

## **‘Food Was My Medicine, My Medicine to Recovery And Healing’ - A Phenomenological Study of Posttraumatic Growth through Positive Nutrition**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth account of the subjective experiences of adults who felt that positive nutrition played an essential role in their growth following their highly stressful life event(s), with a distinctive focus on exploring the embodied experience of posttraumatic growth within this group. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted amongst seven female participants and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Three superordinate themes and nine subordinate themes emerged: (i) discovering the nutritional sanctuary through an embodied healing from foods, enjoying positive emotions and spiritual nourishment (ii) experiencing metamorphosis in the body through physical transformation, embodiment and discovering the ‘new body’, and finally (iii) through an eudaimonic journey manifesting in the form of deepened relationships, heightened personal growth and an acceptance of self. This study is the first of its kind to use positive nutrition to explore growth after trauma. The findings concluded that growth was seen to be processed through the body and posttraumatic growth attained via the embodied route of positive nutrition. Some elements of posttraumatic growth outcomes were found to be more prominent in participants who experienced a body related trauma, in comparison to those who underwent a non-body related trauma and vice versa.*

**KEYWORDS:** embodiment, nutrition, positive nutrition, posttraumatic growth, trauma.

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Although researchers have been studying the concept of embodiment for decades and the somatopsychic principle postulating that the body can influence the mind, the discipline of Positive Psychology still continues to function primarily as an *above the neck* approach (Compton & Hoffman, 2012; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Seligman, 2008). Positive Psychology focusses predominantly on cognitive and emotional phenomena whilst overlooking the role of the positive body for overall optimal human functioning (Hefferon, 2013). In recent years, there has been an evolution of research documenting the body-mind connection to wellbeing in the dimension of physical activity (Faulkner et al., 2015; Kampman, 2021; Kampman & Hefferon, 2020). There has also been a valuable start to studies in different disciplines linking positive nutrition to mental wellbeing (Holder, 2019; Rucklidge & Kaplan, 2016). However, there is still a significant gap in research that aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals who adopt healthy behaviors to their bodies to grow after their highly stressful life events.

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Specifically, little is known about the phenomenological process of how positive nutrition can influence growth after a traumatic event.

Due to the above mentioned gaps in the literature, the purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2022; Smith & Osborne, 2008) study is to explore (i) the phenomenological process of how an embodied approach like positive nutrition can influence growth after trauma (ii) the role of the body in participants who used positive nutrition as an action focused route to posttraumatic growth (iii) if certain posttraumatic growth outcomes were more prominent in participants who experienced a body-related trauma in comparison to those who underwent a non-body-related trauma and vice versa.

## Literature Review

### Traumatic Experiences and Their Impact on the Human Body

Studies have suggested that 70% of individuals experience at least one traumatic event (TE) in their lifetime (Mills et al., 2011). The most common TEs reported have been witnessing grave injury or death, the unexpected death of a family member, automobile accidents, being assaulted and experiencing a life-threatening illness or injury (Benjet et al., 2016). Within the framework of posttraumatic growth, a TE is distinguished from a regular stressful event by its imputed seriousness (Krause et al., 2004), is “seismic” (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, p. 2) and is often characterized as a “highly stressful and challenging life-altering event” (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p. 4). Studies have shown that a significant predictor of trauma is the extent to which the event disrupts and challenges one’s core beliefs, with evidence suggesting that the traumatization experience can vary in individuals (Creamer et al., 2005; Weinberg & Gil, 2016), whilst setting in motion, their cognitive processing (Tedeschi et al., 2018). As trauma is in the “eye of the beholder” (Boals, 2018, p. 77), a TE can be deemed subjective, with interchangeable expressions such as *trauma*, *traumatic experience* and *highly stressful life event* used to describe challenges that disrupt the “individual’s assumptive world” (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p. 4). This paper will therefore use these terms synonymously and define a TE as “the event needs to be significant enough to challenge the basic assumptions about one’s future and how to move toward that future and producing massive anxiety and psychic pain that is difficult to manage” (Tedeschi et al. 1988, p. 2).

Trauma is an embodied experience impacting the mind and body, and long-term psychological trauma resulting from a TE is shown to live in the body and massively impact it (Van der Kolk, 2015). TEs can dysregulate the sympathetic nervous system, a part of the automatic nervous system that regulates the body’s fight or flight response. It can also impact the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis which plays a key role in the body’s response to stress and the inflammatory response system (Chakraborty & Burns, 2020; Kendall-Tackett, 2009). This dysregulation can result in an increase in chronic illnesses like cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic back pain, respiratory problems and gastrointestinal (GI) disorders (Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Korn, 2013). Studies show TEs to have a direct impact on the GI system damaging the microbiome, an integral part of the immune system that produces neurotransmitters posing higher risks for physical health problems after trauma (Gordon, 2019).

### Transformational Growth Following Highly Stressful Life Events

Transformational growth following trauma has been termed Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) and can be defined as “positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crisis” (Tedeschi & Calhoun 2004, p. 1). Since this term was first coined by pioneers Tedeschi and Calhoun in 1995, different conceptualizations and models of PTG have been developed, highlighting the evolution in this field (Kampman, 2021). These models

include the *Transformational Model of Posttraumatic Growth* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004), the *Janus-face Two Component Model* (Maercker & Zoellner, 2004), the *Organismic Valuing Theory* (Linley & Joseph, 2004), the *Action Focused Growth Theory* (Hobfoll et al., 2007), the *Corporeal Posttraumatic Growth Theory* (Hefferon et al., 2009), the *Affective-Cognitive Processing model of Posttraumatic Growth* (Joseph et al., 2012) and more recently the theory of *Growth as Positive Personality Change* (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014).

Arguably, the most studied model is the *Transformational Model of Posttraumatic Growth* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004) and in this model the changes after trauma have been shown to be *transformational* and profound involving positive changes as a result of complex processes in the “cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral” lives of trauma survivors (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p.25). This growth is purely the result of the *struggle* after a TE and differs from any normative changes that could potentially occur during different growth stages of an individual (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2012). The transformative model has deemed the following nine aspects as fundamental to the PTG process (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2006, 2013; Tedeschi et al., 2017; Tedeschi et al, 2018) – (i) the pre-trauma state, (ii) the traumatic event, (iii) shattering of the assumptive world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), (iv) instinctive and intrusive ruminations, (v) schema revision (vi) deliberate ruminations (vii) social support, (viii) transformative growth through narratives and wisdom and (ix) some distress symptoms. With enhanced research and adaptations to the above models, PTG has also been conceived both as a process and an outcome (Tedeschi et al, 2018). Outcome in PTG has been seen to manifest in the following five domains (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tedeschi et al., 2017) – (i) personal strength, (ii) relating to others, (iii) new possibilities, (iv) appreciation of life and (v) spiritual and existential change.

Research conducted over the past decade has shown the role of the human body to be closely connected to both part of the process and as an outcome of PTG (Hefferon 2012; 2013; Hefferon et al., 2008; 2009; 2012; Kampman, 2021; Kampman & Hefferon, 2020; Lykins et al., 2007). Furthermore, studies on embodiment i.e., people’s “awareness of and responsiveness to bodily sensations” (Impett et al., 2006, p. 40; Piran et al., 2020; Tylka & Piran, 2019) has also shown that the body plays a critical role in the process and reinforcement of PTG (Hefferon, 2015). Research conducted on the PTG experiences of individuals who have been severely injured or have had body-related trauma postulate that when the body is affected by internal or external triggers, it can lead to heightened corporeal awareness, a term known as Corporeal PTG (C-PTG) (Hefferon, 2012; Kampman, 2021; Kampman & Hefferon 2020). Different types of TEs experienced by individuals can develop into different PTG processes and outcomes (Kira et al., 2013; Shakespeare-Finch & Armstrong, 2010; Wu et al., 2019). Whilst the role of the body in the PTG process has been primarily researched through studies in physical illness populations depicting C-PTG (Hefferon, 2012), it has also been suggested that the body should be part of “all explorations and models of growth” (Kampman, 2021, p. 261).

PTG has also been linked to wellbeing, a concept that in the area of Positive Psychology particularly has been conceptualized through two directions – (i) subjective or hedonic wellbeing, which is defined as satisfaction of life with a high positive affect and a low negative affect and (ii) psychological wellbeing (PWB) or eudaimonic wellbeing i.e., the actualization of human potential (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Although growth outcomes are complex and not always related to PWB (Park et al., 2022), the Organismic Valuing Theory of PTG has argued that PTG is an increase in eudaimonic wellbeing (Joseph et al., 2012). Studies have also been shown to link growth to one’s psychological growth (Cormio et al., 2014; Durkin & Joseph, 2009; Tallman et al., 2010), in the dimensions of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, autonomy, positive relations with others and purpose in life (Ryff, 1989).

## Positive Nutrition and the Body Mind Connection to Wellbeing

This study focusses on the component of positive nutrition, acknowledging that the role of diet and nutrition has been overlooked in Positive Psychology (Hefferon, 2015). In fact, to the best of the authors' knowledge, prior to this study, there have been no empirical studies available specifically connecting *positive nutrition, trauma, and growth*. Therefore, this section will review available studies from different disciplines focusing on the somatopsychic principle that what one puts into the body can potentially affect one's growth and wellbeing. Due to the lack of a standardized definition in this field and for the purposes of this study, positive nutrition will be defined as *diet and nutrition that leads to optimal functioning* (Gordon, 2019; Hefferon, 2013; Heferron & Boniwell, 2011; Korn, 2013; Korn, 2016) interpreted from the works of different researchers in this area.

Positive nutrition has been associated with diets such as the Mediterranean diet and the Keto diet which is low in processed foods, rich in fruits and vegetables, legumes, whole grains, healthy fats, fish, nuts and rich in omega-3 fats leading to higher mental wellbeing (Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Hefferon, 2013; Korn, 2013; Korn, 2016; Sofi et al., 2008;), with an increase in energy, vigor and contentment (Akbaraly et al., 2009) and a lower incidence of mental disorders (Heferron 2013; Jacka et al., 2010; Jacka et al., 2017; Rucklidge & Kaplan, 2016; Sanchez-Villegas et al., 2009). Correlational, longitudinal, and experimental studies across multiple populations have shown an emerging pattern – individuals eating more fruits and vegetables (FV) were associated with greater wellbeing (Holder, 2019) including higher life satisfaction, an increase in creativity, curiosity, vitality, flourishing, motivation, and better mood (Dreher, 2018; Otake & Kato, 2017). Further, in a longitudinal study conducted by Mujcic & Oswald (2016) examining food diaries of 12,385 randomly sampled Australians aged 15-98 years over 2007, 2009, and 2013 using the *Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey*, an increase in their FV consumption was predictive of higher wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness. Eudaimonic wellbeing has also been linked with FV consumption (Conner et al., 2015; Rooney et al., 2013) leading to an increase in dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin which have all been connected to eudaimonia (Rao et al., 2008). Finally, a hermeneutic study to understand the lived experience of food wellbeing in adults also shows nutrition as a eudaimonic experience that includes various processes, meanings, and contextual states (Mugel et al., 2019) potentially linking PTG to be an embodied experience where trauma is processed through the body and growth achieved through an embodied route (Hefferon et al., 2009) via nutrition.

### Research Question

To explore the intricacies, complexities and nuances of the subjective experiences of adults who used positive nutrition after their TEs, this study aimed to capture the idiographic accounts of what it is to live through this experience and how the participants made sense of their experiences and interpreted them in a way that led to their PTG. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research question: What is the lived experience of adults who used positive nutrition to grow after a traumatic event?

### Methodology

#### Design

Given this study was new, and the area under-researched in Positive Psychology, a qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate to explore new phenomena (Kegler et al., 2017). Furthermore, the participant pool for this study was niche, hard to reach and the

sample size small due to the strict participant restriction criteria (Kampman & Hefferon, 2020). Due to the deep exploratory nature of this specific study, the authors decided to use IPA which aimed to find the meanings of experiences and states of this small, homogenous sample of participants (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborne, 2008). This study therefore stands on the three major theoretical pillars of IPA (i) phenomenology – the study of the lived experience (ii) hermeneutics – the theory of interpretation and (iii) idiography – analysis of the unique and subjective phenomena (Smith et al., 2009).

## Participants

Participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method called ‘purposive sampling’ seeking out information rich individuals (Devers & Frankel, 2000) who used positive nutrition to move forward from their traumas. Social media, forums, and word of mouth was used for recruitment, and based on eligibility, seven participants were selected. The ages of the seven participants ranged between 30 – 60 years. Six out of seven had some form of college education with most pursuing higher education. The candidates spoke English fluently with all participants except two being non-white. Although this study was open to both the male and female population, only women responded. To maintain anonymity, all individuals were given pseudonyms.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality
P1	Ally	Female	40s	British
P2	Beatrice	Female	30s	Polish
P3	Caroline	Female	40s	British
P4	Dora	Female	40s	British
P5	Ellie	Female	50s	Australian
P6	Fran	Female	30s	British
P7	Gemma	Female	50s	British

All participants described their highly stressful life events as *the events happened several times and stopped* (Kira et al., 2013). Three participants had body related traumas (for instance, cancer); the other three had non-body related traumas (for instance, divorce) and one participant had a non-body related TE which ultimately led to a body trauma. The types of foods included in all participants’ diets post their TEs were consistent with healthy, nutritious foods ranging from fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, fish and seafood, nuts and seeds, healthy fats, lean meats, eggs, organic red meat with a complete omission of highly processed and saturated foods.

## Procedure

After gaining the ethical approval for the study, recruitment of participants commenced. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, keeping in line with the IPA protocol (Smith et al., 2009), with each interview process lasting around 60 to 90 minutes to explore the topic deeply (Alase, 2017). Open-ended questions such as ‘could you talk about your experience of engaging with foods after your highly stressful life event’; ‘how if at all did these foods help you move forward with your life’ were used as an interview guide (Howitt & Cramer, 2017) to aid this process. Following the interviews, participants were debriefed, and appropriate support services sent in the debrief letter to them.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the analytic steps followed in an IPA study. The authors want to acknowledge that there have been recent changes incorporated to IPA analysis and terminology (Smith et al., 2022). However, as this study was well underway and conducted prior to the release of the new edition, Smith et al., (2009) was used as the guide to check the alignment and protocol of IPA. The authors also understand that both versions will be used for a period of time (Smith et al., 2022) and have therefore unanimously agreed to use old terminology for this study to stay fully authentic.

As part of data analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. After this stage, there was an initial noting of comments and on readings that followed, emergent themes were identified and noted. This was further analyzed by searching for connections between emergent themes through the processes of abstraction and subsumption (Smith et al., 2009) before organizing them into meaningful clusters. After completion of this process for all participants, theme patterns across all transcripts emerged and a summary table was developed only displaying themes that directly reflected the participants' quality of experience of the phenomenon under investigation including quotes to illustrate each one. The aim was to stay as close to the original transcripts to demonstrate that the themes generated were grounded in data and followed perspective management (Levitt et al., 2017). As IPA is an iterative process (Smith & Osborne, 2008) theme labels were modified, and unidentified themes revisited as analysis moved up from the individual to group level. Once full and final integration of superordinate themes and subordinate themes were identified (Table 2), write up commenced.

**Table 2**  
*Superordinate Themes, Subordinate Themes and Prevalence*

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Prevalence
1. Discovering the Nutritional Sanctuary	1.1 Embodied Healing	(6/7) Ally, Beatrice, Dora, Ellie, Fran, Gemma
	1.2 Positive Foods for Positive Emotions	(4/7) Beatrice, Caroline, Fran, Gemma
	1.3 Spiritual Nourishment	(4/7) Caroline, Beatrice, Ellie, Gemma
2. Metamorphosis of the Body	2.1 Physical Transformation	(5/7) Ally, Beatrice, Caroline, Fran, Gemma
	2.2 Grounded, Reconnected and Embodied	(5/7) Ally, Beatrice, Dora, Ellie, Gemma
	2.3 Discovering the 'New Body'	(4/7) Caroline, Dora, Fran, Ellie
3. The Eudaimonic Journey	3.1 Embracing Positive Relationships	(4/7) Beatrice, Dora, Fran, Gemma
	3.2. Broadening Horizons	(7/7) Ally, Beatrice, Caroline, Dora, Ellie, Fran, Gemma
	3.3 Acceptance of Self	(4/7) Ally, Beatrice, Ellie, Caroline

## Results

Three master themes and nine subordinate themes transpired during the analysis of data (see Table 2). These themes expressed a strong emergence of growth amongst all participants who used healthy foods to grow after their TEs. Specifically, in all individuals, growth was seen to be processed through the body and PTG attained via an embodied route through positive nutrition. In addition to this, some elements of PTG outcomes were found to be more prominent in individuals who experienced a body related trauma in comparison to those who underwent a non-body related trauma and vice versa. The three superordinate themes are: 1. Discovering the Nutritional Sanctuary, 2. Metamorphosis of the Body and, 3. The Eudaimonic Journey. Nine subordinate themes were also revealed, highlighting the profoundly unique journey of each participant. Each theme will be analyzed in this section representing the unique experiences of participants.

### Discovering the Nutritional Sanctuary

#### *Embodied Healing*

The journey of healing was a physical experience, reinforcing that positive nutrition served as an embodied path to healing and PTG. Furthermore, this process was a powerful phenomenon for participants who experienced a body related trauma. Many expressed how the body takes prominence, is brought front and center. Individuals shared powerful experiences of witnessing a lack of control in the body when faced with physical illness. Positive nutrition was seen as a powerful way to regain some form of control, to survive and heal through nutritious foods. Ellie, who is a cancer survivor shares:

*I was in a really horrible place because of cancer and actually over the next 10 years I had seven surgeries with reconstruction. Emotionally and physically, the foods made me feel that I was in control, and it made me feel that I was doing everything I could to survive, to honor my body. I incorporated healthy food and I felt comforted, built, nurtured by the food that I put in my body, I felt that I was doing my best. Yeah, I thought I felt closer to my body in my health by really taking time to appreciate what I was putting in my body. Nutrition was this healing space for me.*  
(Ellie)

Ellie expresses here how using the body and nurturing it intentionally with healthy foods became a potent part of her healing process. However, through her language and continuous use of the word 'feel', there was an indication that although she was not able to control her treatment and changes to her body from cancer and the treatments, she felt there was immense power to heal through foods. Positive nutrition offered her a safe space when everything else around her was chaotic and uncertain, eventually helping her "move forward" and grow. Similarly, Gemma also talks about reviving through food: "The foods really revived me... I think later as time went on, I noticed that certain foods had different purposes and perhaps sensations." For Gemma the use of the word "revived" gives the impression that embracing different foods had different effects, sensations and energy levels on her body and healing. Again, a strong trend discovered amongst individuals who experienced a body related trauma, this became an exercise of discovery as they understood how nutrition worked for them. "Different foods had different purposes and different outcomes for me, so one size really doesn't fit all" said Ally, a shared knowledge amongst all participants that what one's body



needs today in terms of nutrition may be very different from what is required another day. This can also be interpreted as what is a healing food for one, perhaps does not serve others.

### *Positive Foods for Positive Emotions*

A psychological construct for many, participants expressed how healthy foods had a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing. Analyzing this in an in-depth manner, this subordinate theme can be further broken down into three parts (i) positive foods leading to positive emotions, (ii) positive emotions driving physical activity and (iii) positive emotions facilitating better sleep.

The first aspect of the experience was straightforward for all participants – the consistent action of eating healthy foods led to an increase in positive emotions. Participants used words like “calmer,” “happy,” “content,” “high energy,” “lifted mood,” “self-love,” “joy,” “optimistic,” and “hopeful” to describe their mental states. Positive emotions also led to better processing of negative events and higher goal setting. Beatrice who adopted a Keto diet after her highly stressful life event shares:

*So it was, as I said about my emotions, I've had a feeling that if something tough happens, I can look at it now and process it. I am more aware. I am more conscious dealing with this stuff because previously if something happens, it was like click [clicking her fingers] and I was full of anger and full of negative emotions and I couldn't stop it. And since the Keto diet and eating all these healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, something happened, and I look at it. I am calmer. I have all these positive emotions now; on any day I follow this schedule and I'm more organized and more in control. (Beatrice)*

As Beatrice shares her experience, there is a sense of curiosity she displays as to how her previous patterns of negative emotions shifted or even the mechanism of it. The clicking of her fingers as she expresses herself shows this was instant, almost a physical manifestation of the suddenness of the change and a tone of awe in how the processing of her emotions transformed since she started her Keto diet.

The second aspect of this experience for participants was that positive foods led to positive emotions which in turn motivated them to get physically active. Individuals described this as healthy foods helping them relax, feel light, clean and the high energy giving them the drive to focus on exercise, yoga and running. Caroline says:

*I had this huge amount of energy, it actually started to give me pleasure to be physically active... I started doing yoga in 2019. Just to keep moving things forward in a positive way. With the food and yoga, I started feeling all these positive emotions and just good about myself, self-love you know, just happier.*

Caroline’s description illuminates this ripple effect on her emotions both from foods and engagement in physical activity. The use of the word “pleasure” shows her enjoyment and motivation engaging with yoga, whilst “self-care” expressing how she is now in a position of awareness to take care of her wellbeing, leading to further positive emotions.

The final component was positive foods giving rise to positive emotions which in turn allowed participants to enjoy deeper and fuller sleeping patterns. Experienced by many of the participants, they describe how shifts in sleeping patterns added to their positive emotions thereby increasing their overall wellbeing. Fran summarizes this as:



*I was sleeping better as previously the sugar would just feed my insomnia and keep me awake. I didn't feel that full and I felt clean, light and sleep gave me more energy for everything. I was feeling so much more positive and really hopeful, optimistic that things were going to get really better for me after all this time.*

As Fran shares how her sleeping patterns shifted after changing the way she ate, one can sense how she was finally able to reclaim her sleep and, in a way, reclaim her life, illustrating how valuable this shift was for her wellbeing. Her tone and description express a deep sense of hope and optimism from this simple yet powerful habit leading the way to a more positive space.

### ***Spiritual Nourishment***

Experienced strongly by participants who endured a non-body related trauma (for instance childhood abuse, divorce), this subordinate theme highlights the spiritual impact foods had on participants after their TEs, including a deeper sense of reliance on faith, a profound understanding of beliefs and a connection to the universe. Participants described how the act of cooking and praying over food offered a deep sense of spirituality, growth, opening and coming home to their authentic selves. Gemma shares her thoughts:

*I began to pray over my food and keep my thoughts focused on Krishna [a Hindu God] when I was cooking and on God and yeah, and I think that's something that stayed with me. That was the spiritual aspect. I think that was like bringing it all home. It was karmic, I was coming to myself, yeah my real self.*

For Gemma, food was an expression of her religion and faith, an anchor, and a private space for her to come home to. Her use of the word “karmic” symbolizes the spiritual effect of food i.e., “you are what you eat,” perhaps offering her a deeper understanding of the experiences of trauma she underwent. Whereas for some participants like Gemma food was part of a religious and spiritual practice and an expression of their faith, for others food itself was their religion. Ellie said, “food is my religion” and how connecting her body through foods established a “larger than life connection with it all.” Despite having suffered immensely through her traumas, foods offered Ellie a spiritual rejuvenation, allowing her to grow and the believe that she is supported by the universe.

Although some participants experienced a sense of spiritual nourishment only after introducing positive nutrition post their period of psychological disequilibrium, some had gone on to build from their pre-existing beliefs. Two of the participants took their sense of spirituality to deeper levels by engaging in yoga and working in spiritual wellness centers. Caroline went on to do a teacher training program in yoga and shares her spiritual experience:

*I've definitely become more spiritual after eating healthier and being more mindful of what I put in. Because I don't drink [alcohol] anymore and because I don't spend my time escaping, I think I spend more time on personal development like spiritual development ... I think that it's been more of a recognition that I am an energy being and that much of what we manifest is based on our vibrational frequency. Yep.*

Caroline suggests that positive nutrition was only one part of the larger puzzle, but an important piece that led her down a clean and deep spiritual path. She was able to move away

from all the numbing behaviors that did not serve her and engage in personal and spiritual development.

Finally, for one of the participants who had experienced a body-related trauma, there was a sense of disequilibrium and a spiritual struggle at the time of the interview. Dora described how she has never really been a spiritual person but sensed that her experiences perhaps had led to some shifts in this area. Not ready to share more, she says, “So this spiritual side, I don’t know, it’s just private.”

## **Metamorphosis of the Body**

### *Physical Transformation*

Positive nutrition post TEs led to a physical transformation in participants who experienced both a body and non-body related trauma. One of the most striking changes was significant weight loss which occurred as result of incorporating healthy foods and eliminating highly processed foods. Expressed by Caroline as “changed self-concept,” by Beatrice as “re-composition of the body” and by Ally as “a body with less cellulite,” they echo this thought of how weight loss that started in the body physically enhanced strength and a better sense of self. For instance, two participants Fran and Caroline had a tremendous weight loss journey and Caroline shares her experience:

*The physical changes have been really, really significant. A lot really. I mean, really, I have a completely changed self- concept. You know, before I was a size 22 at my biggest and I'm now a size 10, I can move around more. I am just so much connected to my body physically... The weight loss was so visual, changing my body and then changing my mind was simply transformational for me.*

For Caroline, sharing and discussing her weight loss journey was particularly a poignant moment. The number of times she uses the word “really” in the above extract clearly drives home the physical transformation she underwent. A smaller body also signified greater movement. The phrase “changing my body and then changing my mind” is particularly powerful in exhibiting how a visual change through weight loss was a significant catalyst in aiding her psychological growth.

Whilst weight loss was significant for some, for others, the prominent physical transformation appeared as a reduction in physical ailments. Owing to the TEs experienced by participants, many struggled with physical issues because of their extreme distress. This manifested in the body in the form of severe migraines, cysts, dizziness, brain fog, bloating, hormonal imbalance, period pain and issues relating to the gut and bowels. However, with the introduction of positive nutrition after their TEs, this changed, as Beatrice expresses:

*I also saw huge changes in my physical body because after I started eating healthy, I had no pain in my stomach, no bloating, no sounds... I don't have these ups and downs now after eating healthy, and I have no pain during my period, I think my hormones are more stable.*

Given the intensity of physical symptoms it was illuminating to witness Beatrice’s sense of awe, relief, and solace, highlighting the role nutrition played in her recovery. For Ally too who spent years encountering the physical symptomology of trauma, she shares how a change through foods was “life changing for me.”

### ***Grounded, Reconnected, and Embodied***

Reconnecting with the body through positive nutrition opened an embodied path to integration with participants' traumas. Using foods led to a body-based rumination process which overtook any previous intrusive rumination. This deep sense of embodiment reinforces how the body, brain and the outer world are interwoven with all psychological processes firmly grounded in the body. Beatrice shares:

*I can see that my body is happy, it feels very grounded and connected... Now my body feels alive and completely energetic. I feel everything in my body now. When I process my emotions too, I can sense it in my body.*

Participants with a body related trauma explored this on a semantic level and recognized that appreciating their bodies through nutrition paved a way to reconnect with it. Ellie articulated how emotions like anger, happiness and sadness can now be processed through her body and the deep sense of disconnection with the body she experienced previously had now changed. She says:

*I feel everything in my body now. When I process my emotions too, I can sense it in my body. I never used to be connected to it, I don't even think I could feel my body before, there was no connection really. Now everything has changed. Well, honoring my body was my biggest priority because I think you know I've been given this house that I live in, and it inspires me to look after and nurture and honor and appreciate our body [through healthy foods]. I feel very passionately that I have a duty to, it's my responsibility to help my body to function as best as I can. (Ellie)*

From Ellie's words, one can notice a renewed sense of appreciation and a deeper connection she felt towards her body. "Honoring my body" illuminates her passion for nourishing her body on a cellular level, almost like this was the only way to reclaim it. Becoming aware of her body through foods reminded her of the emotions she was feeling, leading to embodied cognition and an acknowledgement that she felt grounded in this experience.

Another significant finding in Dora and other participants who experienced a body related TE was this idea of "retaking control of the body" and "using my body to get to my mind." She goes on to explain:

*So, I think by doing things like eating healthy foods that I was in control you know, just retaking control of my body... It anchored me to my body, to my core. I felt I had to use my body to get to my mind. My body had to feel it first and the nutrition helped me do that. That anchoring to the body was important ... I mean the grounding and anchoring certainly came from first the body and then a psychological perspective. (Dora)*

"Retaking control" was significant for Dora and other participants as they lost control of their bodies or in some cases, ignored their bodies after their TEs. One can see that with food they regained some form of control, finding their way back to their bodies through food. Furthermore, from the above extract there is a clear role nutrition played in facilitating

embodiment after trauma. The body brought them full circle reminding them that intentionality and engagement begins with the body. The body became the center of their experience, paving the way for psychological shifts. The body was a vital player in facilitating PTG for these participants.

### ***Discovering the 'New Body'***

Four participants discovered the “new body” on this journey. For Ellie and Dora, their new bodies were positive as they were able to move forward from “hating my body” and “switching off connections” to creating “self-love” and a “deeper sense of connection with the mind and body” through the embodied journey of positive nutrition. However, there were negative connotations for two of the other participants with their “new body,” and the authors strongly feel that their voices should be heard. Powerful metaphors such as “battle scars” and “war wounds” emerged. Both participants agreed that eating healthy and losing weight was positive for their mind and body, yet there was a flip side to it. For Fran who had a distressing body related trauma talks about how mortified she is of her new body, the negative effect on her body image with the ‘new body’ being a constant visual reminder of her trauma. Fran shares:

*As I started to eat healthier and lose the weight I was feeling fantastic, I was lighter... But then on the flipside of that I was distraught and devastated at the state of my body... The scars are there, it was never the body I imagined that I would have... Even now I can't look in the mirror fully like naked, I don't know that I ever will be able to. I hope that I will, but I think it's a constant reminder of what I went through like it's a scar in itself.*

Fran’s contemplation illuminates how both growth and distress co-existed in her journey. As she uses the words “distraught” and “devastating” one can sense the distress she’s experiencing in this new state. However, discovering the ‘new body’ after it had undergone trauma and seeing the way it functions in its present form was also a way for her to connect to the corporeal self, which is a critical route to growth. Caroline also shares:

*So, I'm positive because I'm healthier, cleaner and the other side, I'm also saying, oh yeah, this new body has also come with certain not so positive things ... but that's kind of like a battle scar in a war, what I kind of went through and then the transformation.*

From the above extract Caroline is moving towards appreciating her new body. Her use of the term “battle scars” is a symbol of transformation and finding new meaning through her journey - a new narrative switching from *ugly scars* to *battle scars*, highlighting her powerful growth.

### **The Eudaimonic Journey**

#### ***Embracing Positive Relationships***

Four participants described closer and deepened relationships with their family members. However, the authors feel that it’s important to clarify that this subordinate theme was not experienced by participants outside of their households. The intensity of the shared experience of using healthy foods within the household and the act of cooking played an instrumental part in facilitating this closeness. The kitchen was seen as a “happy place” by Dora

where cooking and sharing of foods was an “act of love.” Another participant, Gemma also shares:

*My relationships with my children are amazing and it really revolves around food... I think food, yeah, I mean it's when we come together and share food. You know with my son, we are always kind of trying to develop something new in terms of food, something we kind of like... Yeah, there is this thankfulness ... You know, a few years ago, my daughter started taking over Christmas cooking at Christmas, so I am now the assistant ... You know it's so lovely because yeah, Christmas dinner cooking is a big thing! ... And when you cook, it's a lot of positive emotions which is amazing and builds strong relationships.*

For Gemma, cooking promoted a sense of togetherness, connection, and bonding with her children, leading to a rise in positive emotions, a sense of purpose, gratitude, and healing. Through Christmas dinners and creating new recipes there also appears to be a powerful ritual that developed within this family from planning to preparing to sharing. This highlights the formation of a co-creative relationship for participants with their families as a positive outcome through foods.

Fran's relationship with her family sharply contrasts with the other participants' experiences. The journey of her body related trauma, extreme distress, treatment and then recovery was a testing experience. Her parents became her carers during her illness, and she shares how this shift and dependency on her parents challenged their relationship.

*I was on these steroids and my parents started to notice that literally I just wanted to be eating. So, my relationship with my parents became extremely challenging because I was desperate, and I was doing ridiculous things like coming down in the middle of the night and hoarding food. I was hiding food... This relationship I'd become so dependent on my parents for everything including food. (Fran)*

Fran's frustration is clearly demonstrated in the above quote as she describes the battle she faced with her parents through her trauma. However, she then goes on to express a shift she noticed as she started managing her foods and diet. This allowed her to reclaim some of her independence, ultimately paving a way to reclaim her relationship with her parents.

The researchers feel that it would be remiss to overlook the relational strains that can result from trauma. As expressed by Fran, sharing of trauma experiences with others outside of family was challenging:

*My friendships were definitely impacted because I had become so dependent on my parents. I just cut myself off, like I really had gotten to the point where I just didn't want to have relationships with anyone but my mom and dad. Only they knew what was happening to me, only they knew only they could help. No one else understood what I was going through. (Fran)*

For participants, although the positive shifts in relationships with their families outnumbered the negative changes, there were complexities in relational dynamics when it came to others like friends. This was clearly demonstrated in this study especially with participants who experienced a body related trauma, calling attention to the complex physicality of their traumas.

### *Broadening Horizons*

All of the participants described how using positive nutrition after their TEs led to healing and growth, therefore strongly reinforcing the embodied approach to PTG. Participants used similar language to describe this growth: “strength,” “resilience,” “motivation,” “not a victim anymore,” “bounce back and beyond,” “confidence,” “can overcome anything,” and “stepping out of the comfort zone.” This rise in strength gave participants an opportunity to “broaden horizons” and enhance their personal growth. Caroline articulates:

*I feel like I've experienced growth in action. You know because there's this idea that you bounce back, bounce back and beyond. I think there's definitely something to that. Bouncing back and growing from the traumas I think just a more positive outlook and a more positive way of being in general in my life ... I think probably the phrase broadening horizons comes to mind. (Caroline)*

Caroline repeatedly used the phrase “bounce back” illuminating her strength, self-determination and resilience leading to ‘broadening horizons’ which manifested in the form of positive opportunities for her, demonstrating the presence of growth in her life. Some participants also described how they felt emotionally stronger, that is, a sense of psychological preparedness after responding to their TEs by engaging with foods. This preparedness presented opportunities to grow, allowing them to realize their potential. This resonated strongly with Beatrice who shares “I am so prepared, I just know myself so well now, I can do anything,” and Dora’s feeling that, “I can overcome anything, I am a long-distance cyclist now, and I am up for all these adventures, who would have thought!” and Ally articulating:

*Changing my diet, so that's where it started and then once I did that, I started getting happier and having less stress, should I say. After that, everything kind of slotted into place. You know I did do many things. This led to opportunities.*

Finally, participants also reported learning new skills or enhancing existing skills in both expected and unexpected ways. They acquired or developed skills to meet demands of their new situation and reflected on how this provided new possibilities for change. Fran’s illness had put her in a wheelchair during her trauma and after rehab she had to learn new skills to perform tasks old tasks. She shares:

*I grew and challenged myself, yeah I even started driving again ... I got reassessed and so I drive a car now with hand controls ... I had so much confidence in myself ... I had to learn new tasks and new ways of doing things. I was still having treatment, so it made sense at the time, and I just needed to build my confidence, my confidence was coming back. (Fran)*

In the above extract, Fran has used the word “confidence” three times. Although there were negative life-altering changes she experienced in her body because of her illness, there is a sense that she able to slowly reclaim her life and rebuild her confidence opening further opportunities for growth.



### *Acceptance of Self*

Although participants had undergone extreme distress due to their TEs, they expressed that they were now in a position of accepting their past. Beatrice shares:

*After changing to the Keto diet, I think that's when I could process emotions more easily. I had this strength to finally face my childhood. And face all emotions that were difficult, and I had the strength to do this. To 'clean this basement'... It's time to 'clean the basement'. Clean everything that was going on ... Yeah, I just started throwing myself into growing and really accepting my past and everything that happened to me. So, at this point I'm grateful for all this trauma.*

The multiple use of this powerful metaphor “cleaning the basement” by Beatrice from the above extract gives a profound sense that positive nutrition was the first step that helped her delve into the past and start a clean-up. Through these words, one can almost visualize her strong need to remove any clutter and negative experiences from her mind, through her body using healthy foods to move forward. Furthermore, she expresses a deep sense of gratitude for the lessons from her trauma leading to PTG. Participants also acknowledged multiple aspects of their self – the good, the bad, the insecurities, the battles, and their victories. PTG was clearly visible as they reported accounts of their self-acceptance, as Ellie shares, “Choosing my foods and nutrition was the one single thing that helped me grow the most and honestly accept my life.” For Ellie, her breast cancer journey was traumatic. She shared with the researcher the number of times she had always thought “why me,” questioning her illness despite having no family history of the disease, nor having smoked in her life. It can be seen here that perhaps the enormity of this change and movement from despair to acknowledging multiple aspects of her journey led to acceptance through foods, again emphasizing the role of this embodied approach to growth.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the research question – what is the lived experience of adults who used positive nutrition to grow after a traumatic event? Three key themes emerged, concluding that the participants experienced PTG after using positive nutrition post their TEs. The themes also exhibited the complex and diverse processes and outcomes of growth, suggesting that the journey of growth is ever-evolving (Kampman, 2021). These themes include (i) discovering the nutritional sanctuary through an embodied healing from foods, enjoying positive emotions and spiritual nourishment (ii) experiencing metamorphosis in their bodies through physical transformation, embodiment and discovering the ‘new body’, and finally (iii) through a eudaimonic journey manifesting in the form of deepened relationships, heightened personal growth and an acceptance of self. The findings of this study incorporate multiple points that overlap with published literature on PTG, whilst also providing a more in-depth view on the role positive nutrition played in the development of PTG.

### **Growth Facilitative Power of Nutrition Via the Purposeful Activity of Engaging with Foods**

The findings from this study demonstrated that embodied healing through foods was particularly experienced by participants who underwent a body related trauma. These results of embodied healing have been shown to converge with other studies in physical illness populations. For instance, a study conducted by Missel et., al (2018) demonstrated how

nutritional intervention and education in individuals who underwent esophageal cancer showed a process whereby cancer survivors reconnected to their bodies by learning to inhabit new practices i.e., a process known as re-embodiment eating. Further research conducted in adults five years after their bariatric surgery also exhibited re-embodiment eating and a renewed relationship with foods leading to changed perspectives (Natvik et al., 2014). Reinforcing that the body is forefront after body related traumas (Carel, 2011; Hefferon & Kampman, 2020; Merleau-Ponty, 1962;), this similar trend was reported in this current study whereby participants Dora, Ellie, Fran, and Gemma exhibited re-embodiment eating practices, learning to “nourish, honor and repair” their bodies through nutritious foods leading to an increase in their bodily awareness, healing, and PTG.

### **Positive Nutrition, Mental Wellbeing, and the Process of Growth**

It was demonstrated that all participants managed their “deliberate reflective and constructive rumination” (Kampman 2021, p. 168), an integral part of the PTG process by evoking positive emotions through cooking and engaging with foods (Mugel et al., 2019). Growth was facilitated through Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions which posits that positive emotions can broaden thought-action repertoires, undo negative emotions and build resilience through physical, intellectual, and psychological resources (Cohn & Frederickson, 2009). This embodied growth through positive nutrition led to a broadening effect urging participants to engage in less negative thoughts (Fredrickson, 2001) and increase physical activities and sleep, which in turn helped cultivate physical and psychological strength (Brady & Grenville-Cleave, 2018; Ong et al., 2017). Mugel et al. (2019) also connected food wellbeing i.e., positive, and holistic contributions of food-based activities like eating, sharing of meals and developing food creativity through cooking to eudaimonia. These acts were experienced by Dora and Gemma in the kitchen, inculcating a feeling of being connected with family members, and their altruistic aspect of caring leading to their highest level of wellbeing and an increase in positive emotions (Belk & Llamas, 2012).

### **Spiritual Nourishment Leading to PTG**

This subordinate theme was predominant amongst those who experienced a non-body related trauma, validating that PTG trajectories of processes and outcomes can be different with different types of traumas (Chopko et al., 2018; Kira et al., 2013; Shakespeare-Finch & Armstrong, 2010). Although different concepts, spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably (Arrey et al., 2016) and can overlap especially in individuals who have experienced TEs (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Mytko & Knight, 1999). The interchangeable nature of spirituality and religion was witnessed in both Gemma and Caroline where their engagement with positive nutrition after their TEs led to a search for higher meaning, faith, and transcendence (Sulmasy, 2002) which in turn facilitated PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). One of the participants initially identified with Hinduism, with PTG manifesting as the spiritual concept of “karma” (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p. 21), that is, one’s present condition viewed because of the past and then a shift to Christianity with her deep faith in this religion routed in prayer and meaning. Empirical studies conducted by Harris et al. (2010) revealed that the use of prayer can foster PTG and Christians who kept focused on religious faith and spirituality are more likely to experience PTG (Tedeschi et al., 2018). Food was also seen as a religion for participants, with studies conducted by Cohen (2021) indicating that food can be viewed as sacred and divine or as an offering to God, as Gemma shared. Foods have also been connected to wellness and spirituality (Michopoulou & Jauniskis, 2020) influencing individuals’ inner determinations and beliefs (Tan et al., 2014) leading to PTG. Although participants in this study

reported PTG through spirituality, researchers have also argued that great loss and tragedy endured can lead to loss of faith and significant existential distress (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006).

### **Physical Transformation Aiding Growth**

Over the years, researchers have called for more studies to explore embodied approaches to growth following trauma (Hefferon & Kampman, 2020; Kampman, 2021; Kampman & Hefferon, 2020). In this study, participants reported experiences of doing things they didn't think possible and shared new ways of being through the body. For some, a physical transformation was most prominent, with the body providing an avenue for processing their traumas and a catalyst for further growth (Hefferon et al., 2009). Presenting as tremendous weight loss for Caroline, a change in her physical self was seen as a shift in self-identity manifesting in the form of strength and body composition (Sablston et al., 2007). Furthermore, for some, physical transformation was seen as a crucial component in enhancing self-worth (Hefferon et al., 2010), body satisfaction and physical self-concept (Annesi & Porter, 2015; Hefferon, 2013) leading to PTG. Physical transformation also manifested in the form of a shift in physical ailments resulting from their psychological distress. Multiple studies have validated the physicality of trauma (Chakraborty & Burns, 2020; Gordon, 2019; Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Van der Kolk, 2015) and participants like Ally and Beatrice who suffered from trauma induced migraines and gut issues leaned on nutrition to combat their physical symptomology (Kendall-Tackett, 2009). This led to higher wellbeing through foods, resulting in growth (Hefferon 2013; Holder, 2019; Korn 2013, 2016; Rucklidge & Kaplan, 2016; Sadhukhan, 2020).

### **The Role of Embodiment in Facilitating Growth**

The experience of trauma has been shown to exhibit symptoms ranging from intense emotions to abstract thoughts, ever-cycling inner ruminations (Im & Follette, 2016; Stanley, 2016) and a phenomenon known as 'numbing', where many survivors have reported dissociation, both in the form of physical numbing and psychological anesthesia (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Litz et al., 2002; Pozza et al., 2019; Van der Kolk, 2015;). For participants in this current study, reconnecting with their bodies meant moving away from such numbing behaviors and forging an embodied path to the amalgamation of their traumas (Van der Kolk, 2015).

Previous research shows that the body is central in the PTG process for those who experience a body related trauma (Hefferon, 2012, 2013; Hefferon et al., 2008, 2009, 2010; Kampman, 2021; Kampman & Hefferon 2020) with studies demonstrating that physical trauma can lead to a heightened sense of corporeal awareness of the body that may not have been present preceding the trauma (Hefferon et al., 2012; Hefferon et al., 2009, 2010). Research has also shown that positive healthy behavioral changes when introduced to the body, like physical activity (Hefferon, 2012; Hefferon et al., 2008, 2009; Hefferon & Kampman, 2020) and positive nutrition (as seen in this study) in body related trauma survivors have shown (i) body-based constructive rumination (Hefferon & Kampman, 2020), (ii) benefit finding (Tedeschi et al., 2018), (iii) 'action focused growth' (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014, p. 11) and positive embodiment (Piran, 2016) leading to C-PTG (Hefferon, 2012). This form of growth was strongly exhibited in participants Dora and Ellie.

### **The 'New Body' and Growth**

Based on the working theory of C-PTG, discovering the 'new body' also raised corporeal awareness for participants like Dora, Ellie, Caroline, and Fran, who had to undergo unique processes and outcomes to survive their trauma and then eventually grow (Hefferon et

al., 2008, 2009, 2010). Ellie and Dora transitioned from a state of hating and fearing their bodies to rebuilding a relationship with their physical selves. They were able to reclaim control and have a sense of appreciation toward their new bodies, with these findings converging with other studies in this area (Gorven & Du Plessis, 2021; Kampman et al., 2015). However, for Fran, despite the growth, the old body was missed, and the new body seen as a visual reminder of trauma leading to a complex relationship with the body (Hefferon, 2015) resulting in a negative body image (Avalos et al., 2005; Cash & Smolak, 2011), again reinforcing that distress can coexist with growth (Kampman & Hefferon, 2020).

As seen above, previous research has strongly focused on the role of the body and C-PTG in physical illness populations (Hefferon, 2012; Hefferon et al., 2008, 2009; Hefferon & Kampman, 2020). However, through this study, the authors would like to highlight that the body and “awareness of the body” (Hefferon et al., 2009, p.372-373) in facilitating PTG processes and outcomes can also be extended to those who experienced a non-body related trauma as seen in participants Beatrice and Ally. They experienced an awareness and connection with their bodies (Impett et al., 2006; Piran et al., 2020; Smith, 2017) manifesting in the form of positive embodiment (Piran 2020), that is, “positive connection, embodied agency and attuned self-care” towards the body (Piran, 2016, p. 47) leading to PTG (Hefferon 2015). In terms of future research and practice, more work needs to be done to understand the role of the body and embodied approaches to PTG in those who undergo non-body related traumas.

### **Positive Nutrition Facilitating Personal Growth and Self-Acceptance**

Personal growth can manifest because of developing new interests, learning new habits, building advanced career paths, or creating changes in the community leading to PTG (Shakespeare- Finch & Barrington, 2012; Tedeschi et al., 2018). In this study, self-determination, strength, and psychological preparedness facilitated personal growth for all participants. Like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), the Self-Determination Theory posits that psychological needs must evolve to lead to motivation and personal growth, and this was demonstrated in all participants. Finally, Beatrice, Caroline, Ellie, and Ally reported self-acceptance demonstrating that positive nutrition helped them accept all parts of their selves whilst feeling positive about their past lives (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Expressed as “cleaning the basement” by Beatrice and “I have accepted my experiences” by Ellie, this validates research that suggests that trauma survivors can experience increased self-perceptions like self-acceptance post TEs (Hemenover, 2003; Wamser-Nanney et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). A deeper corporeal awareness experienced because of the embodied approach of positive nutrition also helped participants like Ellie and Caroline develop a renewed relationship with their bodies (Hefferon, 2012), leading to self-compassion, positive self-image, and self-acceptance (Latifi et al., 2020; Soltani et al., 2020), therefore carving a space for growth.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth account of the experience of PTG in adults who used the embodied approach of positive nutrition to grow after their TEs. The qualitative methodology of IPA was used, and seven female participants interviewed. This study through its findings concluded that growth was seen to be processed through the body and PTG attained via the embodied route of positive nutrition. Furthermore, some elements of PTG outcomes were found to be more prominent in participants who experienced a body related trauma, in comparison to those who underwent a non-body related trauma and vice versa. For instance, metamorphosis of the body was a key component in participants who underwent a physical trauma whereby PTG was facilitated via embodied healing and heightened corporeal

awareness (Hefferon, 2012; Kampman & Hefferon, 2020). On the other hand, spirituality led to PTG in participants who experienced a non-body related trauma. Other outcomes such as broadening horizons and rise in positive emotions paved the way for PTG in all participants irrespective of the type of trauma they underwent. This supports researchers' views that different types of TEs can impact the process and outcome of PTG (Kira et al., 2013; Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Although extensive research has been conducted on the role of the body and PTG in physical illness and severe injury populations (Hefferon, 2012; Hefferon et al., 2008, 2009; Hefferon & Kampman, 2020; Kampman, 2021) there is currently scant research on the role of the body in non-physical illness populations, therefore calling for the body to be incorporated in all investigations of growth (Kampman, 2021). In addition to this, one of the recommendations going forward is to study exclusively the role of positive nutrition as an embodied approach in both the male and female populations who have undergone a non-body related trauma (for instance, divorce, bereavement, social bullying) to understand PTG processes and outcomes within this group. Other embodied approaches to PTG like human touch, physical pain, positive sexuality, body modification and other body therapies (Hefferon, 2013, 2015) in both body and non-body related traumas have also been neglected and further research around this discrepancy would be valuable in Positive Psychology research.

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### Notes on Contributors

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