

Psychology and Postgrowth

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Psychology and Postgrowth



WHO AM I?

Arvid Marklund = Computer Nerd Psychologist¹



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Purpose: Share Knowledge from Clinical Practice

To Inspire Conversations on Degrowth Psychology

PLAN

1. Therapy Crash Course
2. Lessons from Clinical Practice
3. Theme Conversations

THERAPY CRASH COURSE²

Starting Point: Creative Hopelessness

- Allow feelings of hopelessness and sadness
- Make sense of why you are stuck
- Then: Try something else



QUESTION

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?



²Specifically so called *Third Wave* Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) methods, see e.g. Hayes and Hofmann (2021) and Linehan (1993).

Only one. But the light bulb has to really want to change.



Find out what you want your life to be about.



What you want your life to be about

Not means to an end but **ends in themselves.**

Example: Adventure



Example: Being there for my child



Example: Being a part of my community



This is where you want to keep moving



in the presence of both Comfort and Discomfort

i.e. Worry, enjoyment, sadness.



So how do you get there?

- Power of Will?
- Mind Control?
- Stimulus Control!

Stimulus Control

Arranging Environment³.

E.g. for *Being there for your child*:

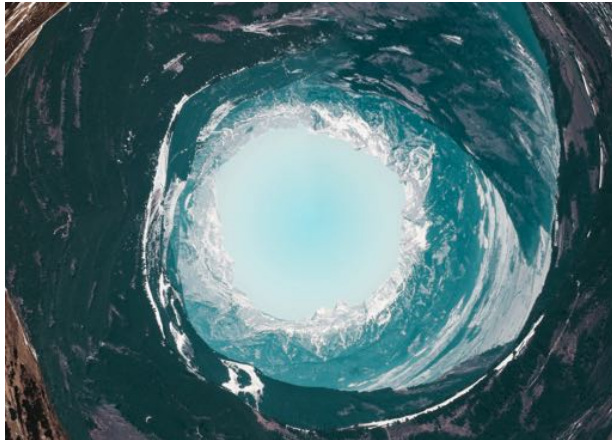
- Changing Context of Getting Ready for School



³see e.g. Bouton (2014) on the fundamental importance of the context in which something is learned.

If you want Radical Change in Behavior

Make Radical Changes to Environment.



CBT Crash Course - Summary

- Creative Hopelessness
- What do you want your life to be about?
- Arrange Environments
- Act and Mind your Mind

LESSONS FROM CLINICAL PRACTICE

Story. Retirement-induced Depression⁴



FIRST LESSON

PEOPLE NEED TO BELONG⁵

People need to Belong



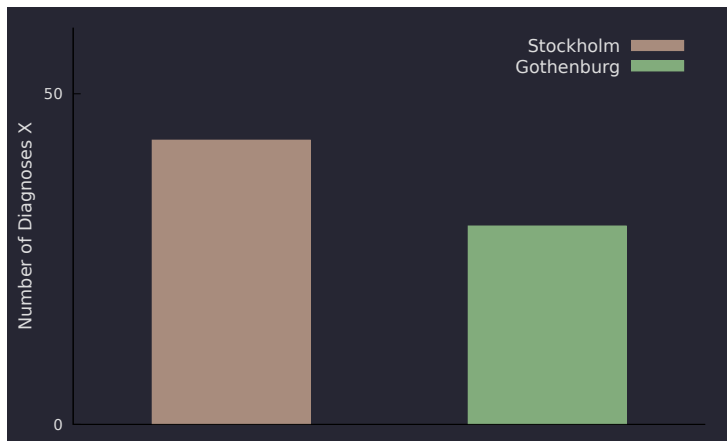
⁴A study by Bailey and McLaren (2005) showed that physical activity alone was not sufficient to senior citizen's mental health without the addition of a *sense of belonging*.

⁵One of the basic needs that was stipulated by Maslow (1943).

Another story - Based on a True Story

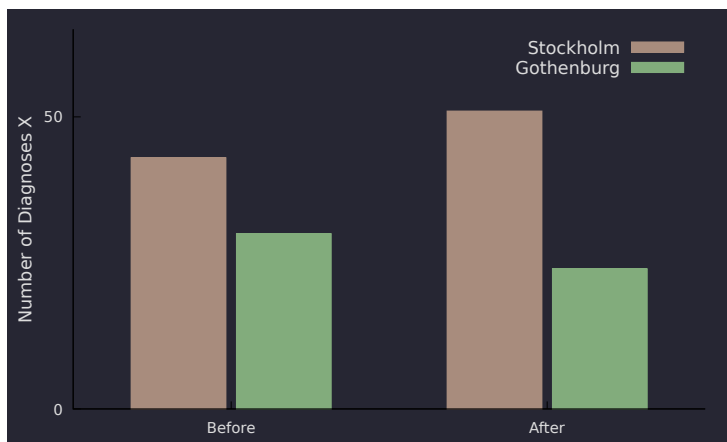
Government Agency wanted to align their two units

Measuring. Found Differences and Reported Back



Guess what happened?

Before/After. Gap increased. Why?



What they communicated:

- *You are like this.*
- *Don't be like that.*
- *Don't be yourself!*

But we want to be ourselves (push/pushback)

Bara få va sig själv (Laleh)



They also communicated:

- How to act like a typical Stockholm/Gothenburg Investigator (identity instruction)

And People need to Belong

Acting like *one of us*, means *being one of us* (identity⁶)

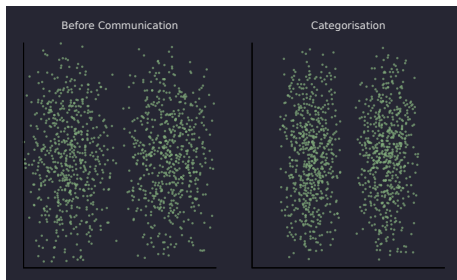


⁶See Masson, Jugert, and Fritsche (2016) on collective self-fulfilling prophecies.

SECOND LESSON

FIND COMMON GROUND NOT CATEGORIES

Because communicating categories will reinforce them.



And communicating common ground will loosen them.



Categorisation vs. Common Grounding



Our Common Ground

Humanisation⁷ = How am I like you?



⁷In compassion focused therapies this is often referred to as *Common humanity* Neff (2023).

Dehumanisation = You are not like me

Dehumanisation is a common strategy to enable torture/killing.



THIRD LESSON

HUMANS ARE ADAPTIVE

- People in general are not good nor evil⁸
- They will adjust to environments

Humans are not Rational

But highly Rationalising⁹ (a way to adapt)



⁸Although some scholars like e.g. Warneken and Tomasello (2009) make a compelling case for a natural tendency towards altruism.

⁹Aronson et al. (2016).

Humans are Adaptive

- Thrive in prosocial conditions¹⁰
- Become hostile in hostile conditions



Adaption Online

Online we are exposed to *Contextual Narcissism*¹¹



¹⁰What O'Brien (2014) refers to as *prosocial contexts*, also see Nelson et al. (2016) for well-being benefits of prosocial behavior.

¹¹For a full description of Narcissistic Personality Disorder see American Psychiatric Association (2013).

Contextual Narcissism

- Low emotional connection ability¹² (lacks empathy)
- Excessive Social Comparisons¹³ (preoccupation with envy)
- Rewarded: Boosting self and *specialness* (grandiosity)
- Rewarded: Outgroup Hate increase followers¹⁴ (arrogance)

Why are the platforms so bad?

Platform Companies are exposed to *Contextual Psychopathy*¹⁵



Contextual Psychopathy

- Rewarded: Moving fast, breaking things¹⁶ (not respecting boundaries)
- Rewarded: Invasive tracking and advertising¹⁷ (deception)
- Punishments small and narrow (lo/no shame)
- Attractive and Convenient (superficial charm)

¹²Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) and Drimalla et al. (2019).

¹³Midgley (2020).

¹⁴Munn (2020).

¹⁵For a description of the Personality Disorder Concept Psychopathy see Hare (1996).

¹⁶Luger, Moran, and Rodden (2013) and Bond et al. (2012).

¹⁷Zuboff (2019).

What if we could adapt environments to humans?

- Contextual Prosociality
- Strengthen Common Ground
- Fabric facilitating Prosociality and absorbing Antisociality



LESSON 4

GET INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES

Get into other people's shoes, not in their face.

Fighting = Adapting to someone being hostile



- No one likes to be pushed or pulled.
- Common Environment Changes have to be deeply (bottom-up) rooted.

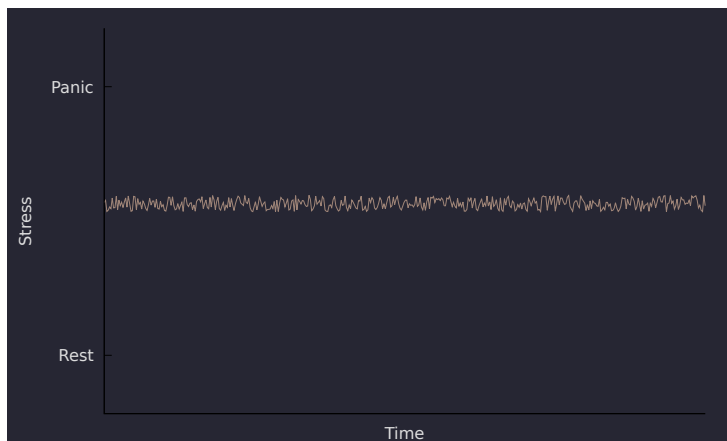


Not telling people that they are wrong
when you *know* you are right, can cause stress but...

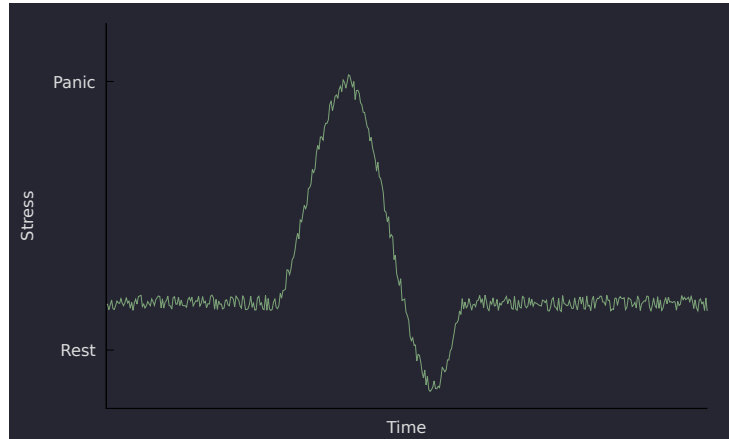
LESSON 5

STRESS IS NOT HARMFUL

Lack of recovery is



Normal stress¹⁸ and recovery:



Believing stress is harmful is harmful

Because it can maintain a steady elevated level of stress

Gig-work

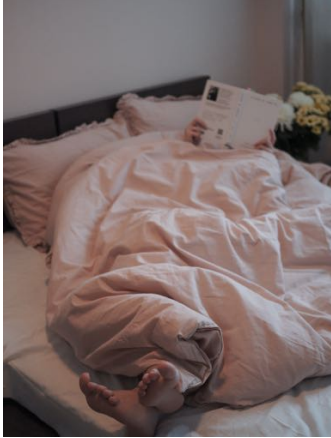
Work-buyers who demand you to be constantly available can also cause lack of recovery



¹⁸Karatsoreos and McEwen (2011) suggests using the term *allostasis* instead of *stress* because of how essential stress responses are for survival. Also notably from a postgrowth perspective, they point to the fact that industrialised society brings overwork, urban *always-on-the-go* life-style, sleep cycle disruptions and diminished physical activity, which is a poor fit for our evolutionary past and will frequently cause harmful *allostatic overload*.

The Comfort Zone

- What do people usually tell you about your comfort zone?
- *You have to get out of your comfort zone!*



TW: SPIDERS

CBT-Trap

- *Why are you doing that?*
- ~~*Because its unpleasant. That's CBT!*~~
 - Only do unpleasant things to achieve something important



LESSON 6

CHERISH YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Don't be ashamed for feeling comfortable

My Personal Comfort Zone

Alone with the firewood

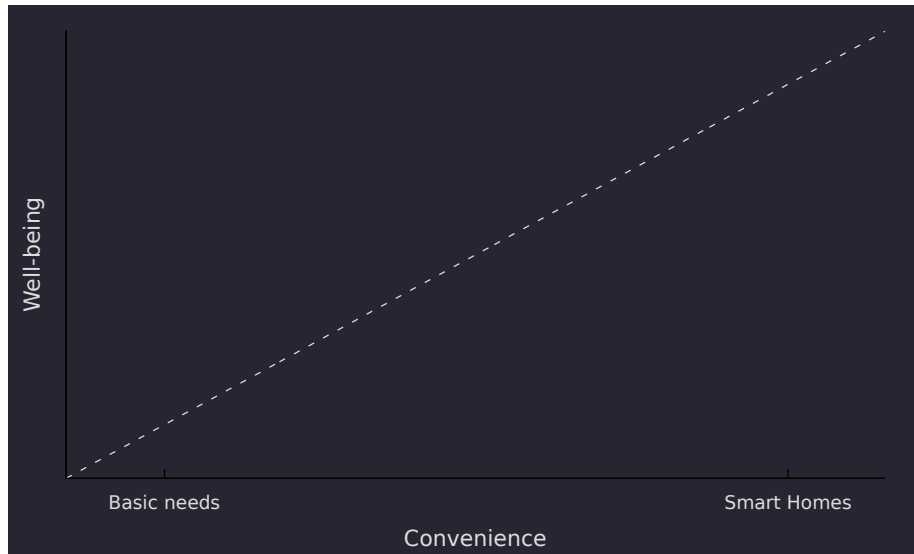


Find your comfort zones and use them to recover

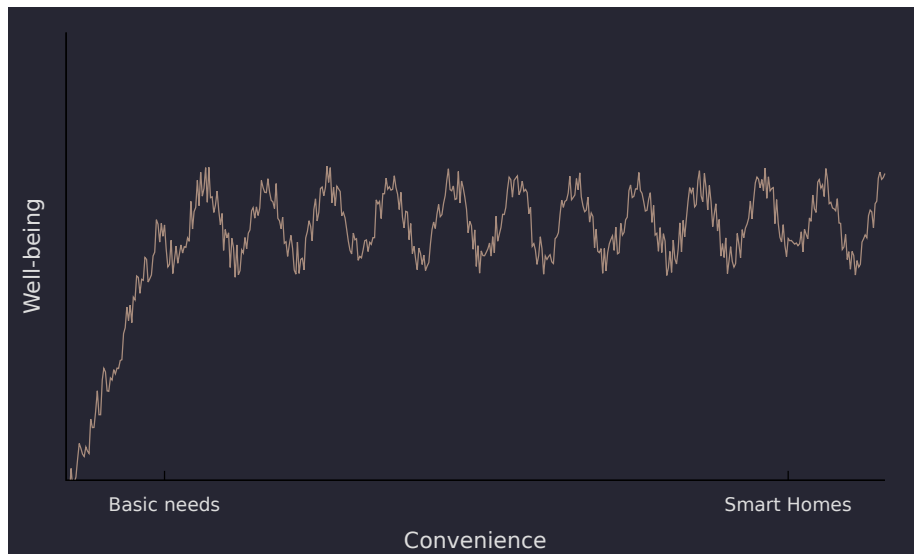


CONVENIENCE

What you think smart technology will do to your life:



What really happens:



LESSON 7

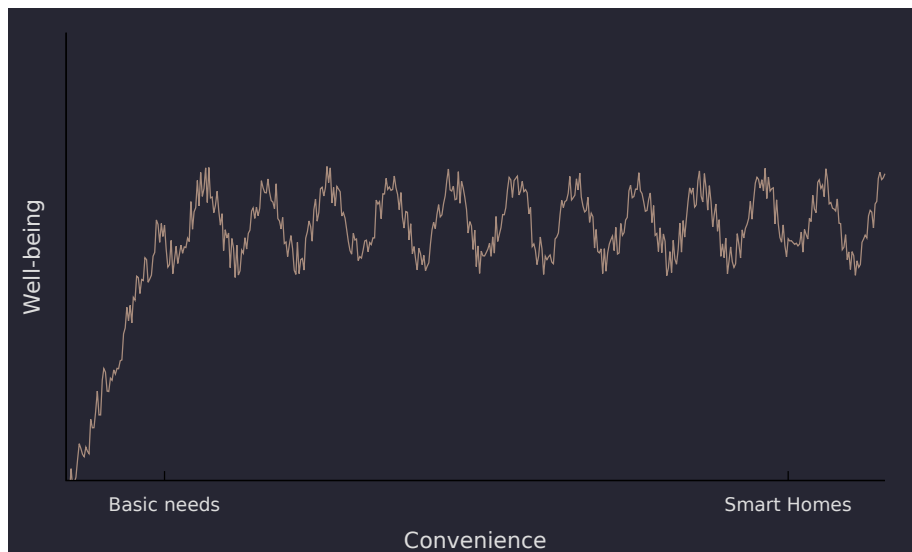
CONTROL AND IMPROVEMENT ISN'T EVERYTHING

Control And Improvement isn't everything

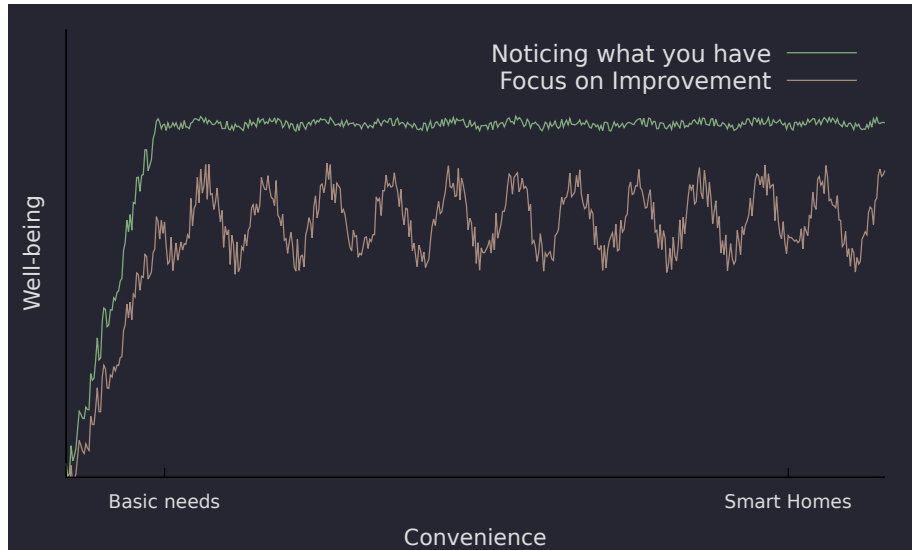
- Control and improvement are powerful tools
- But they don't work everywhere (e.g. other people/your thoughts)



Focusing on Improvement (constant micro-unhappiness)



Not focusing on improvement can improve well-being



LESSON 8

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

- Notice what you have - Count your blessings
- Notice what you no longer have - Grief your losses



- Not to be confused with *positive thinking*



Positive thinking = Fighting your mind



This includes debates and *reasonable* arguments

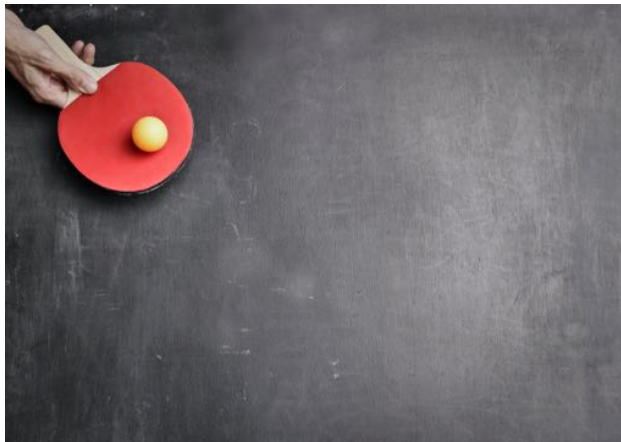


LESSON 9

(DON'T) MIND YOUR MIND

Don't engage in Mind Ping-Pong

- Worried Thought = Reply with Reassuring Thought
- Negative Thought = Reply with Positive Thought



Who is winning?

Mind Ping-Pong

- You are Loosing your Attention and Energy.
- Sound easy, but it is not. It is normal for humans to get into these games.



LESSON 10

FORGIVE HUMANNESS

Forgive Humanness

- Forgive and Compassionately¹⁹ help yourself staying out of exhausting mind pingpong



¹⁹For a current review on compassion focused interventions see Neff (2023).

Forgive Humanness



Figure 1: Potato Chips



Figure 2: Three minutes later...

**THEN CAN WE ALSO:
EXPECT AND PLAN FOR HUMANNESS?**

Stimulus Control. Remove bad stuff



Expect and Plan for Humanness

Stimulus Control. Add Good Stuff

- Get to know your neighbor. Now your environment is expanded to include him/her.



POSTGROWTH THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

EXPAND FORGIVENESS?

Forgive Companies for being Companies?



Expect and Plan for Companiness



- Companies will be companies.
- Not wishing for “Good” Companies
- Stop **talking to** companies. Start talking **about** companies.

- Companies are arbitrary
- Humans are not



THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

THEMED CONVERSATIONS

During the session we discussed the following themes and these are some of the reflections that came up.

Theme 1: Keep your eyes open

- Notice what you have
- Grief your losses



Group Reflections

- Very fundamental for postgrowth because we are already losing some things, and stand to gain a lot as well. Things that we will be able to appreciate like more time with loved ones.
 - How can *sufficiency* framings replace *efficiency* and *optimisation* ones.
-

Theme 2: Find Common Ground

- Find Common Ground not Categories
- People need to Belong
- Get into People's shoes



Group Reflections

- One difficulty came up concerning inequalities, that the global south people feel like they (for good reason) deserve to also have access to status symbol consumption like e.g. cars etc.
 - How can we address the underlying inequalities to prevent this focus on status symbols to be that relevant?
 - About empathic perspective taking: It is one thing to listen to what someone you disagrees with is saying, but much harder to actually see, that from their point of view, what they believe and their opinions does make perfect sense.
-

Theme 3: Do something!

- Expect and Plan for Humanness
- Humans are Adaptive
- Arrange Common Environments
- Note: It Will not be Perfect



Group Reflections

- There is a lack of support structures now around doing things that are outside the growth-paradigm.
 - Piano playing metaphor: Someone reflected that there was a theme throughout the talk, about not hitting the piano keys too hard and monotonous, but to rather play in a mellow and balanced manner.
-

Theme 4. Relax and Recover

- Cherish your Comfort Zone
- Lack of Recovery is Harmful
- Control and Improvement isn't Everything
- Forgive Humanness



Group Reflections

- Important to account for humanness and to allow space for that.
- We need to redefine what we consider to be *comfort zones*. This does not have to be consumption-heavy convenience, but also calm spaces that can actually become much more frequent in a non-growth paradigm.
- The importance of maintaining and growing empathy towards ourselves as well as others.
- Let the *peeling off layers* of finding out what is really important to you, take its time.

Thank you all for participating in the conversations afterwards!

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Credits

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




































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Other

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