

Self-Balancing Sanctuaring: A Classic Grounded Theory of Relaxation

Ruth Tiffany Naylor, CPsychol, British Autogenic Society, Ltd., London, England

Abstract

This author aimed to set out a grounded theory (GT) of relaxation as it is carried out under the normal pressures and tensions of everyday life. After switching from using the Corbin and Strauss grounded theory (2008) design to classic grounded theory, the author discovered a five-step theoretical causal-consequence model emerged from the analysis of what 21 non-anxious-to-slightly-anxious people from the community said what they do to relax. Their main concern is self-balancing. A disturbed sense of ease (cause) arising from internal and external threats (context) leads to resolution by switching (core category) in safety (condition). The chosen switching activities are self-emergent. Their continuing use depends upon transforming hindrances and integrating feedback to the process to maximize benefits (contingencies and consequences). Three switching strategies are central. Benefits not consciously or analytically generated are restoring, refreshing, and re-energizing me; maintaining and building me; and growing and developing me. Restoring, refreshing, and re-energizing me is characterized by a sense of well-being and lifted mood; maintaining and building me is characterized by integrating and strengthening the core self and connecting to the community; growing and developing me is characterized by expanding self-discovery. Theoretically situating extant descriptive and conceptual models of relaxation is one of the many contributions this research makes.

Keywords: anxiety, classic grounded theory, relaxation, positive psychology, interacting cognitive subsystems model.

Introduction

Prior to this research, relaxation has been viewed as a process of letting go of all tension not only in the body, in the sense of micro-factors of muscle physics and electrical activity (Jacobson, 1964), but also of macro-factors of such as those arising in the environment (Selye, 1946), the mind, and the spirit (Benson, 1975). The debate about psychophysiological relaxation that took place in terms of Claude Bernard's abstract concept of the constancy of the milieu intérieur (Modell, et al., 2015) and which was made more concrete and practical by Cannon (1932) and then by Selye is now taking place in terms of allostatic balance, load, and overload (Chuang, Gleib, Goldman, & Weinstein, 2007). This historic focus on release of muscle tension was driven by a mechanistic medical view of how humans "work." This means that active relaxation

activities have rarely been studied together with passive ones, and that neither have been studied in the context of life as lived.

Theoretically, while relaxation is mentioned in related disciplines which do include contextualised activities involving significant body movements, such as in Csikszentmihayli's extensive empirical, conceptual, and theoretical work on "flow" in work and play (1975), the largest body of recent empirical work directly focusing on relaxation, per se, is Smith's (1990, 1999) which focuses on passive relaxation activities. Smith (1990) developed a set of structured inventories using factor analysis of words and phrases culled from passive relaxation therapy text books. These questionnaires were then used to develop "R[elaxation]-State" concepts which are said to be emotional, mental, and physical states. Smith (1990) first hypothesized a hierarchical linear model of how people progress through the R-States and later a "dual path" (Smith, 1999, p. 45) model, with the suggestion that any sequence through the R-States may be possible. As mindfulness took hold in the United States, the dual-path model has been re-framed in a mindfulness context and re-named "window of renewal" (Smith, 2007, p. 41). "Core mindfulness" and "transcendence" were then hypothesized to be anchoring concepts in the new conceptual model, which focuses on the activity itself and not on its drivers, antecedents, or long term outcomes.

Thus, for the present research, it was a logical first step to talk with people about all forms of relaxation without pre-conceived questionnaires and without a single focus on passive activities. This shift was to discover the main concern and how it is continually resolved when people say they relax, regardless of how they do it. Also, as "anxious" people are often unable to relax by their own self-report, the focus of this paper is only on "non-anxious" people's reports.

Methodological Concerns

Methodologically, Smith's conceptual model along with mechanism of action models made by proponents of specific therapeutic activities, such as Jacobson (1964, 1977) for progressive and applied relaxation, Kabat-Zinn (1991) for mindfulness based stress reduction, and Schultz (1972) for autogenic training, had to be set aside.

Purposive sampling began with recruiting people from the wider community who were not more than 'mildly' anxious to talk about relaxation. Eleven attendees at a public meeting called "Psychology for All" which was sponsored by the British Psychological Society and held in London in March 2009, volunteered for interview. They reviewed and signed a consent form which had been approved by Canterbury Christ Church University's ethics committee along with a semi-structured interview in February 2009. The interview format, the ethics approval, and the participant recruitment processes were designed to follow the Corbin and Strauss GT method (2008) which was advised by and approved by the dissertation committee.

Volunteers talked for twenty minutes and handwritten notes were taken as verbatim as possible. At the end, to assess participant anxiety levels, a 5-point anxiety scale was used which read "Are you? Very Well, Well, Worried Well, Unwell, Very Unwell". For ethical reasons the word "anxiety" was not used in this scale; instead, wellness concepts (Pontious, 2002) were substituted with answers of 'very well' and 'well' equating to 'none' to 'mild' anxiety levels. This scale was used to rule out any

participant who was not 'very well' or 'well' by self-report; one participant was in fact ruled out.

Following the Corbin and Strauss comparison method (1990), coding and analytic memoing began immediately after interview using MAXQDA software (Peters & Wester, 2007). Three theoretical issues emerged: (1) relevance of relaxation activity levels, (2) relevance of gender, and (3) relevance of opportunity recruitment factors.

The idea of energy expenditure being central to benefits of relaxation was spontaneously mentioned by participants. Jetté, Sidney and Blümchen's (1990) metabolic equivalency tasks (METs) tables which quantify the "energy expenditure values for numerous household and recreational activities [as a multiple of] the amount of oxygen consumed while sitting at rest" (p. 555) were used to assess activity levels of all the activities mentioned. Stress management authors (Woolfolk, Lehrer, & Allen, 2007) suggested activity levels and gender could be relevant variables. A further question had arisen. Could the relatively high level of knowledge of psychology common to the volunteers have biased the data?

To assess whether these variables were relevant and to ensure theoretical saturation of concepts, attendees of the Surrey Economic Business Partnership breakfast meetings held in Guildford, Surrey, and members at the Blackhorse Apiaries, St Johns, Woking, Surrey were told about the research and asked to participate, if interested. With permission, all interviews were audio recorded. Participants from the whole set who were willing to be re-contacted were contacted again for further discussion of concepts relating to activity levels and to the switching processes within them.

Whilst no specific occupational categories or gender were targeted, by the end of theoretical sampling there were 21 participants, 7 men and 14 women ranging in age from 19 to 65. They came from these fields: psychology, teaching, coaching, management, education, garden construction, entrepreneurship, journalism, and financial services. And, participants had talked about a variety of activities which they undertook from three times a day to once or twice a year. These activities ranged from low to high METs: hot bathing, working, gardening, guided Pilates, guided relaxation, listening to books, meditating, playing a musical instrument, reading self to sleep, scuba diving, shopping, steam bathing, swimming, taking days off, walking with a friend or alone, watching funny films, watching TV and playing Sudoku, working out, and yoga.

Ultimately, over 200 codes with memos were captured in the MAXQDA database using the Corbin and Strauss method (1990, 2008). Initial sorting of theoretical memos yielded a preliminary description, not a theory. At this point of being overwhelmed with data and of realizing a description and not a theory was emerging that two of Glaser's books (1978, 1992) were discovered.

Attending to verbal direction given by the Grounded Theory Institute (GTI) in 2010, it became clear that the data overwhelm could have easily arisen because interviews were taped (1997) and database software was used instead of pencil and paper. With advice from the GTI faculty, all previous coding and memoing was set aside. Paper and pencil only were used to re-do the analysis from start to finish. Interviews were open coded again. Memos were written. The number of codes reduced by almost two-thirds and conceptual and theoretical memo output increased. At this point, it was clear that no further theoretical sampling was required. Theory that emerges from this

simple, iterative, inductive process is an extended hypothesis which can and should be altered as and when new data and information suggest that it no longer works and fits as it stands.

Theory: Self-balancing Sanctuarying

On sorting memos, it became clear that Glaser's (1978) generic "Six-C Model" (p. 74) of a cause-consequence process, doing an activity in its ecological, or "inter-being," context, worked and fit. There are five variables: a self-chosen, self-emergent, self-balancing relaxation activity (assessing, arranging, using switching strategies) is placed within a context (internal/external), with a condition (safety), a cause (actual or threatened dis-ease), consequences (benefits), and contingencies (hindrances and enablers). There are no co-varying factors.

Self-balancing sanctuarying is an iterative, and at times recursive, switching process. The self-balancing activity involves taking action in a three-stage switching process; these stages may progress in moments or over an extended period of time.

- Stage one requires a realistic assessment of the external context of objects, people, and ongoing life and of the internal context, the self's "felt sense of ease" (FSE).
- Stage two involves arranging these externals and internals to develop and maintain safety.
- Stage three involves doing the activity using up to three switching strategies.

Contextually, and at the start, anticipating benefits and/or ignoring distresses are tactics which may be used to maintain current state or to deal with distress in the near term if circumstances do not permit self-balancing in the moment. Hindrances must be managed and benefits must be integrated at each stage to optimize self-balancing and give motivation and meaning to the overall process. Past experience and selected family, friends and others in the community are important supporters of this self-balancing process. Significantly, for the process to proceed, a condition of safety must be assured during assessing and arranging and then throughout the activity itself. Once benefits accrue, these are integrated into the process at each step, giving motivation and meaning.

Main Concern: Self-Balancing

Participants talked about their concern this way: "When I unwind I am detaching from my work day commitments, I process the day, think about the next day, I have time and space to clear my head:" unwinding from stress re-balances. "The first thing would be noticing that I feel tense and not plowing on through that, making the choice to do something constructive to relax, taking the time for myself, allowing myself time:" letting go of stress brings balance.

I have had periods in my life when I have been extremely stressed, so I avoid that, and in order to avoid that it is essential I have relaxation time, I relax with friends, and family, but also have to carve that out as a bit of time for me."

We see avoiding accumulating stress as a way of staying balanced.

Core Category: Switching

The context for self-balancing sanctuaries is the internal and external life milieu—is it balanced or is it loaded or overloaded with dis-equilibrating factors and forces? Constant monitoring by the felt sense of ease answers this question. Switching begins with realistic assessing of the real time or anticipated possible disturbances in the felt sense of ease. If motivated, attention and action are re-oriented toward adaptive arranging, and then participants start a chosen self-balancing activity using one or more of three switching strategies. The consequences of switching are a restoration to balance and a restored felt sense of ease with experience, along with other multiple benefits. Two contingencies impinge on the process: (1) transforming hindrances that dampen the process in a negative causal feedback loop, and (2) integrating feedback to the process in an amplifying positive causal loop. These contingencies may happen over short (seconds) or long periods (hours).

Cause and Context: Self and 'Felt Sense of Ease' (FSE)

Participants acted upon and made meaning of their experiences of ease or disease through their felt sense of ease or dis-ease (FSE). This acts as a barometer to let them know if they are balanced or loaded (context variable) and also acts as a trigger (cause variable) to begin self-balancing. One participant put triggers to relax this way: “[it’s] a combination of overload and frustration.” From the theoretical perspective, this felt sense of ease or dis-ease functions in two ways: as a sensing device and as a gatekeeper. This felt sense appears to align with Gendlin’s (1997) discussion of a “felt sense” of knowing. Gendlin theorised, from a philosophical and clinical perspective, that humans have “a thinking that employs more than conceptual logic, rules, or distinctions . . . a wider process of human sense-making” (p. xii, xvi). Sense-making for Gendlin (1997) is meaning making which arises pre-cognitively within the body as a felt sense.

The FSE is a body based “voice” which communicates non-lexically, implicitly, subjectively, and concretely, even though it is lexically blank, by pointing to the implicit that must become known. It has a “language” and a “voice” that make and validate meaning by the subjectivity of experience. The FSE has a balancing set point that ranges from inflexible to flexible; it has a tipping point and a safety range which is narrow to wide, and it responds to perceived threat load. To explain why they engage in relaxation activities at specific times, participants use a combination of common-sense logic and a felt sense of knowing. “If I am confident and comfortable in the situation, like I am supposed to be there, then I am relaxed.” They have attributed causality to a number of distal and proximal incidents arising from internal and external contextual sources, like accidents or work stress. For example:

My job is hard, it is long hours and dealing with difficult people, with little in way of breaks during the day... it’s illegal, I’m sure, so [yoga and relaxation once weekly] help me unwind the thought which goes on in my head constantly the other four days of the week. . . .

And, “I think it’s more an overload thing with me, I’ve got an overload going on up here [in the mind], which is rationalized [internal threat].”

The FSE is felt as either a juggling or a flowing state which has a set of distinct self-balancing objectives: getting back to me, being me, and becoming me. “It is something I do to relax [play an instrument], or something I do, full stop . . . it is part of a routine, so ingrained in my life over decades.” And, the listening self modulates

awareness of the felt sense of ease, either pre-consciously or consciously, asks itself questions about its state, and decides what to do next. For example, one consciously aware participant who does not manage hindrances well says: "I am aware of the fact that it [meditation] would help, I would like to do it, but it is genuinely a time constraint... I do know I need to do it more now, clearly, but clearly is not enough!" Another participant who is pre-consciously aware and has integrated a positive feedback loop into ongoing life says: "I find that I am relaxed most if I can do something at a set time of day, then there is no stress involved, you just get yourself ready and you do that activity and it's relaxing."

Condition: Safety

Switching proactively or reactively is done in a safe and unhindered way. "I am wanting to concentrate – to do it in the best way, I need to be physically relaxed and comfortable. My space is very calm and light, it's my retreat." "Maybe it's a very pleasant place to go to." "It's a haven, it's safe, it's my own space, nothing else, no one invades it, if you want, unless I chose to let them." Sanctuaries are places and spaces in which the outer world is controlled and inhabited by the self and trusted others only, distant from threats. A sanctuary can be a place:

I love water, if I could I would spend all day in the bath. Also, I know that when I am in the bathroom no one else has access to me, I don't have any distractions from the outer world, I am in my enclosed private space.

It can be an inner space: "It's just a sense of calmness, connection and safety, I feel safe. I feel cared about." And, it can be a place where others participate: "The yoga teacher has a voice like liquid chocolate... her voice is very relaxing, which is why I have stuck with that particular class."

Activity

An effective self-balancing activity is incorporated into the life through a learning and repeated doing process. People do the activity in their own individual way, not in a forced way, but because they like it and it works for them over time: they have made it their own. In essence, their chosen activity has emerged into their life during a time of confluence of interest, ability, social support, and a growing felt sense of ease that the activity serves its purpose.

Stage One: Realistic Assessing. This is the first step. It can be an automatic process wherein challenges to starting are easily and seamlessly met. "I don't think anything like, 'I have to relax, I will do x'. I don't ever consciously think 'I have to relax'... it is part of my routine." Some challenges are noticing cues and accepting present reality. If self-balancing is not a habit or routine built into the life, assessing requires developing adaptive processes for countering resistances and hindrances, appreciating, and integrating benefits. At the point in the process where challenges to assessing must be surmounted, the felt sense of "flowing" may be low to non-existent, and the felt sense of "juggling" may be high.

To notice in time and respond accordingly the person must be vigilant and honest. "I think the biggest obstacle is actually recognizing that I am feeling something that is making me feel uptight or stressed, anxious." Vigilance and honesty can be impeded by factors in the external and the internal milieu. Where work or other activities

are demanding, and when it is felt that time cannot be taken to self-balance may attract attention from or may mask disturbances in felt sense of ease that are signaled through the body. Early childhood training, which may have functioned adaptively within the family, can extend to developing a very strong work ethic, to hiding some kinds of emotions, feelings, and sensations, and to putting responsibility to others above duty to and responsibility for the self. For example, devotion to others before self-care may be a hindrance: "I am not very good at relaxing when I'm at home, I don't sit down and do nothing... when I do, I feel guilty, I think there are other things I ought to be doing or could be doing;" and "I have had two heart attacks... Relaxing on a day off from work, I have a host of jobs to do on a fine day, and I feel guilty not doing them, or not starting them."

Hindrances like these must be overcome before the internal and external milieu can be made safe by adaptive arranging. The degree of honest appraisal of current state, and acceptance of self as worthy of self-care, whether clearly articulated or not, and as reflected in the action tendencies, are therefore key adaptive factors.

For people who accept, trust, and are honest with themselves, as well as vigilant and committed to self-care, assessing is rarely a challenge. Assessing happens all the time, and may or may not be done at the center of awareness, even when the felt sense of ease is disturbed. Pushed by external or internal threats, the person thinks or has a felt sense of needing down- or me-time, or needing to switch activities. The process flows when people have control over the environment and when they easily respond to subtle internal cues arising through the body. They are able to switch automatically to micro or macro sanctuaries as needed.

Some cues have strong associations, as in the starts of rituals and habits that are time dependent and well entrenched. Here, anticipating doing the self-balancing activity at a future time can reduce the felt sense of threat in the present, thus helping maintain self-balance in the present. One participant put it this way:

It's a longing to be in the zone, in flow, and anticipating it might happen [that takes me back to the jazz making]. [Without this way of relaxing, I] would have to find a way of living, but for me I cannot imagine it, I believe it would be like a very serious amputation, very serious effect on me psychologically.

The felt sense of anticipation of a future experience (near or distant) can be a micro self-balancing sanctuary in and of itself and anticipating can be a form of responding in time, as habitual ways of relaxing are known through repetitive experience to work effectively, to fit the life and to be integral to "being me."

When people who say they are not naturally relaxed seek a release of tension, they may be challenged to bring awareness of subtle internal cues to center stage to trigger a self-balancing process before they get loaded or overloaded. This is particularly true when external threats are increasing the load. Juggling of pros and cons over a long period of time and carrying on regardless by ignoring cues instead of responding to them prevents self-balancing and is psychophysiological counter-productive, thereby increasing allostatic load. As one participant put it, "actually, I will end up feeling ill, I think my body finds a way to say 'you are going to stop, even if we have to make you.'"

Stage Two: Adaptive Arranging. This is the second step. "It's about being comfortable in what you are wearing . . . the right shoes. The wrong shoes change the experience entirely." Arranging is a two-staged adaptive structuring process: (a) some arrangements have become part of the fabric of ongoing life, and (b) some may be consciously made as the activity is taken up. For all participants, arrangements are already integrated so minimal efforts with few surprises are needed to take the activity up in real time.

Arranging involves choosing from amongst the culturally available repertoire of relaxation activities (content), placing this choice in a setting with boundaries and ensuring physical comfort in support of the doing the activity (contextual safety), and pacing the activity (taking time). Choosing and committing to the process may or may not take considerable effort as there is a wide range of objects from which to choose, and the choice depends on the self-balancing goal at the time. Successful arranging also requires organizing people and things so a safe haven is created in the right time and place, and so boundaries and physical comfort can be maintained while the activity or process continues without interruption, if possible, as in this example:

Switch off my mobile, obviously first communicate with everyone and do all that needs to do, get all the jobs finished, my dinner, call my husband, call all my friends, then switch off the phone, and be just on my own.

Metaphorically, the body is the container of the mind. So, as long as the body is perceived to be and experienced as being comfortable and not under threat, arranging continues with setting further boundaries. For example, people say a prayer, process and/or set aside worrying thoughts, talk with loved ones beforehand, close doors, look away, put the phone on silent, and so on. The posture and place people actually take varies as widely as the activities they are preparing to do, ranging from sitting still in a home or office environment, to meandering or jogging down paths outdoors, to sitting in the garden talking with chickens and bees.

Arranging also involves pacing. When self-balancing is high on the priority list, and the tolerance range for deviations from an acceptable felt sense of ease is low, action is taken more quickly to dispel impediments to switching to the relaxation activity itself, and where action cannot be taken immediately, anticipation of relief in the near future tides over. Alternatively, the activity is placed and paced in life habitually. In any case, this repeated adaptive behaviour couples self and action in synergistic ways so that the timing of self-balancing relaxation activities is optimised.

Stage Three: Switching. The third step involves using one or more switching strategies: distracting/blocking, managing/controlling, and, letting go/allowing. Most participants used more than one strategy in the same or separate activities, and their use depended on the immediate goal. One participant put it this way: "I go to the gym for mental relaxation, because that just clears my head [for epiphanies] . . . if I just want to literally not think at all and not doing anything I would read a novel."

Distracting/blocking is an escaping/maintaining me strategy. It serves an immediate re-balancing function by applying narrowly directed thought and action. There is an active disengagement of attention from detractors or disablers in the environment and in the inner world and an active focusing of attention exclusively on a limited set of inner and outer objects. Physical activity levels and interaction with social supports may

vary, but the mental escape is the same. One set of thoughts and feelings is completely set aside and the entire experiencing space is actively replaced with another more desired set for the time being, a set which is made in dialogue with the external object. An example would be attending to characters in a book or enacted stories or playing online computer games.

When using distraction/blocking to switch, the switching process itself and the state it induces are experienced as the “opposite of stress” or an “antidote to stress.” One participant put it this way: “I am on Facebook. That would make me smile, in terms of state of mind, I am relaxed, and happy.” The immediate emphasis is on the process itself, on being in it, and on doing it voluntarily and repeatedly. The emotional states most likely to emerge are either neutral or intermittently positive (enjoyment). With this type of switching there is no intention to broaden habitual ways of thinking, feeling or acting, so that neither the broadening nor the building that Fredrickson (2001) hypothesized are part of the near-term benefit—even if positive emotions actually emerge. There is, however, a release of mental tension, a strengthening of current distraction/blocking skills, and a self-soothing time out from normal stresses and strains of everyday life.

Managing/controlling is a filling/building me strategy. It requires filling the mind with specific thoughts and inputs using open, congruent judgmental criteria. Whilst giving time out from problems that cannot be immediately resolved, it is an additive strategy fostering positive emotions, requiring thoughtful action, and adding to knowledge stores. One participant puts it this way: “Taking my mind off anything stressful, to get my mind away, so I don’t have to think about it, normally that’s work, I decide to sit down and read magazine articles that interest me.” The objects and processes used may be instrumental in seeking and finding solutions to current problems by building on interests and strengths. The cognitive and emotional content of the activity, which can range from light to heavy METS, is not as thoroughly specified in advance as in distracting/blocking. Thus, the experiencing space is more open for something new and unexpected to come in or to arise from within. For example, the space can be filled by learning something specifically relevant to hobbies or career (light METS), by responding with a full range of emotions while making music with others (moderate METS), or by taking on physical challenges that have very high attentional demand and build the body (heavy METS).

Letting go/allowing is an opening up/growing me strategy. It affords a different viewpoint on challenges, offering opportunity for engaging with mental and emotional contents of the inner world head-on, as they arise consciously and pre-consciously both during and/or after the switching process. As one participant put it:

Something might suddenly pop up that I hadn’t realized would pop up, something that I wasn’t consciously thinking about... or sometimes I bring something consciously to mind that I’m thinking about, that I might be in a box about, and I let it drift.

This switching strategy involves a non-judgmental attitude of unguarded hopefulness and trust regarding the full range of inner experience. Emotions and thoughts are experienced in a “still” way; reactivity is lower or non-existent; thoughts are viewed in a more detached way. Room is made for whatever arises to arise during or after the activity.

Consequences: Benefitting

Chosen activities, whether active, passive, or a combination of both, involve a coordinated series of steps and induce self-emergent positive changes in at least two of four arenas—body, mind, emotion and action.

Relaxed means that you are not stressed at all Enjoying life. [Reading] clears your mind . . . makes you forget about some things, fills your mind with something interesting and new. I like to know new things all the time.

Relaxation is thus an experience where life is as it is in the moment, and is freely chosen and experienced within arranged parameters for exactly what it is. One participant put it this way:

In the sense of being comfortable with your situation, could be very active... and can be resting to go to bed, so it is context dependent – yes, if I am confident and comfortable in the situation, like I am supposed to be there, then I am relaxed.

Successes throughout the process feed back into the system automatically or upon reflection, and then become foundational elements, amplifying the energy for developing and maintaining chosen activities, habits, and rituals. The whole process brings a person in touch with and allows them to understand and express their essential self in authentic, grounding, and often joyful ways. “After a stressful day at work, I would dive in into the deep 12-foot end of the pool, hang out there 2-5 seconds in the water, being free, totally away from everything underwater hanging upside down. Incredible!” It can be experienced as a “flow.” And it offers opportunity for growth and development of strengths. Emerging insights, creative epiphanies, and peak experiences arise, and there is reduced emotional reactivity to and increased objectivity about problems and worries along with an enhanced ability to see what is important and meaningful in life. Benefitting happens all along the way, as each of the three steps present different opportunities for learning about the self and for what Fredrickson (2001) called broadening and building positive thought-action repertoires, thus increasing resilience and commitment to self-care.

One benefit of switching is that switching offloads stress and is comfortable and self-soothing. It conserves resources by restoring, refreshing, and re-energising them, and by lifting the mood in the near term. When self-balanced, the felt sense of ease settles with feelings of returning to me, being me, and maintaining me. This benefit holds no matter which switching strategy is used. In the longer term, consistent self-balancing practices using managing and letting go switches yield a felt sense of ease not only of being me, but also of and growing me, respectively.

Benefits from switching by managing/controlling offer a direct way of experiencing a series of positive emotions: interest, enjoyment, calm, amusement, satisfaction, and peace. Self-balancing this way not only accomplishes blocking/distracting if that is sought, it also teaches or supports, for example, new trains of thought along desired and specific lines. As it builds on current interests and strengths in directed ways, this strategy fosters growing me. Managing/controlling restores, builds, adds knowledge, increases self-confidence, and brings well-deserved pride in personal accomplishments.

Switching by letting go/allowing gives a further benefit of expanding self-discovery through transforming and growing by connecting. It can be by connection to a sense of wholeness: "To connect with my god, my higher self, the universe . . . There's also, oneness, maybe, sensing a unity, as the goal." It can be by a connection to what is valued: "Really, it's an internal NO. I think breathing is a big one, imagining when you exhale you are getting rid of everything negative." And it can be by a connection to one's place in nature: "I think too often we are only using . . . well, focused on one sense, and gardening and nature make me aware of all of them, and I can actually be still in a garden . . . so it is being in nature, doing that."

Both managing/controlling and letting go/allowing offer the benefit of changing appraisals. The scope of problems can be clarified: "So it's like prodding the part of me that is feeling a bit anxious, this helps me get in touch with it." Approaches to problems can be reformulated: "I think I can get quite reflective, maybe more philosophical, more spiritual—more accepting, perhaps having insights, yes, it's almost about being a bit more reflective on life, people and events" and, premises and presuppositions can be examined again—"So it is partially the idea, if something is that easy to erase from your mind, then whatever was stressing you out isn't that important."

Epiphanies, solutions, and connections with regard to whatever may have been pre-reflectively or consciously offered up or with regard to whatever emerges may surface and be recognised in amplifying causal feedback loops. Transformation may take place without consciously seeking it. It is initiated by and arising through the felt sense and the body. Presenting itself without conscious reflection, it gives rise to a consciously known course correction. It involves "breaking the circle of conditioning" such that underlying framing and appraising processes and meaning structures—including assumptions about how the life world is to be interpreted—are reformulated.

Contingencies: Managing Hindrances and Integrating Enablers

Wherever and whenever self-balancing takes place, and whatever activity is undertaken, there are two contingent feedback loops integral to entering into and maintaining immersion in the activity: dampening negative causal loops which are activity hindrances and amplifying positive causal loops which are activity enablers. For example, negative causal loops emerge when hindrances to choosing, starting and staying in the switching process arise, and they must be adaptively transformed. When hindrances are not transformed, the necessary condition, safety, is impaired, the felt sense of ease is disturbed, the self-balancing process is dampened, and the activity may either stop or be less beneficial. This is what happens, for example, when noticing and responding are dampened by childhood training or by the particularly onerous demands of high-pressure work.

Arranging is hindered where the assessing process may not be as honest as needed, as when a strongly felt sense of devotion to duties and responsibilities causes people to place a higher priority on others than on self-care. The correct match of activity to the self-balancing need may not be made or non-sanctuarying activities may also easily take priority. Once assessing is honest, and hindrances to arranging are adaptively managed and set aside, along with the guilt which may arise when a set aside effort is made, switching to the appropriate activity may still begin with reluctance. This does not mean that reluctant relaxers do not have an overall felt sense of ease about themselves or that they are not balanced for the most part. Instead, it means that they

justify to themselves and others their priorities by referring to upbringing and to their essential nature—being playful and responsible people. It means that they plan their sanctuaries activities and that they are structured into the lifestyle in such a way that they can justifiably set a duty or a feeling of guilt, feelings which would otherwise be a hindrance (contingency), aside. For an example, when of a hindrance to remaining switched arose, the daily walker whose managing/controlling switching process no longer worked because of guilt had two choices: add content to the managing/controlling switching process; or, change to a letting go/allowing switching strategy. An example of adding content is here: “daily was going for a walk, the walk got boring, so I got the MP3 player with audio, so this is how it evolved. I am not a person who can switch off and think about nothing.”

At the other end of the spectrum, where positive feedback loops have been consistently strengthened, people who place a high value on self-care enter and exit sanctuaries activities either on the spur of the moment, dipping in and out of micro-sanctuaries almost automatically, or by entering consciously designed, more time extensive habits and rituals such as macro-sanctuaries are needed. In either circumstance, knowing what to expect, or knowing that the conditions of safety and trust are arranged, is a central feature of the positive feedback integration process.

In summary, for a hindrance to be managed and transformed at each stage, being vigilant and honestly recognizing objections to assessing realistically, to arranging adaptively, and to switching are done consciously. Recalling the attractors and the values of self-balancing, recalling past positive self-balancing experiences, and reminding oneself of relevant life goals lead to transforming disablers into enablers and to allowing positive movement are required. In this transforming process, an activity can be adjusted so that it is more enjoyable or easier to do, so that impediments to starting and staying committed to the process are minimized and positives from benefits arise to take their place. Positive causal loops arise in a narrow and a broad sense. In the narrowest sense, these loops include ideas arising from how to improve the activity and make it work and fit even better. In the broader sense, benefits arising during and after the activity amplify the desire to continue or resume the activity at a later time, make it easier to get benefit from doing the activity, and make it easier to transform other hindrances to doing the activity, thus supporting its integration into the life.

Discussion

The current study breaks new ground in relaxation research by using a classic grounded theory research design and by considering with equal weight passive and active relaxation processes. It aligns with Gendlin's (1995, 1997) philosophical model of meaning making by and through the body's non-lexical voice which functions as a context and cause variable, and aligns with his theorizing from a philosophical and clinical perspective about how and where thought arises in fully embodied persons. In the positive psychology tradition of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), gathering data about positive subjective experience and about the emergence and evolution of positive personal traits over time takes place.

This current study also supports Teasdale and Bernard's (1995) Interacting Cognitive Subsystems macro-theory of the non-mediated, non-linguistic synchronization of body-based information with memory making and the development of schematic mental models (Cowdrea, Lomax, Gregory, & Barnard, 2017). During self-balancing

sanctuarying, new meanings are created and made accessible to lexical consciousness at metacognitive and implicational levels. These are the levels at which Teasdale and Barnard (1995) and Park, Dunn and Barnard (2011) proposed that schematic implicational models be held. These models can be changed by proprioceptive information arising from the body without conscious lexical thoughts as mediators; they are models of meaning that positively construct an objective and a subjective self.

The state of consciousness people enter when using all three switching strategies closely aligns to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) model of the autotelic self and his concept of flow with the process itself having its own reward. The benefits directly align with the broadening and building theoretical concepts proposed by Fredrickson (2003) who urged that "we need to develop methods to experience more positive emotions more often" (p. 335) not only in the best experiences of daily life, but also in neutral and negative experiences. With a managing/controlling switching strategy interest precedes the activity and is one of many motivators for choosing it; and, the enjoyment and sense of lightness and freedom that emerge when doing what one wants to do in a safe space, carry on often for hours after the relaxation activity is over. The question of which comes first arises: the anticipation of positive emotion as an outcome and benefit, or the desire to learn more by doing the activity more. When the managing/controlling switching strategy is used the two factors serially and mutually enhance and reinforce each other over time. This supports Fredrickson and Joiner's (2002) finding that "positive affect and broad-minded coping reciprocally and prospectively predict one another" (p. 172) and Fitzpatrick's and Stalikas's (2008) assertion that "positive emotions are not just indicators [of change] but [are] also generators of change" (pp. 137, 151).

Implications

People have implicit health maintenance models and beliefs about whether, why, when, where, and how to stay balanced. The self-balancing sanctuarying theoretical model can function as a guide that may be used to assess and motivate people who need to self-balance yet who do not consistently do so for a variety of reasons. This model identifies enablers and disablers to all variables in the self-balancing process and clarifies that both active and passive activities can be successfully used to refresh, restore and re-energise.

To uncover, assess, and support a person's situational and motivational hindrances and enablers to self-balancing with regular relaxation, it may be beneficial for laypeople and professionals to use the metaphors community participants used. Unwinding and loosening (threads, strictures), moving away from (threats) or toward (safety as in a journey), and diluting (density, saturation as in a fluid container) are examples of the many metaphors.

Limitations and Future Research

Time and access to participants constrained study of "well" people's relaxation process such that saturation of concepts was not achievable in every area. Specifically, for the distracting and blocking switching strategy there may be a behavioural addiction quality to the use of the strategy in some circumstances. Saturation of the concept "addictive focusing" was not achievable during this stage of the work. Whilst two participants talked of extensive periods of time spent doing repetitive tasks that functioned in a maintenance fashion, further study of the use of this strategy is needed, partly as the

repetitive tasks may function to block relaxation induced anxiety (Newman, LaFreniere, & Jacobson, 2018).

This current theoretical understanding of relaxation as a self-balancing process has many common elements with Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory at personal, place, and social levels (Bonaiuto et al., 2016). It may be important to embark on studies to differentiate relaxation from flow and from other waking states of consciousness in terms of relationship to the self, in terms of the Massimini and Carli (1988) skills/challenge matrix, and in terms of finding flow in online gaming (Weber, Tamborini, Westcott-Baker, & Kantor, 2009), for example. Another question is: Does this theory of relaxation work and fit for people who are moderately to severely anxious, where positive transformations arise out of negative or traumatic life experiences which may "shatter the assumptive world" (Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2007, p. 399) and may for some people eventually result in post-traumatic growth? Using this theory of self-balancing sanctuaries on an "emergent fit" basis, the researcher investigated what anxious people do to relax and this will be set out in a subsequent report.

Conclusions

Twenty-one people who reported feeling "well" or "very well" and who lived and worked in the community talked about 22 activities they do to relax in their daily lives. A consistent pattern emerged: a main concern and core category of self-balancing whilst in safety. Realistic assessing and adaptive arranging happen before using switching strategies to move into full engagement in self-emergent, self-chosen relaxation activities. This process seems to come more or less easily, and transforming hindrances to starting the process, to staying relaxed and to integrating positives into the process are contingencies that are routinely managed proactively.

People use different switching strategies in a variety of combinations: distracting and blocking, managing/controlling, and letting go/allowing. Each of these strategies restores, refreshes and re-energizes. Benefits from managing and allowing strategies can also include a subjective sense of being and becoming oneself, of integrating and strengthening the self, of expanding self-discovery, and of connecting people to nature and the world around them.

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