order to grow, fail in order to know, & lose in order to gain. Because some lessons in life, are best learned through pain.
IRON TRIANGLE

to overcome the

TERRORS OF LIFE
AND DEATH

COURAGE

to face fate with the
defiant human spirit

ACCEPTANCE

what cannot be
avoided or changed

TRANSCENDENCE

to transform the
dark side of life

♦ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong
• Attitude is more important than aptitude.
• Meditation is more important than medication.
• Courage is more important than avoidance.
• Compassion is more important than competition.
3. The new paradigm of existential positive psychology
The suffering hypothesis and the new science of flourishing through suffering

• Suffering is essential for happiness and flourishing.
• Life is always a mixture of happiness and suffering.
• Self-transcendence is the process of integrating opposites.
• It is through integrating happiness and suffering that we can find the middle way.

“"The more one forgets himself — by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love — the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. Self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.””

— Viktor Frankl
There is often a complex and dynamic relationship between happiness and suffering.

A Dual-System Model

- Normal Life Conditions
- Approach System (PURE)
- Meaning, happiness & Personal growth
- Reduce Threats
- Transform Threats (ABCDE + PURE)
- Threats Noxious conditions
- Avoidance system (Defense mech. + coping)
- Safety and Survival
- Vicious Cycle
- Vigilance
The new paradigm of flourishing through suffering

1. Suffering triggers one’s search for meaning as a better alternative to addiction, aggression, and suicide
2. It motivates people to voluntarily embrace sacrifice in order to become one’s best, thus making suffering more meaningful and worthwhile.
3. It teaches people how to manage or overcome painful emotions and experiences so that they can have greater capacity to be happy.
4. It serves several transformative functions, such as diagnostic, curative, redemptive, character building, and contributing to resilience and personal growth.
Three tenets of existential positive psychology

1. **Polarity:** All things in nature exist either as two opposite poles on the same dimension or as two opposite but interactive dimensions.

2. **Transcendence:** The is the process of rising above limitations and conflicts by navigating a dynamic dialectic balance between opposites.

3. **Balance and Harmony:** Inner peace and wellbeing result from the life intelligence of navigating optimal balance between different dimensions within the individual and the complex systems in society.
Dialectical Mandala Model of Mature Happiness

- Spiritual
  - High Others
  - No Self
- Social/Cultural
  - High Yin
  - Low Yang
- Psychological
  - Low Yin
  - High Yang
- Physical/Biological
  - No Others
  - High Self

Mature Happiness (Sweet Spot)

Purpose Test
Practical Wisdom
Moral Courage

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4. Integrative meaning therapy
Seven Ways Meaning Therapy Transforms Tragedy into Triumph

1. Reframes it into a larger and more meaningful story.

2. Extracts meaning and benefits from it.

3. Reaches out to the community for mutual support.

4. Treats it as a stepping stone for character building and future success.

5. Explores the invisible transcendental realm for inspiration, comfort and help.

6. Explores new values and new directions for one's future.

7. Incorporates it into a new life story of a hero's triumphant journey.

Paul TP Wong
FOUR-COMPONENT SOLUTION TO THE QUESTION OF MEANING IN LIFE

P: You need to choose a worthy **purpose** or a significant life goal.

U: You need to have sufficient **understanding** of who you are, what life demands of you, and how you can play a significant role in life.

R: You and you alone are **responsible** for deciding what kind of life you want to live, and what constitutes a significant and worthwhile life goal.

E: You will **enjoy** a deep sense of significance and satisfaction only when you have exercised your responsibility for self-determination and actively pursue a worthy life-goal.

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The Pathway of Resilience

A  Accept the reality
B  Believe in possibilities
C  Commit to achievable goals (PURE)
D  Discover new resources & solutions
E  Evaluate & enjoy the progress

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12 Rules of Meaningful Living During Hard Times

1. Connect with our true self.
2. Connect with others.
3. Connect with God.

4. Face an uncertain and risky future with courage.
5. Accept the dark side of life.
6. Transform tragedy into triumph.

7. Be aware of one’s need for change.
8. Control one’s impulses & inordinate desires.
9. Determine to do the right thing & follow the right path.

10. Create a new path when is no path.
11. Imagine a better way, a better future.
12. Look up for inspiration.

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10 commandments of mental health

1- Think positively; it's easier
2- Cherish the ones you love
3- Continue learning as long as you live
4- Learn from your mistakes
5- Exercise daily; it enhances you well-being
6- Do not complicate your life unnecessarily
7- Try to understand and encourage those around you
8- Do not give up; success in life is a marathon
9- Discover and nurture your talents
10- Set goals for yourself and pursue your dreams