



## “Triggered” Positive Thoughts and Emotions

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“Triggered” positive thoughts and emotions will be produced by anything in the *present* that comforts, covers, compensates, or counter-acts core lies. The triggered positive thoughts will be the opposite of the underlying lies, and the triggered positive emotions will be the opposite of the emotions usually associated with the lies. For example, various experiences in Charlotte’s childhood led to her taking in lies along the lines of “I’m not acceptable/I’m not good enough.” She also learned that she temporarily felt better when she performed well and people affirmed her performance. Temporarily “I *am* good enough, I *am* acceptable” would feel true, and she would feel confidence and security instead of the anxiety and insecurity usually associated with her “I’m not acceptable/I’m not good enough” lies.

Impaired discernment and balance: The perceived importance of the triggering event/situation/behavior, the perceived validity of the triggered positive thoughts, and the subjective intensity of the triggered positive emotions will all be exaggerated because they will match the importance of the underlying wounds and lies (as opposed to being appropriate for the current situation). This inflated perceived importance, perceived validity, and subjective emotional intensity will impair our discernment and interfere with appropriate balance, drawing us into making poor decisions and causing us to neglect/harm ourselves and others as we pursue the temporary relief of the triggered positive thoughts and emotions. Continuing on the example above: one time Charlotte made herself late for a trip we had planned because she was talking to some people who were highly interested and impressed with a program she designed. Pursuing the triggered positive emotions associated with their attention and affirmation made her feel like somehow she simply *had* to answer every question and tell them about *all* of it *in detail, right then*, even though doing so made her late for the previous commitment.

Triggering mistaken for guidance from the Holy Spirit: Just as triggered negative emotions are often mistaken for a “check in the Spirit” (guidance from the Holy Spirit that we *should not* do a certain thing), triggered positive emotions are often mistaken for a “prompting from the Spirit” (guidance from the Holy Spirit that we *should* do a certain thing). This makes a lot of sense when you think about it for a minute. A true *check* from the Holy Spirit often feels subjectively like an emotional/intuitive nudge/pressure *away* from doing a certain thing, and a true *prompting* from the Holy Spirit often feels subjectively like an emotional/intuitive nudge/pressure *towards* doing a certain thing. This nudge/pressure inherently feels like more than the ordinary “I don’t want to do such and such” or “I do want to do such and such” (if it didn’t, we wouldn’t think it was a check or prompting from the Spirit). It also inherently feels somewhat mysterious – we can’t identify an adequate, logical explanation (if we could see an adequate explanation we wouldn’t think it was a check or prompting from the Spirit<sup>1</sup>).

Similarly, triggered negative emotions will often feel subjectively like an emotional/intuitive

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<sup>1</sup> We sometimes feel a “check” before we have a logical explanation, but as we consider the matter more we think of the/a logical explanation. Our perception is that the initial feeling could be a true “check” from the Holy Spirit, and that this prompts us to think about the situation more carefully.

nudge/pressure away from doing certain things and triggered positive emotions will often feel subjectively like an emotional/intuitive nudge/pressure towards doing certain things. The inflated perceived importance and exaggerated emotional intensity contribute a subjective *more than the ordinary* component, and we usually can't identify an adequate, logical explanation for our triggered emotions because our psychological defenses usually hide the connection to the underlying wounds and lies. Furthermore, the subjective feeling that our triggered emotions are valid – that they are real, that they come from somewhere – can add conviction to triggered “guidance” we mistake as a check or prompting from the Holy Spirit. Our perception is that many people, including ourselves, have mistaken triggered emotions for guidance from the Holy Spirit. The good news is that it is reasonably easy to tell the difference once you learn to recognize both triggered negative emotions and triggered positive emotions.

Positive trigger behavior, compulsive behaviors, and addictive self medication: We perceive a number of significant similarities and differences between behaviors that trigger positive thoughts and emotions, compulsive behaviors, and addictive self medication.

In all three of these behavior patterns the behaviors in question are *qualitatively* abnormal in some way, and usually (always?) feel pressured and/or driven.

The impairment of discernment and balance found with all three of these behavior patterns are very similar. For example, the way in which I neglected other aspects of my life in order to pursue the triggered positive thoughts and emotions associated with various aspects of academic excellence (described below) looks a lot like the way in which compulsive and addictive behaviors impair discernment and balance.

The spontaneous emotional reaction to being thwarted from a positive trigger is similar to the spontaneous reaction experienced when thwarted from an addictive or compulsive behavior.

Compulsive behaviors are often a form of positive trigger. For example, a person who was made to use their hands as a part of childhood sexual abuse may have lies along the lines of “I am bad, and my hands are especially dirty and evil.” This person might engage in compulsive hand washing in an attempt to counteract these lies. After each episode of washing, “my hands are evil and I am bad” lies are temporarily replaced with triggered positive thoughts such as “my hands are clean and I’m okay,” and triggered negative emotions of shame and self loathing are temporarily replaced with triggered positive emotions of relief.

“Workaholism” can include a number of different dynamics, but one important dynamic in workaholic behavior is pursuit of triggered positive emotions.

Note that addictive self medication is NOT a form of positive trigger. Things that trigger positive thoughts and emotions directly address specific underlying lies, whereas self medication is a nonspecific “shotgun” approach that temporarily covers any kind of pain.

Internal child ego states: If the memories and lies in question are carried by an internal child part, the “triggered” positive thoughts and emotions will “feel” young/childlike because the internal child ego state will come forward with the triggered positive thoughts and emotions.

Additional examples of triggered positive thoughts and emotions:

“I’m not important/special” and attention from father figures: During much of my childhood my Dad spent many hours each week in church-related ministry and also worked a full time job. In addition to being very busy, counseling related crises often interfered with our being able to spend time together. I have many memories of emergency phone calls taking Dad away

from his time with me and from his time with our family. I misinterpreted these events to come up with the core lies “I’m not important or special” and “Dad doesn’t spend time with me because I’m not important or special enough.” It should not be surprising that special attention from father figures like Francis MacNutt, Ed Smith, or our senior pastor has been especially powerful in triggering positive thoughts and emotions by temporarily counteracting these lies.

When one of these father figures would give me special attention I would experience appropriate, truth-based positive thoughts such as “It’s an honor for these people to spend time with me,” “This mentoring is a real gift and something I need,” and “These people feeling led to spend time with me is one way the Lord shows me he loves me,” and corresponding truth-based positive emotions such as encouragement, gratitude, and joy. However, these appropriate, truth-based thoughts and emotions were mixed together with triggered positive thoughts such as “Oh boy, oh boy, he wants to spend time with *me!* I *am* special! I *am* important!” and corresponding triggered emotions of unbalanced, manic/pressured giddiness. I can also usually perceive the presence of a child ego state. These triggered thoughts and emotions would clearly impair my discernment and balance. For example, I would sacrifice almost any other consideration in order to pursue a potential opportunity to spend time with one of these father figures, and I would always talk too much when I was triggered in this way. As the Lord has been removing the many closely related components of these thematic lies the lies have been feeling less and less true, my discernment regarding time with these men has been improving, and I am increasingly able to be a calm, balanced adult when I am actually with them.

“I’m not important/special” and physical manifestations: When our clients first started displaying physical manifestations during therapy sessions, I thought “Wow, something really *is* happening! God *is* answering my prayers, I *am* important, I *am* special!” instead of my old lies of “I am not important or special.” Temporarily, I felt encouraged, excited, important, and special instead of discouraged, unimportant, and ignored. Instead of recognizing these exaggerated, triggered positive emotions for what they were I thought they confirmed that the physical manifestations were somehow inherently important and valuable. Pursuing these triggered positive emotions as a present (apparent) solution to my old lies and pain impaired my discernment and led me to focus on the physical manifestations in an unbalanced way.<sup>2</sup>

“I’m not going to be okay,” “I’m not important/special,” “I’m not good at anything,” and family vacations: As a grade-school age child living in Chicago in the 1960’s, I felt like the world was falling apart. I saw civil rights marches and urban race riots on television, and experienced constant tension, frequent intimidation, and occasional violence in our mixed race neighborhood. Environmental activists were warning us about how pollution from modern industry and the exploding population would soon cause global ecological disaster. The news was filled with horrors from the Viet Nam War – I can still remember seeing the television footage of the naked Vietnamese girl running, screaming, out of a burning village, and color *Life* magazine pictures of napalm-burned children. John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King were all assassinated, and everybody knew that we would all die in World War III

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<sup>2</sup> See the five essays “Deceiving Spirits and Counterfeit Manifestations: How Wounds, Lies, Internal Parts, Repression, and Denial Can Give Them a Place,” “EMDR, Traumatic Memories, and Physical Phenomena,” “Emotional Healing, Spiritual Opposition, and Physical Manifestations,” “Physical Behavior, Phenomena, and Manifestations: ‘Pressure Leaks’ that can Hinder Prayer for Emotional Healing,” and “Physical Behavior, Phenomena, and Manifestations: Summary, Practical Applications, & Sample Prayers” (all available as free downloads from [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) for a description and discussion of physical manifestations, and for a more detailed description and discussion of how my unresolved issues impaired my discernment regarding physical manifestations.

if somebody pushed the wrong button. On top of all of this, it felt like my parents and the other grownups in our church were too busy dealing with all of these huge problems to help a little kid deal with all his fears. All mixed together, this pile produced strong thematic lies along the lines of “I’m not going to be okay.”

In addition to being chronically anxious, I was also skinny, slow, and not good at any sports. I had difficulty in school because of my dyslexia, and I was not artistically or musically gifted. These aspects of my childhood experience reinforced the “I’m not important/special” lie described above and also contributed to a lie along the lines of “I’m not good at anything.” Nature study was the one thing I felt good at as a child. I felt at home in the woods and knew most of the plants and animals in the rural areas we visited – even as a child the others in my family recognized me as the nature study expert. Unfortunately, nature study wasn’t much good when it came to impressing peers in our urban neighborhood.

Once each year throughout my childhood our family would leave the city for two weeks, either to go camping or to visit my grandparents in rural Pennsylvania and Virginia. For two weeks each year we escaped from the playground and the neighborhood where I felt physically unsafe, from the pollution that constantly reminded me of environmental destruction, from the crowding that reminded me of global population problems, from the media full of death and destruction, and from the counseling crises that constantly took Dad away from our family (my best childhood memories with my father are all from family camping trips). And we escaped to the rural environments where I could enjoy and excel at nature study. These “big trips” provided temporary relief from the negative emotions associated with many of my lies. For these two weeks “The world is falling apart and I’m not going to be okay” seemed to be replaced by “I’m *not* alone” and “Maybe there’s still hope;” “I’m not important/special enough for Dad to spend time with me – there is always something or somebody else more important” seemed to be replaced by “I *am* important and special – Dad *does* want to spend time with me;” and “I’m not good at anything” seemed to be replaced by “I’m the best at nature study.”

It should not be surprising that I have experienced intense triggered positive emotions in association with “big trips” that involved getting out of an urban environment and having opportunities to study nature. My triggered positive emotions associated with getting out of the city impaired my discernment regarding how often we should travel and my intense triggered positive emotions associated with nature study impaired my ability to hear Charlotte’s desires regarding where to go and what to do on our vacations. My triggered positive emotions while on these trips would also have a pressured, manic, unbalanced intensity that made it difficult to hear Charlotte’s desires or care for her needs regarding the many specific concerns that would come up while traveling.<sup>3</sup>

My experience with traveling out of the city provides a good example of parallels between a person pursuing triggered positive emotions and a person pursuing positive emotions through addictive self medication. Much like people who are engaged in addictive self medication, I displayed an intense, pressured, subtly abnormal “happiness” when I was experiencing triggered positive emotions, but would be very irritable and intolerant when anything got in the

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<sup>3</sup> As described below, positive emotions and associations can also be healthy and truth-based. I have many healthy, truth-based positive emotions and associations from these childhood trips, and there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to continue “big trip” and nature study traditions from my childhood. The problem in our experience was that healthy, truth-based positive emotions and associations were contaminated with “triggered” positive emotions that impaired my discernment and balance.

way of the activity that produced the triggered positive emotions. For example, I would be unreasonably impatient regarding any delay in leaving on a trip. My reaction would be exaggerated and unreasonable if Charlotte did not get money out of the bank the day before, so that we had to delay our trip for ten minutes to drive by the cash station. It seemed like she always took *much* too long to take care of last minute things like checking to make sure she had turned off her computer or that her driver’s license was in her purse, and I couldn’t imagine *what* she was doing if she took more than a minute in the bathroom.

Our experience with traveling out of the city also provides a good example of triggered positive emotions being packaged along with a child ego state. I would become increasingly giddy as the time for a “big trip” approached, and both Charlotte and I could especially perceive the presence of a six to eight year old ego state sharing my mind on the morning of departure. I would usually wake at 4:30 – 5:00 a.m. in a state of excited agitation, and would *march* around the house with a compulsive six to eight year old grin on my face, saying things like “Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!” and “I can hardly *believe* it – we’re gonna go *today!*” (All of these details being just like my behavior as a child).

Unfortunately, my triggered child ego state also contributed to impairing my discernment regarding “big trips.” For example, my adult “discernment” regarding how I should help with trip-related responsibilities was remarkably similar to my childhood perspective. I would prepare my travel bags days or even weeks ahead of time (just like I had as a child), but it seemed reasonable that this would be my only trip preparation responsibility. It just somehow seemed reasonable that somebody else (the “grownups”) would take care of all the other details, such as planning the route, communicating with people we would be visiting, putting gas in the car the day before, getting money out of the bank, etc.. On the day of departure I would help put everything in the car, check all of my pets and plants, and get my body into the car (usually bouncing up and down and saying “Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go”) – just like I had as a child, but it seemed reasonable that these would be my only responsibilities. It just somehow seemed reasonable that “somebody else” would take care of all the other last minute preparations, such as making *sure* that necessary things like maps and phone numbers and gas money had indeed gotten into the car, and that we had closed the windows, shut off the lights, and locked the doors, etc. During the actual trip I liked most to sit in the front passenger seat and stare out the window, “looking for animals” – once again, just like I had as a child. It just seemed reasonable that Charlotte would always start as the driver, and I was happiest when she did *all* the driving. It also just seemed reasonable that she should be the one to know the way to wherever we were going. All these perspectives regarding trip-related responsibilities just *felt* like the way it ought to be. I was able to help with all the “grownup” tasks if Charlotte really pressed the issue, but her requests always felt like unreasonable impositions (I can now see that her requests frustrated me because they interfered with my “big trip” triggered positive emotions). It is not surprising that Charlotte did not appreciate my six to eight year old approach to helping with “big trips.”

Thankfully, our experience with traveling out of the city – from deciding to go on a trip to sharing the driving responsibilities – has been improving steadily as I have been resolving the lies underlying my triggered positive thoughts and emotions associated with “big trips” (the reader may have noted that many of the examples are past tense but that a few are still present tense).

Exceptional competence, academic performance, and various lies: In Jr. High I discovered that



I could be an exceptional student if I worked hard enough, and I began to use academic achievement to pursue triggered positive emotions. Each time I got the highest score on a test or straight A’s on my report card, “I’m smart,” “I’m important,” and “I’m good at something” temporarily replaced “I’m stupid,”<sup>4</sup> “I’m not important/special,” and “I’m not good at anything.” Confidence and excitement temporarily replaced the discouragement and insecurity usually associated with the underlying lies. I eventually learned that I could become exceptionally competent in many areas if I worked hard enough long enough, and I began to use the combination of academic achievement and exceptional competence to pursue triggered positive emotions. For example, each time I knew what to do in a difficult medical situation, I would have the conscious thought “I know what to do – I’m gonna be okay,” and a feeling of being safe and in control would temporarily replace the usual anxiety and insecurity associated with my underlying “I’m not going to be okay” lies. When I worried about the world falling apart and that I wouldn’t be able to take care of myself, I always figured that it would be an advantage to be the best. If you’re *really* good, somebody will always make a place for you. Being the best would give me more options and more control if the world *really* started falling apart. Each time I made a significant career accomplishment that would go on my resume, like getting a scholarship, receiving an academic award, or scoring exceptionally high on a standardized test, the anxiety and insecurity usually associated with my deep “I’m not going to be okay” lies would be temporarily replaced with confidence associated with thoughts like “No matter how bad it gets, there will always be a place for me.”

My experience with academic performance provides a good example of how triggered positive thoughts and emotions can disrupt balance in our lives. There was nothing inherently wrong with my working hard to be competent, doing well academically, or even being the top student in my class, but there was a problem with using academic performance and exceptional competence to pursue triggered positive emotions. The problem was that my intense pursuit of the triggered positive thoughts and emotions associated with being the best and with being extremely competent disrupted the *balance* between studying and the rest of my life. In my triggered, driven attempt to be the best and to know what to do in every situation I neglected sleep, recreation, personal spiritual growth, and my relationships with others. As noted above, this looks a lot like the impaired balance characteristically seen with compulsive and addictive behaviors.

“I’m not important,” “I’m not wanted,” and dramatic success with the Immanuel approach/Theophostic<sup>®5</sup>-based ministry<sup>6</sup>: Another example we have seen occurs when a person<sup>7</sup> with

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<sup>4</sup> See “Psychological Trauma, Implicit Memory, and the Verbal Logical Explainer,” “I’m Too Stupid,” and “Now that We Have Tools that Work, We Can Look at All this Stuff”: Dissociative Phenomena, Case Study and Reflections” (all available for free download from [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) for description of the roots of my “I’m stupid” lies.

<sup>5</sup>®Theophostic Prayer Ministry is a trademark of Dr. Ed Smith and Alathia Ministries, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> While we encourage folks to study the Theophostic<sup>®</sup> principles as taught by developer Ed Smith, we don’t actually use them as a stand-alone model in our practice. We have therefore developed the term “Theophostic<sup>®</sup>-based” therapy/ministry to more accurately describe what we do, and how we use Dr. Smith’s principles. We use the term “Theophostic<sup>®</sup>-based” to refer to therapies/ministries that are built around a core of Theophostic<sup>®</sup> principles and techniques, but that are not exactly identical to Theophostic<sup>®</sup> Prayer Ministry as taught by Dr. Ed Smith. Our own therapy/ministry would be a good example of “Theophostic<sup>®</sup>-based” therapy/ministry – it is built around a core of Theophostic<sup>®</sup> principles and techniques, but it sometimes also includes material that is not a part of what we understand Dr. Smith to

“I’m not important” and “I’m not wanted” lies experiences dramatic success with the Immanuel approach/Theophostic<sup>®</sup>-based emotional healing work. When the living Jesus Christ shows up and releases glorious healing right in front of her, it feels like the Lord has just chosen her to be one of His personal assistants – one of His special, inner circle – one of the disciples that travels with Jesus and gets to watch Him heal. The discouragement and low self esteem associated with the person’s usual “I’m not important” lies are temporarily replaced with the thrilling excitement of “I *am* important! God is answering *my* prayers. Jesus is showing up in *my* office!” The word spreads, and people start calling: “My friend just told me what happened last week. Can you make time in your schedule to pray with me?”, “Oh, *thank you*, for giving me an appointment. I was afraid there wouldn’t be any space left,” and “Please, can’t you just see me for *one* session?” The loneliness and rejection associated with her usual “I’m not wanted” lies are temporarily replaced with the warm affirmation of “*Everybody* wants me!” Without even realizing what is happening, the person will begin to compulsively pursue these intense positive emotions. She will neglect other responsibilities, her family, and herself in order to pursue emotional healing work in a compulsive and unbalanced way. She will also make poor judgment decisions regarding when and where it is appropriate and/or safe to do emotional healing work, and she will fail to maintain appropriate confidentiality out of the intense pressure to tell others about the exciting things that are happening.

What is probably clear by now is that being misled by triggered positive emotions can only occur where there are unresolved underlying wounds and lies. Carrying more wounds and lies will make a person more vulnerable to this problem, and resolving her own wounds and lies will make her less and less vulnerable to this particular variety of confusion and impairment.

Push away from the negative and pull towards the positive: Looking closely at most (all?) situations in which we are drawn to pursue triggered positive thoughts and emotions will reveal that our triggered behavior is driven both by a pull to obtain triggered positive thoughts and emotions and a push to avoid triggered negative thoughts and emotions. For example, getting the lowest score on an exam would have directly triggered all of the lies and negative emotions that were temporarily counteracted by getting the highest score. My academic performance was driven by the desire to avoid the triggered negative thoughts and emotions associated with doing poorly as well as the desire to obtain the triggered positive thoughts and emotions associated with doing well.

Clues regarding underlying wounds and lies: Realizing that triggered positive thoughts and emotions always come with a complimentary set of underlying negative thoughts and emotions led to the realization that triggered positive thoughts and emotions provide another tool for finding unresolved wounds. Reversing triggered positive thoughts and emotions will reveal trauma associated lies and their associated negative emotions, and these lies and negative emotions can then be used as initial targets in the Immanuel approach and/or Theophostic<sup>®</sup>-based emotional healing work. For example, I experienced exaggerated triggered elation, confidence, and

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define as Theophostic<sup>®</sup> Prayer Ministry (such as our material on capacity, the Immanuel approach, and Immanuel interventions, our material on dealing with curses, spiritual strongholds, generational problems, and suicide-related phenomena, and our material on journaling, spiritual disciplines, and medical psychiatry).

<sup>7</sup> This is one problem that I did *not* experience in my journey with emotional healing work. My gift for discovering clutter by getting stuck in every possible way provided ample protection from this particular form of triggered positive emotions.

encouragement whenever I got the best score on an exam. If I focus on these positive emotions I can identify the associated positive thoughts such as “I’m *not* stupid,” “I *can* do it,” and “I’m the best!” When I reverse these I get the underlying lies of “I’m stupid,” “I can’t figure it out,” and “I’m not good at anything,” and the associated negative emotions of sadness, insecurity, and discouragement. Focusing on these lies and negative emotions will then lead me to the traumatic memories where they are anchored. Another way in which to find unresolved wounds is to imagine the opposite of the situation that triggers the positive thoughts and emotions. This will lead to the underlying lies and negative emotions, and as with the first approach, these can be used as initial targets for the Immanuel approach and/or Theophostic®-based emotional healing. For example, I can ask myself “How would I feel if I hadn’t gotten the best score? If I had only scored average? If I had gotten the lowest score? (I can stir up negative thoughts and emotions in seconds if I imagine getting the lowest score on an exam).<sup>8</sup>

Healthy, *truth-based* positive associations and emotions: It is important to distinguish between triggered positive emotions and healthy, *truth-based* positive associations and emotions. The Lord has designed healthy, truth-based positive associations and positive emotions to guide and motivate us towards fun and restorative activities in much the same way He designed healthy, truth-based negative associations and negative emotions to guide and motivate us away from painful and destructive activities. We want to embrace healthy, truth-based positive associations and emotions as the blessing that they are, and accept as healthy the desire to engage in activities that elicit them (as opposed to trying to resolve truth-based positive associations and emotions with emotional healing). For example, it is normal and healthy to want to continue certain Christmas traditions that are associated with positive childhood memories of happy times together as a family. It is normal and healthy for a couple to want to play a certain song that reminds them of special occasions together – a song that is associated with memories of happy romantic times together as a couple. As mentioned in the footnotes above, there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to continue camping and nature study traditions that are associated with positive childhood memories, and there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to work hard and perform well. See “Healthy, *Truth-based* Emotions and Associations” (available as free download from [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) for additional comments and discussion.

Note: We’re not sure “triggered” is the best word to use in triggered positive emotions, since we usually use “triggered” to refer to thoughts and emotions that come from directly activating the toxic content associated with unresolved trauma. We chose to use “triggered” because the subjective experience is so similar with respect to the exaggerated intensity, and with respect to the intense *subjective feeling* that the thoughts and emotions are reasonable *in the present* even though careful investigation reveals that there is no *current* adequate source.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that this is *not* trying to find traumatic memories by imagining “What might have happened,” but rather an imagination trigger, much like Dr. Smith uses when he asks a person with anorexia to imagine eating a large candy bar. See “False Memories?” (available as free download from [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) for additional discussion of memory error risks associated with using imagination in trying to find repressed or dissociated traumatic memories.