

#EMERGINGPROUD

SYNOPSIS

On Friday 17th Jan we held an open space conference in London, UK to discuss the question;

How does the Power Threat Meaning Framework relate to those who perceive their experience in transcendent/ transformative, spiritual or spiritual emergency terms, and how could it be used to support this?

This report outlines the outcomes from these discussions, and highlights the commonalities and actions points raised, in order that they can be fed back to the Power Threat Meaning Framework team to be integrated into the framework where deemed appropriate.

It's important that I first acknowledge the power dynamic inherent in this report; In personally interpreting and summarising the common themes that arose as the organiser, I am aware that the conclusion here may be biased due to my own lens, so please feel free to make your own interpretations from the points raised throughout.

There is also an imbalance of power in including Lucy's, Mary's and my reflections separately, and although it felt right to include them, it also feels right that this is not left unacknowledged, creating an unconscious shadow dynamic.

Introduction

#Emerging Proud sees a crisis as a possible catalyst for positive transformation; what a lot of the contemplative traditions call a metamorphosis, often initiated through a spiritual experience (a Sartori / peak state / spontaneous awakening) or a crisis which raises existential questioning for a person.

We consider the PSYCHO-BIO-SOCIAL-SPIRITUAL aspects of what it means to be wholly human as inseparable and equally important to take into account when considering emotional struggles. But what does support for this challenging transformation involve? We wanted to explore this in relation to the new conceptual framework for mental distress; the Power, Threat, Meaning Framework (PTMF).

Why?

The world is in chaos and it makes more sense from a mental wellbeing perspective to stop focusing on the problems, and start focusing on the solutions, and the PTMF provides a brilliant foundation for this; both as a potential tool not just for psychiatry but for social change in general. We wanted to see how we could make it even more dynamic and inclusive of any world lens we choose to look through, ensuring the spiritual aspects of life have equal inclusion to the psycho/bio/social elements it already addresses.

How do we produce a protective, academically acceptable conceptual framework for mental distress for those of us who identify as having a spiritually transformative experience, rather than the current clinical pathways and disempowering ideologies? Many experiencers of spiritual emergence feel that their experiences have gifted them with a sense of purpose; to be a voice for our ancestors who were burned, drowned and lobotomised for speaking out about 'unusual' views. Until we have systems and a society that acknowledges this, we will continue to be threatened in our experiences.

If we don't take it seriously, spirituality is at risk of being even more commodified or ignored completely; how do create the safety to discuss these issues seriously in a grounded way, to enable experiencers to emerge with the gifts from their own Hero's journey?

Where?

The event took place at Conway Hall; An ethical gathering place; 'a home for humanism' named after Moncure Daniel Conway (1832 – 1907), an anti-slavery advocate, and outspoken supporter of free thought.

The building spoke to us as we entered;

"To thine own Self be true"

How?

The day was opened ceremonially to clear the energetic space and invite in ancestral wisdom in order to create a space held safely with love. We wanted to acknowledge the possibility in the way the event was hosted, of the spiritual realm also having something to offer the outcomes.

An Open Space format was chosen for the day in order to align with the topic; a conscious conference. It felt vital to hold the belief in the collective wisdom of all who gathered, and to trust in the evolution of what might organically flow out of that space. Together we surrendered to this process.

The marketplace was opened, and any attendee present was invited to propose a discussion topic.

The topics raised and harvest from each discussion were as follows. Similar topics have been grouped into 4 themes, and these themes will be returned to in the overall summary at the end of the report.

1.) Topics relating to the conceptual / theoretical framework itself; possible additions

Discussion title:

- Creative dialogue and safe spaces for insight and new meaning; how we are, our 'Way of Being' creates change (convened by Joe and David)

Summary of discussion:

- Power imbalance in therapeutic relationships creates a loss of trust
- The difference between coaching, therapy and dialogue
- Community and holistic approach – validating experiences
- Creating a safe space where ‘magic’ can occur – insight through relationship
- Magic occurs when relationship forms through dialogue- joy, trust, presence, sensitivity, insight all become possible.
- It’s ineffable – magic happens in the energetic space between dialogue
- The real “magic” occurs when the ego drops away and the soul connection forms; soul-to-soul connection.
- When the egoic mind has finished with the story of ‘what happened to me’ and insight from within the soul and the soul-to-soul connection allows for **New Meaning** - who I have become and who I might now be from my life experience.
- That strange awareness that it is so difficult to speak of soul talk, and yet, people know when they’re in it – it’s a felt sense. That awareness that it can form when you are least expecting it and often happens in the presence of the grandeur of a tree, for example.
- The mental health system exists in its head / Ego – the need to integrate head and heart.
- Recognising that some people are not in the right place to enable them to create New Meaning

What needs to happen next?

- The PTMF explores what happened to us – **we need to move it on to the PTNM Framework**, which enables people to find New Meaning for their lives in safe spaces using dialogical approaches to help bring about insight for new meaning to grow. (This particularly occurs in group dialogical spaces)
- New Meaning – who we have become and who we might have the potential to be

Discussion title:

- ‘Spiritual bypassing’ – the belief that ‘God’ / spiritual practice can solve everything when there is underlying trauma and more support is needed; How do we strike a balance? (convened by Sophia - Muslim)

Summary of discussion:

- In some communities we are taught to turn to God whenever you have a problem
- If I stop believing, then what else do I have?
- What is your story, and how can I walk this with you?
- ‘Psychosis’ in Islamic faith is ‘Jinn’ = demonic possession and this is also harmful
- Balance is needed of healthy faith and therapeutic environments
- Ancestral issues – the problem is the problem, it doesn’t belong to one person
- We’re all inherently ‘good people’ with things that happened to us
- What is my power dynamic with my higher Being?

- Spirituality can also be misused like the medical model is (Religious imposition)

What needs to happen next?

- The importance of language being reclaimed and driven by those with lived experience; being aware of our own assumptions and when we impose them
- Other ways of communicating using imagery etc
- Have a crack at the church – take what’s useful and leave the rest
- It’s not up to ‘God’, it’s up to you to make your decisions
- Understanding the ‘imposition’ of beliefs as opposed to finding our own
- Knowing that spiritual bypassing can be a coping strategy – sometimes this is a necessary part of the path until one is able to face the pain stored in the body
- Signpost to online 12 step program for spiritual emergence (<https://spiritualemergenceanonymous.org>)

Discussion title:

- The continuum between ‘psychosis’ and spiritual emergence; what is the role of dissociation – both a gateway to spiritual experience and a normal response to trauma that gets misdiagnosed as ‘illness’ (convened by Karen)

This ran in collaboration with;

- The patterns of engagement with the spiritual realms / the psyche as a perceptual organism in addition to the physical perceptions (convened by Dave)

Summary of discussion:

- There is no clear delineation between psychosis and spiritual emergence
- How damaging it can be when a person is denied their spiritual experience through it being described as ‘psychosis’
- The power of love to heal – connection between worker and Experiencer
- The PTMF could stop pathologizing by enabling people to tell their narrative – and also by describing it as education and not therapy
- To challenge the empirical space
- Investigating the experiences themselves with curiosity
- Move away from risk- averse cultures
- ‘Delusions’ or truth? – experiences need to be acknowledged as a possible truth, not just a person’s perception of their truth
- Acknowledgement of the unseen / invisible world as real
- Healing dissociation – recovery of our inner child (**when our truth is denied this maintains dissociation from our authentic self**)
- The importance of being held by those with similar experiences
- Being heard with non- judgement

- Intergenerational trauma / experiences
- We need to listen with both body and heart, in addition to mind
- Group processing

What needs to happen next?

- First of all, staff need to heal themselves / acknowledge they need to heal
- To create spaces for everyone to heal – shift in culture
- Change training / education to reflect PTMF to humanise the workforce
- Alternatives to hospital are needed for people to journey through their experiences

Discussion title:

- How can we re-frame the term 'spirituality' to one where we see that we are 'spiritual beings' first and foremost? (convened by Coco)

Summary of discussion:

- Human beings relating to one another at the centre of the other; soul to soul / heart to heart
- Unity consciousness – to start a new wave of deconstructing the Self to our core essence; non- separatism
- It's the next stage of a kinder, more compassionate society
- Death play / ritual ceremony of death as a growth ritual (who are we when there's nothing left?)
- Framework is a bridge to how we should be – deeper, more open conversations where there are no experts
- Mental wellness is everywhere – just as spirit is everywhere; we just need a remembrance to tap into it
- Collective, not individual
- Peer support is key
- **Re-defining suicidal thoughts as a desire to re-birth**

What needs to happen next?

- Small changes are good; we don't have to create large new systems
- Move away from the age of administration
- How do we 'love' the person in a way that sees their inherent nature rather than labels of 'therapist' and 'client'?
- Spirituality is about holding the paradox – everything needs to change, and everything is alright just as it is (it's all a process and happening exactly as it needs to)
- Companionable silence – to sit and be with another, not to need something from another, or for the therapist to feel that the other person needs to change (holding space)

- Do what makes your heart sing!
- Spirituality doesn't come second, it's not an either / or, it's the whole cake!

Discussion title:

- What are the fundamental principles of all spiritual frameworks that we can apply to the PTMF? (convened by Mica)

Summary of discussion:

- Understanding how language creates barriers; self-awareness of language used
- Spirituality incorporates; connection, love, a sense of something 'more than', open-heartedness, ancestral elements, willingness to let go of control / surrender, service to others, inner peace and soul purpose / dreaming
- Power / threats can disrupt connections to the above; fear can cause separation and the way we create meaning
- Room within the PTMF for these to be acknowledged when thinking about basic human needs, e.g. connection

What needs to happen next?

- We need to be brave enough to be more authentic
- Create Safe Spaces where we can find common ground

2.) Topics relating to working with the PTMF – how to use / apply it

Discussion title:

- Inter- generational healing: How do we extend the healing potential of a transformative experience by including the healing of family, friends and generations? (convened by Wendy)

This ran in conjunction with the discussion:

- Reflections on grief for people who've lost someone in a mental health setting and how to better understand so we can help others – what are the spiritual lessons here? (convened by Cristobel)

Summary of discussion:

- Proposal of a different conversation at the start of a crisis that acknowledges the Experiencer is connected to family and society, and that the healing needs to take place within that larger context. To frame this as a healing opportunity for all.

- There is currently a lack of support for family members when someone is suicidal or in crisis.
- Lots of FEAR is expressed in relation to the crisis – Fear from the system
Fear of stigma
Fear of feelings

This fear all interrupts the healing process

Causes;

- Feelings of guilt from those in crisis
- Not having the words to reach out for help
- The medical model tells you that you are the problem
- Grief is central; when someone is going through a process, and IF they die
- The current system is set up to turn away from pain, not towards it

What needs to happen next?

- Acknowledgement that it would be helpful to have the explanation of crisis being a social issue and to get support for the whole family / system – healing happens in relationship
- The answer is love; we need systems that accept this
- Building supportive communities
- More leaflets / communication to promote this concept
- Acting sooner; educating children that it's okay to have feelings
- More trust / compassion / curiosity
- Trauma happens in relationship, and so Healing has to happen in relationship

Discussion title:

- How do we keep people safe as we journey from head to heart to spirit through the great abyss of suffering that may be there? (convened by Lucinda)

This ran in conjunction with:

- How can we be aware of power in the alternative healing spaces that we create, and how should we deal with it and its abuses? (convened by Sabina)

Summary of discussion:

- Everyone is fighting loneliness and fear – sometimes people are led to corrupt spiritual circles if they have a lack of community
- Loneliness also the experience of professionals, especially if they are trying to do things differently – tribe / community is needed to create safety for anyone
- The system promotes risk as its top priority and thus;
- It keeps people stuck

- Empowered decisions are compromised
- Intuition and instinct are suppressed
- People act from fear and threat and hence use power; professionals feel as powerless as the clients
- Responsibility isn't shared – 'accountability' leads to abuses of power
- Practitioners need to be aware of how to stay grounded and safe for themselves also
- Practitioners awareness of their own trauma responses is key
- Privilege – experiences such as 'psychosis' are defined differently according to privilege
- Limited resources = limited compassion
- Resources, money and political will drives how the system is kept in place
- SAFETY as an internal experience = different for each person
- ABUSE OF POWER happens more readily when in a climate of shame, loneliness, poverty and disempowerment
- SHAME drives the fear / threat response which drives abuse of power – key to be able to acknowledge failure and mistakes (maybe re-frame as opportunities for growth) – it's okay to get things wrong
- Many people are required to demand systemic change – COLLECTIVE ORGANISING

What needs to happen next?

- COLLECTIVE ACTIVISM – the power of the 'congregation'
- Love trumps risk
- Having the courage to take necessary risks within the system
- We're stronger doing this together (making changes)
- Important to be aware of our own power dynamics and our own threat responses – individual responsibility of everyone
- Ensuring we act with consent with each other
- Creating safety requires knowing ones' own boundaries in order for consent to be explicit – this can be the most loving thing to do (CLEAR = KIND)
- Keep your own 'bullshit meter' alive (self-reflection is vital)
- Promote your own intuition / instinct through reflecting, but also being aware that threat responses can drive instinct
- Necessary to create safe spaces outside the system in order to create balance
- New resources need financial backing

Discussion title:

- Spiritual growth and how mental health services suppress this (convened by Ruth, facilitated by Mica)

Summary of discussion:

- Staff fears of being blamed for things unfolding and possibly getting out of hand
- Staff fears of their own feelings and experiences – the system doesn't allow for workers to be human

- Staff groundedness (are staff using coping mechanisms in the same way as the clients?)
- Lack of time for genuine connection and allowing spirit to unfold

What needs to happen next?

- *Nothing added here due to lack of time*

3.) Broader educational work - needed in society to support the change the PTMF is advocating

Discussion title:

- Medication; the need for it and the movement against it. Is there a place for it within the spiritual framework? (convened by Denise)

Summary of discussion:

- There is a need for a more holistic framework (bio-psycho-social-spiritual) and approach to understanding and treating mental health in all its variants, from anxiety, depression, psychosis as responses to life events to avoid fragmentation
- The need for safe spaces to process initial distress before introduction of heavier forms of medication, if medication is needed at all; maybe just space to sleep and calm down and share their story would be enough.
- Clarification of mental distress – more psychological / trauma triggered from past, or perhaps triggered by spiritual experimentation / experience; needs to be more deeply investigated.
- There needs to be more key players involved in the care options and decision process

Resource link: <http://cepuk.org/>

What needs to happen next?

- Guidebook for service users and practitioners giving a better understanding of the complexities of this – normalising all mental health manifestations as part of the human condition
- Safe Spaces where experiences can be normalised and not medicalised – interim arrangement prior to hospital
- Creative / expressive therapies to be utilised
- Better community care and involvement – Mental health emergency service – social change as it's a social issue and should be supported as such
- Basic living needs met (i.e. Maslow's hierarchy of needs – self actualisation cannot be achieved without the basic needs in place); food, shelter, warmth, relationships, non-judgemental support and understanding.

Discussion title:

- How do we include spiritism and spiritual experiences within mainstream services? (convened by Natalie)

Summary of discussion:

- People present having had spiritual experiences / worked with mediums
- Participants had spontaneous clairvoyance
- People have deep 'knowing' – clairsentience
- People who have spontaneous 'friendly' experiences which then stop can stay healthy psychologically
- People who have some experiences which are fear- inducing or disturbing are often considered mentally ill
- Experiences happen on a continuum
- We need to acknowledge that there are already many people working in the mental health system who are clairsentient – hypersensitivity is normal
- Disbelieving staff can 'threaten' people who have experiences
- Giving someone a diagnosis means their experiences have been "madded- off"
- Problem = hierarchical (Western capitalist) education
- We need to hold spiritual dimensions in all of life; education as well as in psychiatry
- We need to have multiple perspectives
- Forensics; need to look at the possibility of spirit possession

What needs to happen next?

- We can each spread the word to staff
- Education – more people sharing their experiences
- Safe Spaces with psychic work and energy healers present
- We need trained psychotherapists and psychiatrists who also have psychic skills as in Brazil and India
- Make the interview process more open to these range of skills
- We need psychiatric wards with sensitive practitioners
- Key importance = compassion
- More education of MH staff for this to be normalised
- Incorporate these criteria into becoming a psychiatrist - trained in this knowledge; academic and practical
- We need more education about 'beyond death' (consciousness)
- Note the work of Galileo Project and James Davies (book - Cracked)
- We need to research how many staff have had personal experiences – NOW!
- Psychics have been around since the beginning of time; we need to stay strong and persist

Discussion title:

- The wisdom of the young.

The influence of children on the acceptance of adult labels / identity and the power of free- spirited / open- hearted education with no curriculum. (convened by Hugh)

This ran in collaboration with;

- How moving towards spirituality and nature-based religions (the rising trend of young people practicing this) responds to and potentially heals the threat of our Earth due to climate crisis. (convened by Grace)

Summary of discussion:

- Children are not listened to!
- Influence of children from the strength of innocence ('not knowing' space)
- Teacher inadequacy
- Awareness comes from modern technology
- Open awareness of spirituality in the young – inherent spirituality is lost through conventional education
- Children are drawing new movements of wellbeing and plant care
- Mental health compromised through lack of openness
- Without indoctrinated education there is no mental health issue – the medicine is open expression and honesty
- Children require exposure to multiple faiths / beliefs / values
- Free expression from the young inspiring / leading self- love and equality
- Supporting the experience of crisis within an open- education model for more positive outcomes, acceptance and growth
- Teachers need to take responsibility for their own way of being to reduce trauma
- Segregation of children in schools based on abilities augments mental health issues (disconnection / shame)
- Self- harm may be the only way a child has to feel – move away from labels

What needs to happen next?

- Taking responsibility for self- healing else it's passed down to the child (intergenerational- trauma)
- Teach grounding to children, more mindfulness techniques
- Open- heart sharing circles for children (to enable expression of feelings)
- Adult healing sharing circles (to enable expression of feelings)
- Remove stigma from educational standards
- Add mindfulness to the curriculum – to replace punishment with mindfulness reflection time
- Promote child- led education; young person centred and created; allow space for a young person to ask 'why?'
- Long running consistent projects

- Using technology to appeal, enable and encourage sharing / diversity and support for young person to ground and integrate / balance information overload

4.) Systemic changes - in the MH system and more broadly in society

Discussion title:

- What first steps can be taken to introduce awareness of the PTMF to develop / cultivate allies to this model? How do we practically bring it into MH conversations to challenge the dominance of the medical model? (convened by John)

Summary of discussion:

- Potential problems and fears practitioners might have on changing the language / discourse
- How the power dynamics of the CMHT can make it very difficult for individuals to start applying the PTMF.
- The PTMF needs to be introduced into the medical curriculum more generally addressing inevitable worries over the changes brought about by a paradigm shift.
- A lot of people get their power by identifying with power
- Limitations of evidence-based research is that the scope of human experiences greatly exceeds the guidelines for RCT's (randomised control trials)
- The discriminative language of psychopathology - the current diagnostic system is limited by Western orientation whereas the PTMF allows for more transcultural descriptions
- In Brazil Shamans and Spiritists walk and work alongside Psychiatrists as part of the multi-disciplinary team
- Those in the position of power have to learn about being 'vulnerable', authentic and honest – and admit they don't always know the answer: to be okay with uncertainty (Open Dialogue style) and be open to exploring other possibilities
- Management culture for processing people could be potential vehicle for bringing change such as PTMF management culture (Reinventing organisations using the PTMF; this is aligned to Teal and Integral theory)
- A real obstacle in implementing the PTMF is resource limitations – more resources would need to be available to provide a greater variety of support.

What needs to happen next?

- Work on our own day-to-day awareness of the use of language in MH discourse / everyday language in society; this is ground point zero starting point. Normalising, e.g. instead of talking about symptoms talk about experiences
- Important to ascertain the baseline of language used by people using services and use that gently bringing their awareness of medical terms to the use of alternative less pathological language (e.g. visions rather than hallucinations etc)
- Bringing into discussions with people using services the PTMF reframing perspective

- Peer support groups being potentially more receptive settings where validation of stories within an implicit PTMF and on occasion more explicit discussion can occur
- Appreciating the 'power of one' – the fact that the smallest interaction can leave a seed of potential growth in the person. Also, the power of small caring actions
- We ask what plans do the psychologists have as a professional body to bring the PTMF into everyday assessment and professional work?
- It should be part of the medical curriculum and all professional bodies related to medicine / psychology / social care and also in general education.

Discussion title:

- Relating the PTMF to cities, constitutions, government, justice and education (convened by James and Michael)

Summary of discussion:

- 'Plato republic' – "For a person to run a city, they first need to find justice in themselves. "Absolute respect for the individual.
- There's something really terrible we do to ourselves as human beings as part of the system (the trauma of the news)
- Social justice, meaning and purpose = spirituality
- Connecting both within and beyond the Self
- Cynicism versus pragmatic cynicism
- Society has an appetite for sound bites, top lines
- Art, creativity, philosophy – being taught **how** to think, not **what** to think
- House of Commons is not serving the common or the collective
- 'Blue zones' in the USA – researched why people had a longer life expectancy in certain areas; they found people were more engaged in community, eating well, had meaning and purpose in life – when we fix individuals society fixes itself
- Socratic circles – 4 people in circle (fishbowl style) with 4 observing; observing dialogue leads to rapid development
- How do we get people that are leading our cities to acknowledge the spiritual aspect of life?
- The powers that be stop us from connecting to our own Higher power

What needs to happen next?

- A more positive news narrative, less critical, more balanced perspective
- The span and direction of our conversations are so weak and ill-informed (e.g. 36 characters) – we need deeper conversations to create connection
- Money without connections / communities that do not rely on monetary exchange
- Let's not argue with people because of their political slant, we need to connect as human
- Working more with children, growing healthier mentalities
- Believe in the inherent wholeness of people – nobody is broken
- Stop exclusion from schools; give children meaning and purpose at a deep level

- Approach people who did research on 'Blue zones' – collaboration?
- Living in tune with nature to support our biorhythms
- Education on how to be in touch with our soul / Self; Ted Talks / Gaia TV – build more 'depth' platforms for education in this area
- Libraries; to connect through story / myth (meaning) – read to children as a form of connection
- Education around deep listening, especially for children
- Stop constraining creativity to something formulaic / theoretical
- Teach people myth, fairy tales; the power of stories – Joseph Campbell; a society that disconnects us from myths disconnects... being comfortable sitting with the unknown / mystical space
- If we change ourselves then we can more easily bond together

Discussion title:

- The role of psychedelic medicines in healing versus harm, and their relationship to power and spirituality (convened by James)

Summary of discussion:

- Opening up versus closing down (this can also happen with psychiatric drugs and addictions)
- Breaching habitual patterns
- Assimilation – prevents flashbacks if given in a validating environment
- They can be the 'best' and 'worst' solution – depends on belief systems and aftercare for integration of what arises
- Preparation – is there any value if the recipient is unprepared?
- They can offer connection; boundaries of Self are dissolved (overlap with meditation)
- Male – San Pedro / Female (mother) Ayahuasca; teaches us God and spirit??
- Fear versus surrender

What needs to happen next?

- They can offer insight, a way into meditation / self- reflection
- A societal awakening – reducing value
- Can we get this into mainstream services, or will that kill it?
- It has medical power – offers a language and frame of reference for experiences

Resource links: <https://maps.org> / <https://trippnetwork.co.uk>

Discussion title:

- The role of Community and energy medicine (convened by Mags and Val)

Summary of discussion:

- Supporting one another to express feelings through movement and sound
- Holding heart sharing circles within the community settings
- People have had negative experiences in larger communities (dictators and hierarchy)
- We need to find the connection with ourselves first before we can find our tribe
- We need different small communities which grow organically to save hierarchies
- Safety precautions around energy work are vital; someone can be 'opened up' too quickly and it's dangerous (can catalyse kundalini / psychosis if not managed)
- Healing also without talking; supportive help to heal yourself from within e.g. art therapies
- Introduction of free extra groups
- Key is to start small and expand out village by village – a return to tribal culture and ways of being; simplistic

What needs to happen next?

- EXPAND circles of support; social prescribing / singing / dancing – embodied movement to work at a somatic level in addition to psychologically
- Important to reflect on what community means to us so we don't have unclear expectations
- Developing a culture of wellbeing – what is it to be human?
- "Grow your own happiness" website
- Wellbeing House in Bath (resistance from system / GP's) – pure humanity; stay for a week and know there is support there. Gives practical advice
- Funding – better care fund
- Create heart-centred sharing circles around the country to support finding meaning and purpose in safe spaces and within local communities.

Additional post-event suggestion from attendee Gillian

Gillian informed us after the event that she had considered convening a discussion to discuss adding the following question to the PTMF;

'What helps you to grow?'

It felt pertinent to mention here as this could aid reflection on the 'transformation' and 'finding NEW MEANING' element that came out of the group discussions.

Lucy's reflections taken from the day;

1. Quite a bit of what came up was not specifically 'spiritual', but on reflection, I think that reflects the fact that what we might see as 'spirituality' is not separate from other areas of our lives, such as the need for community and dialogue (this theme came up strongly in the groups I was part of.) So perhaps we need to make it clearer that spirituality is implied and embedded as an aspect of many of the things we already discuss in the PTMF. A bit like Gillian said - 'What do you need to grow?' could include many aspects of our lives, including spiritual ones.

2. I think the PTMF is generally too individually-focused - we have had this feedback before, and to some extent it reflects the reality of people's lives and of the MH services, but actually this is another set of dominant Western assumptions that needs challenging more strongly than we have done. So, maybe we need a stronger emphasis on the way that distress is part of a group experience - whether a family, a social group or whatever - and so is healing. And we also need to think more about 'healing communities' of whatever sort, and how to create them, in the absence of many of the communities we used to take for granted.

3. A related point is that we have outlined how distress gets transmitted across people's lives and down the generations, but not how the reverse process, i.e. healing, can also happen across lives and down the generations, even if it just starts with one person - a more positive and equally valid viewpoint!

4. Someone asked about whether/how the PTMF would include the idea of Disembodiment - spirits, life after death etc. It struck me that we had taken such care to focus on the embodied aspects - partly to avoid 'You are denying the role of the body' criticisms, and partly because the trauma-informed stuff about the impact of adversity on the body is so useful - that we had neglected this angle! Obviously if someone, or their social group, believed in ancestral spirits or similar, the PTMF would totally accept that as a valid narrative for them. But does the PTMF accept this as an actual possibility in the same way as for the prevalence and impact of traumatic events, say? Or maybe the PTMF doesn't need to go there! Anyway, it gave me food for thought.

5. The whole impact of climate change, connections to the natural world etc - it is mentioned in PTMF but there is room to expand it as it becomes - in good ways and not so good - more central to our lives.

Mary's reflections and thoughts on how things could be implemented into the PTMF;

1. The 'common elements' group I was part of had a really interesting discussion which I think offered ways of extending and shifting some of the emphasis in PTMF. What emerged was the central importance of 'connection' and the very different meanings this could have for different people - e.g. connection to the body (i.e. not 'living in your head'); to other people; to the community; to a cause; to nature; to place; to your essential self; to ancestors; to something above and beyond yourself - a higher power

In PTMF we talk about connections but, echoing Lucy's comment that even with our efforts not to be individualistic, we've inevitably at times been pulled back, it seemed to me that making the theme of connections and their varied meanings more prominent would help to address the problem of individualism in the Framework, and link to the idea of healing (as well as the damage that makes it necessary) being a group and community process. It's also a theme that can be meaningful across-the-board – it's true to the value we place on evidence but also affirms the importance of personal meaning, even if this goes beyond what we might think of as evidence based. It's therefore itself a way of connecting people from very different perspectives.

2. Another theme that emerged was 'love' – a word not often found in psychiatric and psychological literature or practice. But it made me think about conventional talk about therapeutic relationships and processes – usually in sanitised language about 'relationship factors', and even that's often hidden by focusing on 'therapeutic technique'. This links to other comments about the transformative effect of human connection and dialogue. We can see this in peer support groups or even in people's reaction to just being listened to and validated in one-to-one therapy. I think mental health professionals find this very difficult to talk about or at least we don't have a language for its intensity and potential. Can we find a way of talking about this which does it justice but doesn't alienate colleagues?

3. The group on power was a sobering reminder of our maxim in the Framework that power is everywhere. There was discussion of the framework's applicability to professionals and others across many settings, not just in terms of power, but also threat, meaning and threat responses. This is something we need to think more about for the Framework's implications for those working in mental health and related services.

My (Katie) reflections from the day and collating this report

How do we encapsulate into words and on paper something that is so alive and can only be experienced through, well, experience? Spirituality is an ineffable embodied felt sense not a cognitive knowing. It's about the 'soft skills' of life which are so readily missed in academia; connection, belonging, communication, listening at more than an intellectual level, and love. It's experienced through allowing the organic flow and is constantly in growth and change. It's energetic and can't be pinned down; it causes us to let go and have faith in what emerges when we connect.

The PTMF mentions how everything affects everything; every aspect of life is so intertwined and inseparable, and this was demonstrated through the discussion themes. Life is a spiritual experience if it is lived in its fullest sense.

There was a clear desire for more Safe Spaces to be available in which the expression of human emotions that are not allowed in the system / society – our repressed pain, grief, anger, and indeed love – can be released and felt without fear. We need to break the patterns of intergenerational trauma and we can only do that by taking responsibility in healing ourselves; this is a scary and brave act, but so much easier if we do it in community.

There was a clear call for more community – belonging / authenticity / acceptance of ourselves exactly as we are.

What do we mean by ‘belonging’; both to something greater than oneself but also **to oneself** is having the courage to stand alone in order to belong to oneself. This paradoxical marriage can only be achieved in the dance of relationship. If we betray ourselves in order to belong, then we do not belong to either ourselves or to the group to which we’re trying to belong... authenticity is the only way to truly connect. We can then be braver in our decisions if we can find a community / tribe within which we are accepted just as we are, which then enables us to grow. It’s a call for a return to tribal cultures, and our link to wider humanity and indigenous cultural ways of being.

The importance of narrative/ story heard alongside peers; through sitting in circle telling our stories with boundaries but no agenda, the organic results are educational by default; we learn from each- others experiences. What we need is actually pretty simple. A spiritual life is a simplistic life which does not dictate but just allows...

“Every one of us is trying to find our true home.
Some of us are still searching.
Our true home is inside, but it’s also in our loved ones around us.
When you’re in loving relationship,
you and the other person / people can be a true home for each other.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

The importance of language – on awakening it’s usual that a person has access to a whole new level of communication. It can feel that there is a gulf between the experiencer and non-experiencers; do we need ‘interpreters’ to be the bridge between experiencers and the medical profession to bridge this divide? (This point was made in a post- event communication with an attendee). Language can be received as disempowering if it denies experiences as valid and this needs to be acknowledged; adapted to each individual.

Most of us who have been through such a process know that, if we turn towards the pain and look for the messages within it, it transmutes and integrates far more easily, and we benefit from the transformation opportunity it offers. What was clearly agreed is that a crisis can be an opportunity for growth if it framed and supported as such – the spaces provided need to enable the experiencer to find new meaning from their experience.

In this regard, being uncomfortable / in pain is an opportunity for spiritual growth – so do we really need to worry about making colleagues uncomfortable by using the word ‘love’; is their reaction actually our responsibility? Maybe if we’re brave and use it anyway, we could help catalyse more people into spiritual growth.

Common threads from all of the discussions and reflections

- Trauma / mental health issues are not an individual problem – they happen in relationship and healing also needs to happen in relationship
- Re-framing crises as an opportunity for the healing of a whole network / system to take place; pain is passed through generations but so is healing
- The importance of community; feeling connected and a sense of belonging
- The role of LOVE in healing – one of the most common realisations stated by a person on ‘waking up’ spiritually is that everything is connected, and love is all there is; ‘God’ is life force energy = love.
- Education – to educate children to deeply listen and that feelings and their expression are normal; both adults and children need to re- learn this
- Education around spiritual experiences – to be normalised in the system and in our culture
- Holistic Safe Spaces incorporating spiritual practices are necessary for healing to take place
- Power suppresses our natural intuitive and instinctual abilities; it keeps people stuck and stops the natural healing process occurring
- The necessity of self-reflection for all – developing an ability to admit fault and that we may not have the answers – it’s okay not to know and to sit with uncertainty
- Safety – an internal experience found through authentic connection with Self; found through having external safety (i.e. basic needs met, knowing our boundaries and having our ‘tribe’)
- We are stronger together – collective wisdom / activism to affect change from the ground up
- We need financial resources to put ideas into motion outside the system
- It has to be an holistic framework; incorporating body work and spiritual practice as valid
- The importance of Language; dialogue and the non- imposition of a particular narrative – this can create barriers and disempower
- Surrendering to and trusting the process to unfold as it’s meant to
- Integration – safe spaces needed for aftercare to process experiences
- Acknowledgement of the transformative impact of crisis – the ability to create New Meaning / insight through adversity
- Validation – normalising language and acknowledgement of spiritual experiences as a truth, not just someone’s interpretation of belief
- Magic occurs in relationship – the energetic space in-between dialogue and creates potential for new insights to birth
- Vulnerability, authenticity and honesty = bravery and strength; it’s okay not to know
- The importance of peer support and being ‘held’ by people with similar experiences
- Cultural / societal shift is needed in our ‘way of being’
- Meaning and purpose = connection to ourselves and life itself
- The power of stories / deep listening

- Change first has to happen from within – we need to take responsibility for our own healing
- There are no ‘experts’ and hierarchy is not helpful – we all learn from each other
- Basic human needs (i.e. Maslow’s hierarchy) also includes CONNECTION; when we see ourselves as spiritual Beings there are no boxes to separate us.

Outcomes and reflections summary

1.) Topics relating to the conceptual / theoretical framework itself; possible additions

- The PTMF could be adapted to be PTNMF - new meaning. The PTM helps us describe what happened but may keep us stuck in our story of ‘what happened to us’, whereas the addition of NM (new meaning) is about enabling new insights into how we might grow and find purpose post struggle.
Our Ego mind holds the story of what happened, but growth (the spiritual perspective) holds a more expansive concept of new meaning and purpose, which is vital to wellbeing.
As such, could we add in the question 'What helps you to grow?' to the document?
- ‘Spiritual bypassing’ could be included as a threat response - something we do until the pain can be faced/felt, it needs to be more clearly acknowledged as a coping mechanism.
- No delineation between what is deemed ‘psychosis’ and a spiritual experience; the continuum of natural human experiences.
- Definitions of ‘spiritual’ to be included using everyday language - connection, belonging, meaning and purpose. The belief in a power greater than ourselves (however we define it) and in people as 'inherently good'. The importance of restoring the flow of LOVE to allow us to heal.
- Acknowledgement of language being used as a form of power
- Bringing in difficult emotions as being something to work with; e.g. grief carried through family systems if embraced compassionately as an indicator as to what is blocked energetically within the network can serve as a catalyst to heal; emotions are not bad, they need to be reframed as ‘compasses’ pointing us to the answer.

2.) Topics relating to working with the PTMF – how to use / apply it

- Ways of communicating that go beyond words, acknowledge the wordless/ineffable and embodied nature of experience

- Orienting through soul- soul, heart-heart, non-ego connecting - and through dialogical approaches; practitioners would need training in this
- Acknowledging the therapeutic relationship and what affects this - how to be transparent about and work with power in this relationship, how to support all to orient to love/compassion not to threat due to personal fears
- Support for practitioners to practice reflective processing / their own self work, use the PTNMF on themselves
- Acknowledging that it is not an individual but a whole community/network that is healing and that the PTNMF needs to be used with whole families/communities

3.) Broader educational work - needed in society to support the change the PTNMF is advocating

- Educating children to know that it's okay to feel all emotions; to learn to express them healthily, listening and communication education for all ages
- Education for mental health professionals and wider society in spiritual perspectives and their application; transcultural information more widespread
- Research in the above / documentation of outcomes from doing things differently
- Guidance manuals in more holistic understandings of emotional distress; e.g. suicidal ideation being a desire to 're-birth', and other examples through personal stories
- Education around how to get back in touch with our intuition / inherent knowing

4.) Systemic changes - in the MH system and more broadly in society

- Utilisation in our everyday lives of normalising language
- Use of better communication skills and more compassionate ways of being – less 'othering' of anyone who has a different perspective to us; acceptance of all as a partial truth – finding common ground.
- Collaboration and collective activism; how can we connect with other movements with similar visions and values to create a groundswell of positive change in society?
- Acknowledgement of the psychedelic research work being done and the overlap with this in relation to psychedelics offering a possible opportunity to open people up to another level of consciousness / a healing tool, in the same way as a crisis can be.

- Love trumps risk - need to change the risk averse culture – having stronger, clearer personal boundaries for ourselves creates more internal safety, which allows external safety to be loosened.
- Need for safe spaces to experience, process and integrate initial distress before medication or hospital/medical intervention happens
- The need for a return to community and human – human connections; our basic human needs are the same whatever our ethnicity / religion / gender etc and when we connect at this level love and understanding overcome differences
- Committing to our own personal healing journey and growth in order that we can live the most authentic version of ourselves (knowing that this relates to ALL OF US)
- Living with meaning and purpose creates wellbeing; are we living with purpose?
- Helping to restore the flow of love which is so lacking in society today

Finally, coming back to the original question of the day;

How does the Power Threat Meaning Framework relate to those who perceive their experience in transcendent/ transformative, spiritual or spiritual emergency terms, and how could it be used to support this?

The PTMF relates due to the disempowerment and threats imposed on someone experiencing a challenging transformation process through so many avenues; not only by the mental health system, but by family, fundamentalist religions which preach, by spiritual sects which control and allow bad practice, and by our overly technocratic society in general as we live in a culture so closed to the perspective of spiritual growth.

The PTMF could be used to support a healthier healing / emergence / transformation process due to the opportunity it provides for the experiencer to make sense of their experience in their own way, and not having the process impeded but supported holistically, with individual exploration as to what is needed for them personally. It could also support a developmental narrative around the creation of a new meaning for life birthed through a person's struggles. This in turn could support humanity's evolution into an era of more positive wellbeing.

It's important to acknowledge that the day reinforced what is already in the PTMF and was in agreement that a total shift is needed to see 'symptoms' as healthy responses to adverse life events. We look forward to seeing what might emerge...

Acknowledgements

Firstly, to all who showed up and took part in your wholeness; my deep respect.

To Lucy and Mary for your open participation, willingness to share the PTMF and make changes as necessary.

With thanks to Ellie Paskell - Somatic Soul Coach™ for leading our embodiment meditation www.elliepaskell.com

To KindaListening <http://kindalisting.org> for their wellbeing support on the day.

And with huge gratitude to the Safely Held Spaces team for their support and sponsorship of this report.

Resources for spiritual emergence

www.emergingproud.com

<https://www.safelyheldspaces.org>

<https://spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk>

<http://www.spiritualemergencenetwork.org/find-networks/>

<http://spiritualemergenceanonymous.org/meetings/> (A 12 – step program specifically designed and hosted for those going through spiritual emergence, to support integration.)

<https://isgo.iands.org> (A global online resource for anyone who has experienced a NOTE (non- ordinary transcendent experience)

<https://aciste.org/about-aciste/> ACISTE (American Centre for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences) Research and support

Katie Mottram, Jan 2020

