

Posttraumatic Growth from the Perspective of Self-Determination Theory

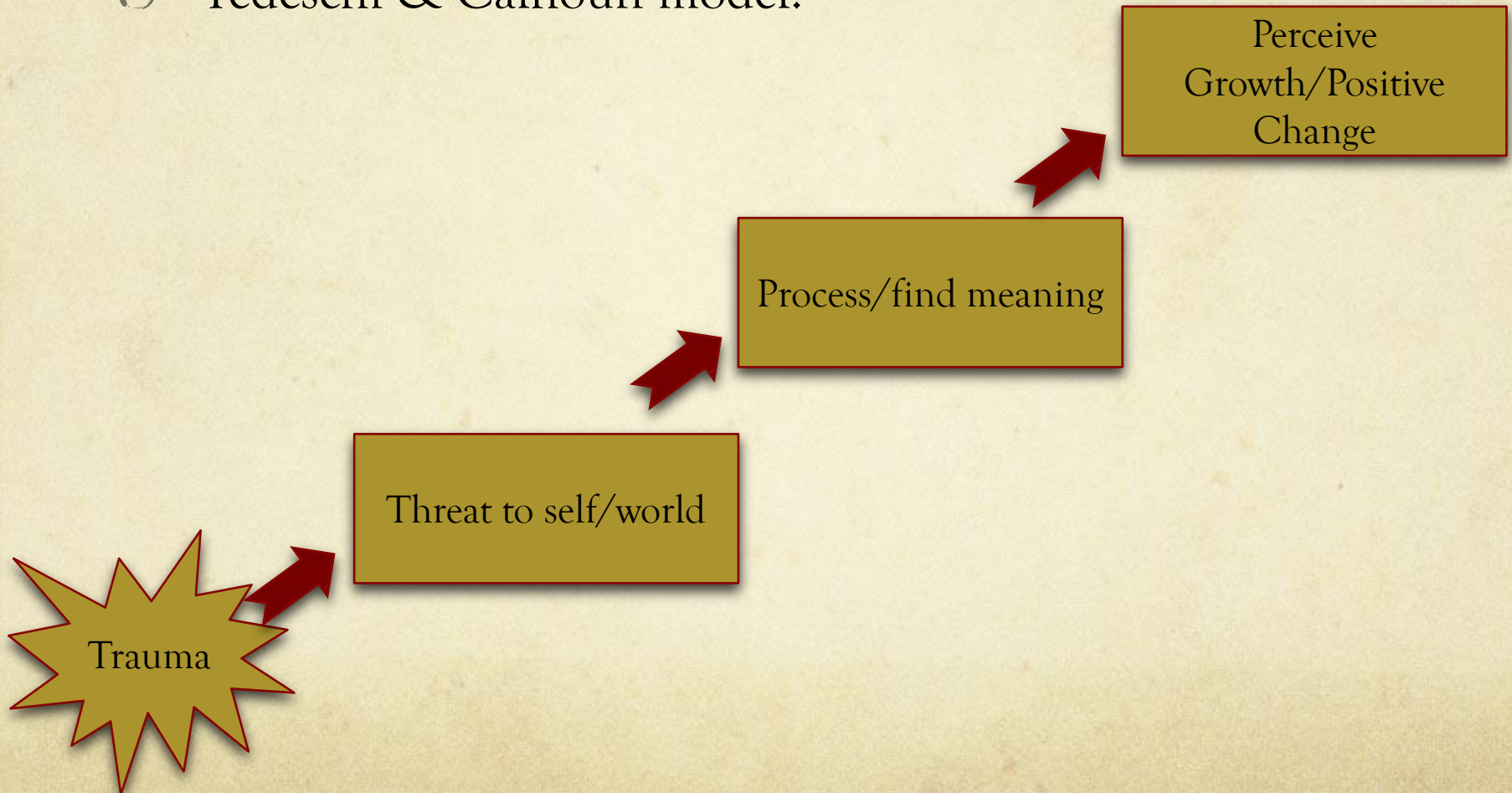
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Perceived Growth following Trauma

- Frequent observation in research on trauma survivors:
 - Self-reported changes in
 - priorities
 - self-understanding
 - develop new skills
 - strengthened relationships
 - appreciation of life
 - >70% of samples report such positive changes

How does it happen?

- Tedeschi & Calhoun model:



Is this the only route to perceived growth?

- Self-Determination Theory (SDT):
 - argues that people are motivated to satisfy fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness
 - when pursuing intrinsic goals that contribute to these needs, we feel happy, satisfied, etc
 - intrinsic goals are personally important; they are self-identifying

SDT Perspective on Growth

- Trauma has potential to thwart/block progress towards important personal goals
 - e.g., stroke, spinal cord injury (SCI)
 - when thwarted, → feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, distress, despair ...
 - goal of rehab: regain sense of control, mastery
 - e.g., mobility



An Alternative Route to Growth?

- As one struggles to regain control and mastery, as one adapts goals one ...
 - develops new perspectives, priorities
 - learns new skills,
 - increases self-understanding
 - new purpose ...
- It is proposed that *personal growth emerges as individuals begin to successfully navigate alternative means to achieving self-identifying goals/projects*

Two Studies

- Stroke study:
 - 67 adults who recently experienced first stroke (58% male)
 - $M_{age} = 64.7$ years ($SD = 13.2$)
 - community-residing
 - interviewed 6, 9, 12, 18, & 24 months post-stroke

- SCI study:
 - 67 adults (81% male); 37 tetraplegic
 - $M_{age} = 44.7$ years ($SD = 17.2$)
 - interviewed 2 ½, 5, & 13 months post-SCI
 - returned to community after T2

Personal Projects Analysis

- Based on B. Little (1983)
- Personal projects refer to the things that occupy one's time and energy in daily life
 - e.g., plan a vacation, write a dissertation, fix one's car, worry about one's finances, spend time with kids, or work on a relationship
 - sometimes mundane; sometimes grand

Personal Projects Analysis

- Participants asked first to list most important current (or pre-trauma) projects
 1. build deck at cottage
 2. exercise
 3. work
 4. fix car ...

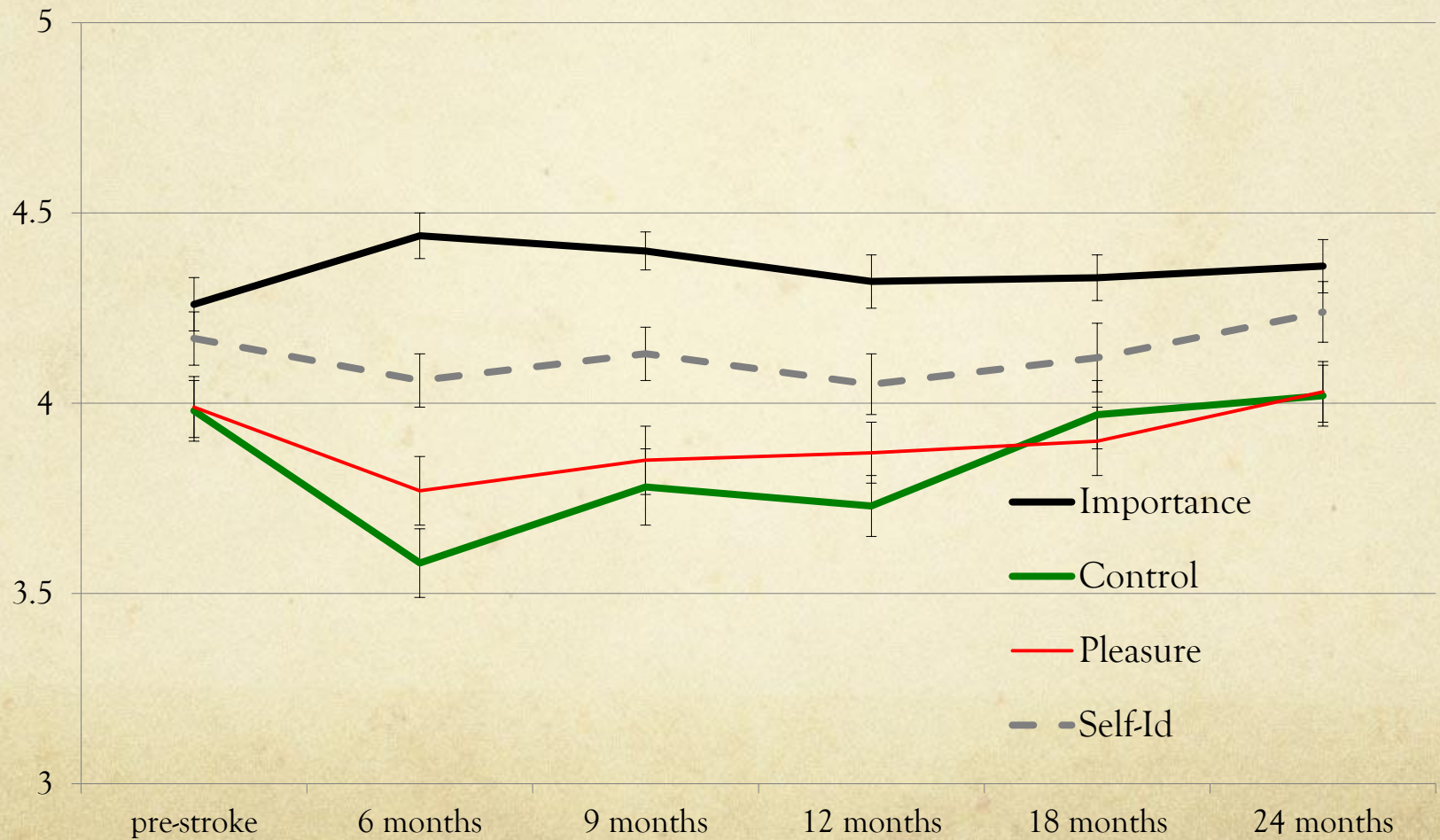
then rate each project on a series of dimensions...

Personal Projects Analysis

- For pre-stroke/SCI projects, we also asked what had happened with those projects
 - completed
 - on hold/delayed
 - no longer interested
 - still working on it
 - *can't continue due to stroke/SCI (= Project Thwarted/Blocked)*

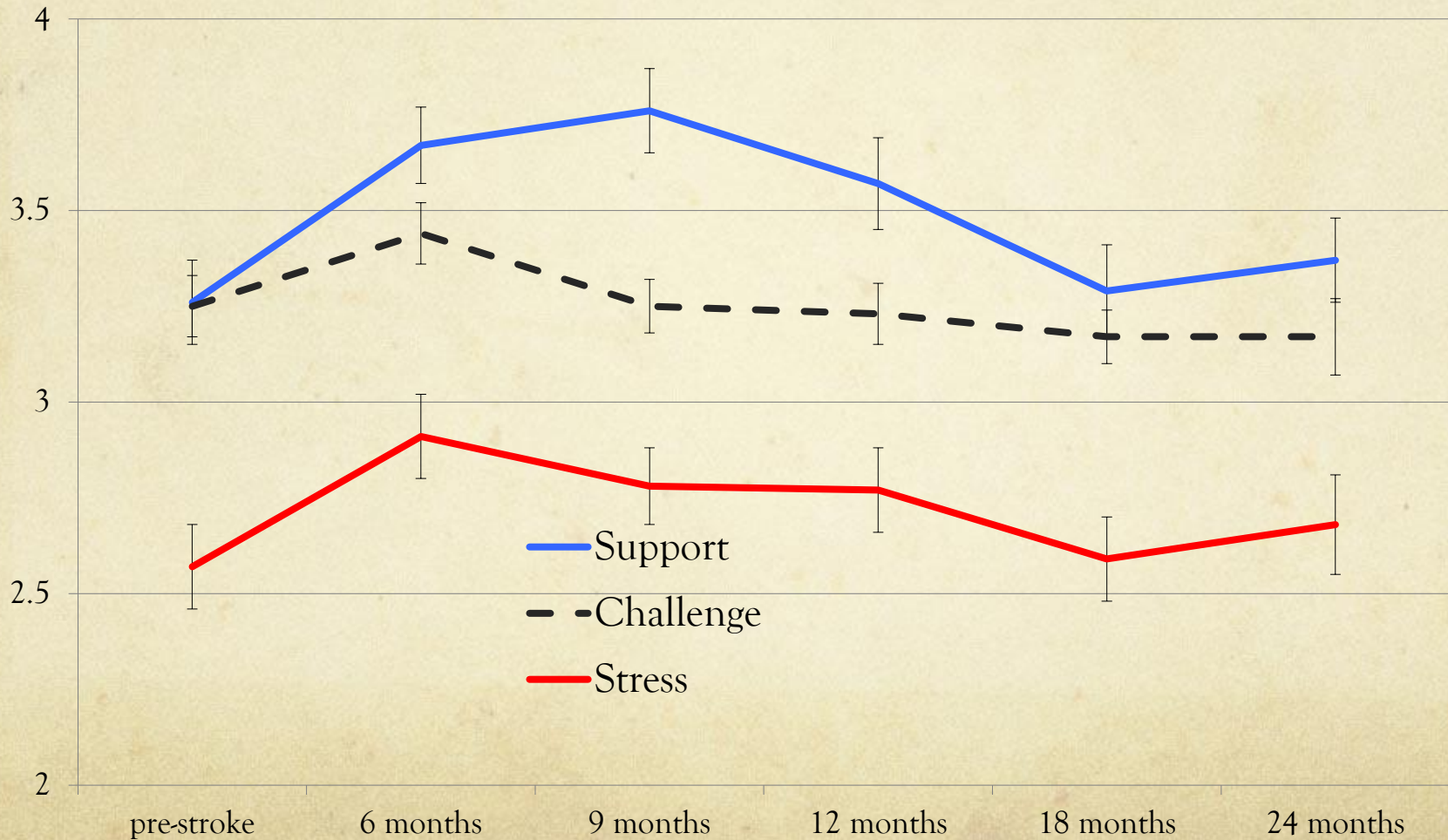
Stroke Results

○ Project Rating Data:



Stroke Results

○ Project Rating Data 2:



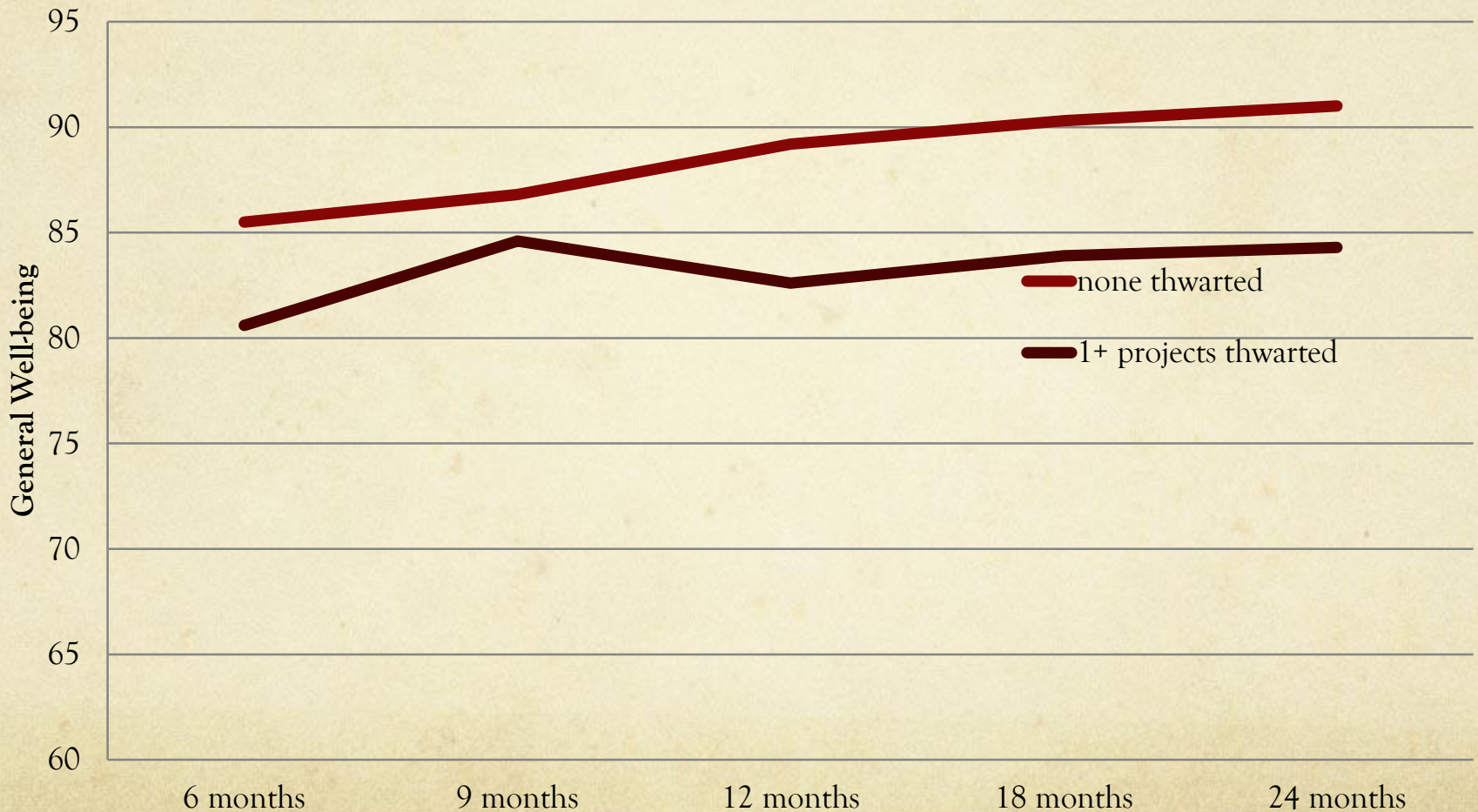
Stroke Results

○ Slight increases in well-being over time ...



Stroke: Thwarted Projects

○ 45% report at least 1 project blocked at T1

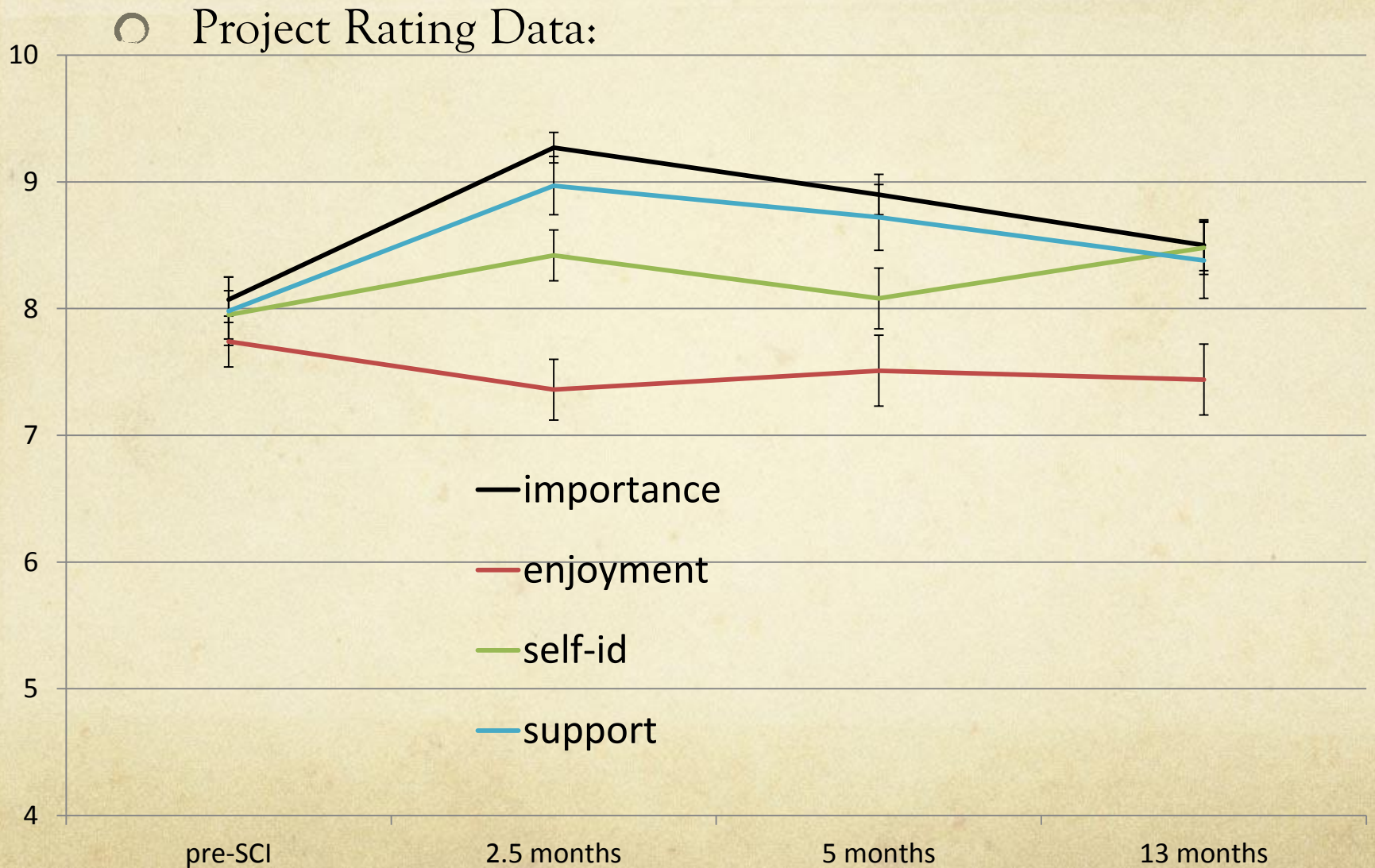


Stroke: Conclusions

- most able to adapt projects successfully
 - people's project lives are as important, self-identifying, pleasurable within 12 months
 - control, stress, challenge returns to baseline by 18 months
 - thwarted projects affect well-being, but not projects scores

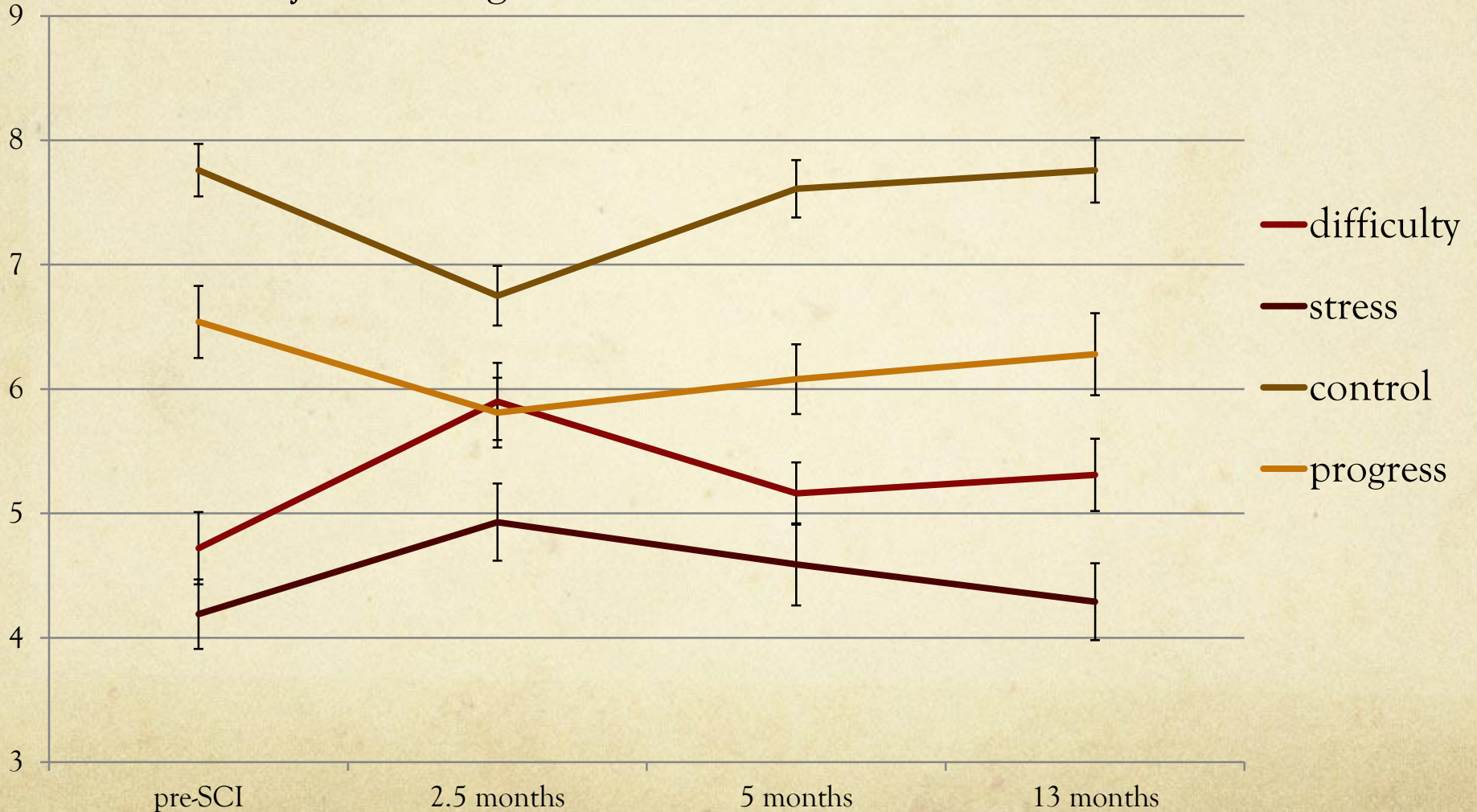
- Is this evidence of growth?

SCI Results



Spinal Cord Injury Study

○ Project Rating Data:

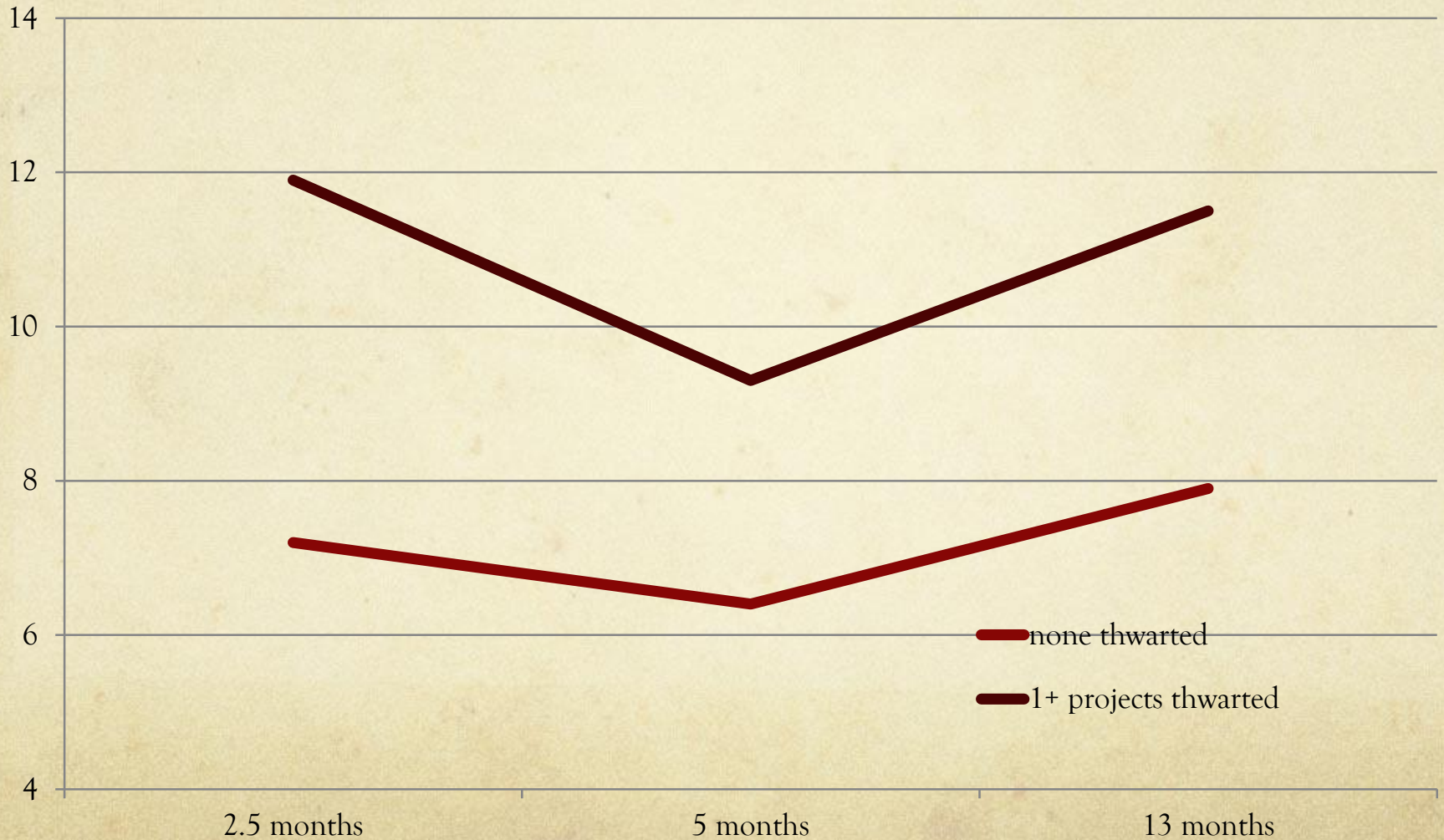


SCI Results



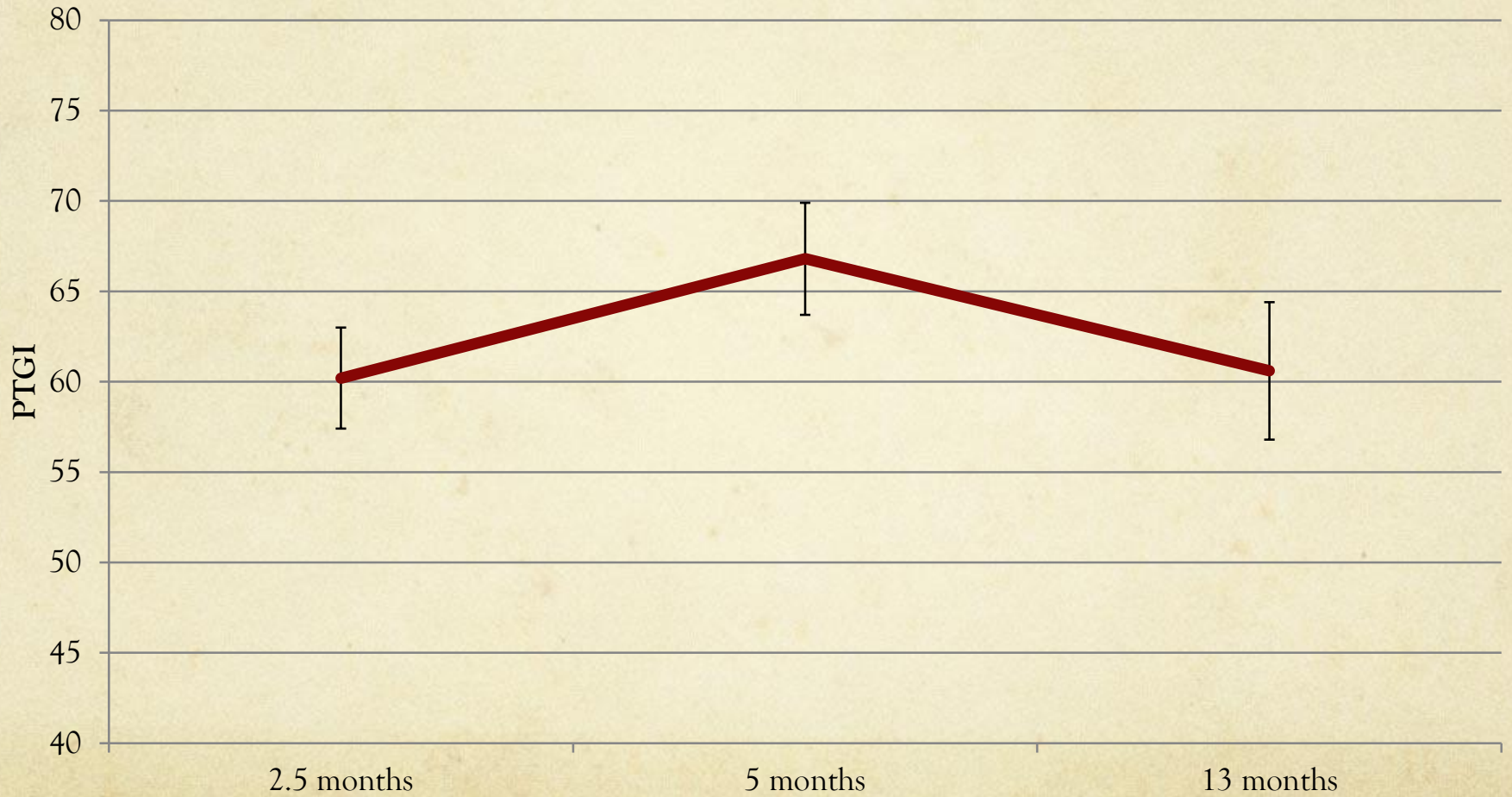
SCI Results

○ BDI as function of projects thwarted



SCI Results

○ Self-reported Posttraumatic Growth



SCI Results

○ Self-reported Posttraumatic Growth as a function of projects thwarted



SCI Conclusions

- As with stroke, the sample had adapted projects by 5 – 13 months to pre-SCI levels
 - projects were just as enjoyable, stressful, etc
 - ... and, if anything, more important, self-identifying, than baseline
- Isn't this what Growth is?
- Thwarted projects:
 - more depressed, but also more self-reported growth

General Conclusions

- for many, growth is motivated by threatened assumptions (fairness, justice, order, control)
- but in a more mundane sense, it is also motivated by a the challenge posed by adversity to goals and activities of daily life
 - how will I continue to pursue the goals that give my life a sense of meaning/purpose?
 - learn to do things differently -> new skills, broader perspective, new priorities...

Thank You

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