The Male Survival Guide to Stress:
Relational Wellness
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My Journey Towards Relational Wellness

- Came to UCSD in 1994, research fellowship
  - Trained in mechanistic model for health & wellness
- Had some physical issues & PCP unable to find cause
  - Told stress related, nothing could be done
- To get relief, had to explore other forms of healing
  - Became a tai chi teacher and led to tai chi research
- Led to understanding and teaching Relational Wellness
Mechanistic and Relational Paradigms

- **Mechanistic View**
  - Has been around since the 16th century
  - Driven much of our advancement in society
  - The Scientific Revolution

- **Relational View**
  - Has been around last 100 year or so
  - Now being researched in many areas of our lives
    - Science, Health, Economic, Politics, Environment, Parenting & Childcare
  - Possibly began with Einstein’s Theory of Relativity

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“Relational Reality” by Charlene Spretnak

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Mechanistic Health & Wellness

- We are separate entities, distinct units with specific functions
  - Operate on mechanical principles
  - Historically created disease/intervention based paradigm
  - Aligned with much of Allopathic Medicine

Relational Health & Wellness

- We are composed of
  - Networks of creative, dynamic interrelationships (Internal)
  - And at the same time we exist within similar networks (External)

- Aligned with
  - Alternative/Complementary (Integrative) Medicine
  - Allopathic Medicine: Supported by basic science research
  - Interdisciplinary fields of Allopathic Medicine
    - i.e. Psychoneuroimmunology
Immune Response

• Mechanistic View
  • Germ Theory: Related to stress, diet, genes, etc
  • Connection between bacteria causing certain disease
  • Unknown why some carry bacteria and do not get sick

• Relational View
  • Explains why some who carry bacteria do not get sick
  • Immune response can be effected by
    • Quality or type of relationships
    • Number of relationships
Relational Wellness & Immune System

• 1997 Study at Carnegie Mellon by Dr. Sheldon Cohen
  • 276 healthy volunteers ages 18 to 55
  • They sprayed cold virus directly into noses of subjects

• Findings:
  • After exposure to the virus
  • Those with most social ties (6 or more)
  • Were 4 times less likely to come down with a cold
  • Compared to those with fewest social ties (1 to 3)
Heart Disease

• Mechanistic View
  • Heart is a separate organ, based on valve/pump system
  • Effected by personal choices or risk factors
    • Diet, Exercise, Smoking, Genes

• Relational View
  • Heart is deeply connected to entire Mind/Body
  • Effected by external factors
    • Effected by quality of relationships & social support
    • Ability to share and confide
    • Amount of physical contact
Relational Wellness & Heart Health

• 2003 study at UNC by Dr. Karen Grewen
  • 91 couples divided into 2 groups: WPC vs Control Group
  • Warm Partner Contact (WPC) defined as
    • 10 minutes handholding followed by
    • 20 second hug with a romantic partner
  • Stressful event administered to both groups

• Findings: WPC done prior to stressful event
  • Significantly reduced Cardiovascular Reactivity vs controls
    • Lower systolic blood pressure by 24 points
    • Lower diastolic blood pressure
    • Less heart rate increase
One of the longest, continually running studies
  Now into 75th year

Dr. George Valliant
  Harvard Psychiatrist
  Directed study from 1972 – 2004
  Written multiple books related to study findings
    Most recent “Triumphs of Experience”

The goal of the study was to
  Identify predictors of healthy aging over decades of life
  Dedicated to unearthing the secrets to a happy & purposeful life
Harvard Grant Study - Protocol

• Recruited 268 members of Harvard classes
  • All Men
  • From classes between 1939 to 1944
  • 68 of original still alive today, well into late 80s & early 90s

• Men evaluated at least every two years by
  • Questionnaires & exams,
  • Physicians data & personal interviews
  • Recently: Neuroimaging scans, blood for DNA analysis & engaging wives for interviews

• Information gathered about every aspect of their lives
Harvard Grant Study - Conclusions

• As Vaillant states there are two pillars of happiness
  • "One is love."
  • "Other is finding a way of coping with life that does not push love away."
  • Love is a key to a happy and fulfilling life

• Vaillant stated study's most important finding is
  • Only thing that matters in life is relationships.
  • A man could have career, money and good physical health
  • However without supportive, loving relationships, he wouldn't be happy
Harvard Grant Study - Conclusions

• Connection is another key finding
  • "Joy is connection," Vaillant says. "The more areas in your life you can make connection, the better."
  • The study found strong connections in relationships to be strongest predictor of life satisfaction
  • Career satisfaction; feeling connected to one's work was far more important than making money or achieving traditional success

• As life goes on, connections become even more important.

• The Grant Study further supports Relational Wellness model that states social ties linked with longevity, lower stress levels and overall well-being.
Is there a physiological cause for these Relational or Social findings that effect your Health & Wellness?
History Human Stress Response

• Coined “fight or flight" by Walter Cannon in 1932
  • A hormonal cascade in response to a threat or danger
    • Activation of the sympathetic autonomic nervous system
    • Release of Oxytocin, Vasopressin, CRF from hypothalamus
    • Leads to release of Epinephrine, Norepinephrine, Cortisol

• Up until 1995 research investigating the “fight or flight” response
  • Primarily had been done with males
  • Females only constituting 17% of participants
    • Researchers stated inequality due to inconsistent results from females
    • Due to fluctuations in hormone levels during menstruation cycles
History Human Stress Response

• When enough women were elected to Congress in 1990s
  • Policy change, National Institute of Health (NIH) mandate
  • Funding provided to fully study female physiology
  • Including female stress response

• Taylor et al (2000) found\(^1\)
  • Due to primarily male based research on stress
  • Overlooked unique stress response

• Taylor termed this unique response “tend & befriend”

History Human Stress Response

- Taylor suggests the “tend & befriend” stress response
  - Evolutionary adaption
    - Tending to young & Befriending others to increase chance of survival
  - Response is protective mechanism
    - Since group more likely than an individual to overcome a threat
  - Forming network
    - Helps with the caring and raising of offspring
    - Serves to secure resources such as housing and food
Human Stress Response - Revised

• Fight or Flight response in times of stress
  • Fight against a threat or
  • Flee if overcoming the threat is unlikely
  • Activating

• Tend & Befriend response in times of stress
  • Tending to yourself and young
  • Befriending those around you for support
  • Calming
Biology “Tend & Befriend” Stress Response

• Oxytocin released by both sexes in a stressful situation
  • Lower release in men: Testosterone tends to suppress
  • Higher release in women: Estrogen tends to enhance

• Release of Oxytocin
  • Decreases cortisol, hormone involved in “fight or flight”
  • Buffers the “fight or flight” response

• Once you connect with others
  • Even more oxytocin is released
  • Further counters activating stress reactions, with calming effect
Neuropeptide Oxytocin

• Found to have positive effect on heart/circulatory system
  • Many studies have shown
    • Higher Oxytocin linked to lower Blood Pressure
    • Mediator of cardioprotective benefit of social bonding
    • Related to lower cardiovascular reactivity to stress response

• Many studies show a regulatory role during immune and inflammatory responses in animal models
  • Human studies, preliminary findings suggestive of same role
Neuropeptide Oxytocin

- How can you increase Oxytocin naturally?
  - Socialize, spend time with supportive friends
  - Listen to soothing music
  - Touch
    - Hugging or close contact with loved ones
    - Massage
    - Petting a canine companion (dog)
  - Future areas of study: Meditation, mindfulness, positive thoughts
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How can one define “Relational Wellness” as it relates to Stress Reduction?
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Relational Wellness (RW)

Connection

Growth

Compassion

Gratitude
Connection

• RW is cultivating moments of peace and quiet in your day, connecting to yourself

• RW is creating time to connect with your family & friends

• RW is remembering to connect with your passion in life
• **Exercise**: Breathing in and out, with eyes closed. And mentally saying to yourself “I’m breathing in” and “I’m breathing out” as you follow your breath
Compassion

- RW is first taking care of your health: body, mind, and spirit; so you can then care for your family and friends
- RW is learning to kind to yourself, as well as others
Compassion

- Exercise: Placing right hand over belly and left on top of right, while breathing in and out. Chi Gung, self-healing exercise
Gratitude

• RW is remembering to be thankful for those people in your life who give you meaning and purpose

• RW is being grateful for all aspects of your life
Gratitude

• **Exercise**: Repeat in your mind who and what you are grateful for. Keep a gratitude journal

I am grateful for............
Growth

- RW is learning to understand and embrace the part of you with which you struggle.
- RW is the willingness and courage to evaluate yourself and make changes or seek help when needed.
Growth

**Exercise**: Being Mindful of whatever thoughts, feelings or sensations come into your mind; name them, and then move back to your breath.
How would I define living a life based on Relational Wellness?
It is knowing that you have lived fully, lovingly, and without remorse.

(Adapted from Finding Balance in a Medical Life, by Lee Lipsenthal, M.D.)
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Review of Tools

- Focus on Your Breath
- Hands over Your Belly: sit, stand or laying
- Gratitude Thoughts or Journal
- Be Mindful – Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
  - Center for Mindfulness
    - Website: mindfulness.ucsd.edu
  - Center for Integrative Medicine
    - Website: cim.ucsd.edu
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Resources

- Center for Wellness & Personal Growth
  - Website: emhwellnesscenter.ucsd.edu

- Executive Health & Wellness
  - Website: ehw.ucsd.edu

- Concierge Medicine
  - Website: concierge.ucsd.edu

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Q&A Session

Luis Castellanos, MD
*Listen to Your Heart*

Mike Hsieh, MD
*Sexual Health After 40*
*Prostate Cancer*

Suraj Achar, MD
*Exercise*

Tahir Bhatti, MD
*Male Survival Guide to Stress*