

## Trauma & Women

LIFE IN ABSTRACTION: Looking for Meaning

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I have no real or perceived vested interests that relate to this presentation nor do I have any relationships with pharmaceutical companies, biomedical device manufacturers, and/or other corporations whose products or services are related to pertinent therapeutic areas.”

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## Learning Objectives

The learner will be able to

- identify a variety of ways that trauma can affect perception and meaning among women who survive interpersonal trauma
- Review practical guidance about the relationship between the trauma and response to services
- Examine illustrations of how trauma and its recovery manifest in the lives of women who survive traumatic experiences

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## PART ONE

- BASICS

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### Introduction: The Basics

- Interpersonal trauma results from an event or series of events that threaten one's survival or integrity.
- Survivor is one who has experienced trauma.
- Triggers are the events or sensory experiences that prompt the urge to engage in a compulsive behavior or induces a flashback.

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### Basics, cont.

- Trauma-Specific settings are ones that are responsive to trauma by assisting clients/patients with managing symptoms
- Trauma-Informed settings are ones that have an organizational response that establishes policies and practices to minimize risk of clients being harmed while seeking help

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### Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

- An organizational response to the needs of trauma survivors that ensures that environment, policies and practices will not be re-traumatizing or re-victimizing. Trauma-informed care includes strategies and approaches that minimize the risk of clients being harmed while seeking help.

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### Understanding Trauma's Impact

- "...The common denominator of Trauma is a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation."  
Judith Herman
- "Trauma is not limited to suffering violence; it includes witnessing violence as well as stigmatization because of gender, race, poverty, incarceration, or sexual orientation." Stephanie Covington

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### Trauma Impacts

- Alters naturally occurring capacities to feel safe; trust in others; have control over one's life; being valued and connected to others.
- The person may feel helpless, hopeless, worthless, damaged, singled out for punishment, profoundly ashamed, blamed, "broken and unfixable," with psychic and physical pain.

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### These feelings can lead to---

- Addiction to Substances
- Selection of Abusive Partners
- Eating Disorders
- Self-harm
- High-risk Behaviors
- Numbing pain or modulating states with drugs, sex, shopping, eating
- Detachment from body
- Depression
- Learning Challenges

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### Common Behaviors

- Fearful; easily frightened startled; paralyzing fear and panic
- Aggressive; hostile; tendency to fight
- Defensive so as not to expose vulnerability
- Tendency to run away; escape; flee; avoid
- "Freeze" or become immobilized
- Dissociate or "zone out"
- Drinking, drugging, unprotected sex, eating disorders, cutting, criminal activity

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### Manifestations

- Accident prone, chronic pain, STD's, headaches, GYN & gastrointestinal problems, asthma
- Social awkwardness or apprehension about seemingly unthreatening activities or events; going into "survival mode" (Chemtob); hyper-vigilance
- People pleasing and passive avoidance as a means of self protection
- Adaptive coping that helps them to survive
- Possible abusive head trauma due to maltreatment

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## T-R-A-U-M-A

- T RIGGERS
- R EACTION
- A LTERED STATES
- U NDERSTANDING
- M EANING
- A FFECT

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## PART TWO

- IN PURSUIT OF MEANING...

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## Trauma, Meaning & Perception

- “One of the things we thought we’d help stop was the **scarring** or **cutting** of tribal marks on the faces of young women...**It is a way the Olinka can show they still have their own ways**...Tashi didn’t want to do it, but to **make her people feel better**, she resigned.” Possessing the Secret of Joy by Alice Walker

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### False Evidence Appearing Real

- “There Leonato, take her back again; Give not this rotten orange to your friend; She is but the sign and semblance of her honour. Behold, how like a maid she blushes here!”
- “She knows the heat of a luxurious bed; Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.”

Act IV, Scene I- Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare

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### Cultural Myths

- Cultural Myth-“What is the feminine voice, and if fully expressed, how might it affect society, in particular the institutions related to health...The masculine and feminine are regarded as polarities...The myths no doubt have some basis in genetic differences but also are formed through environmental forces.” Woman As Healer by Jeanne Achterberg

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### The Myth of Masculine & Feminine

| <u>Masculine</u> | <u>Feminine</u> |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Rational         | Irrational      |
| Power            | Compassion      |
| Giving           | Receiving       |
| Doing to         | Being with      |
| Reason           | Feelings        |
| Active           | Passive         |

Woman as Healer, Achterberg

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### Archetypes

- Cinderella- "That Cinderella's position is the consequence of an oedipal relation is suggested by many versions in this cycle of fairy tales. In stories which are all over Europe, Africa, and Asia---in Europe for example, in France, Italy, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Scotland, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia---Cinderella flees from a father who wants to marry her." The Uses of Enchantment by Bruno Bettelheim

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### Meaning

- "Today, as in times past, the most important and also the most difficult task in raising a child is helping him to find meaning in life." "The Struggle for Meaning" in The Uses of Enchantment by Bruno Bettelheim

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### Chakras-Subtle Anatomy

"Full openness to the healing journey involves being taken through and beyond dis-ease into a new state of awareness and understanding of what it means to be whole and well. This may or not be directly related to the wellness of the physical body. It encompasses spiritual understanding, a sense of purpose, emotional well being and an ease and excitement at being alive." Working with Your Chakras  
by Ruth White

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## The Subtle Energy Field

- “There are particular phases of early life which are crucial to each of the first five chakras. If the needs of each stage are well met, the chakras will function more easily, strongly and openly in every other life-phase...”The early years are foundations for the rest of life. The degree to which the primary needs---such as warmth , food, shelter and love---are met, will reflect into the development and health of the chakra.”

Working with Your Chakras Ruth White

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## Correspondences

- Color
- Sound
- Sense
- Element
- Crystals/Gemstones

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## Chakras & Healing

- “Chakra work does not necessarily replace other therapies but is a safe self-help tool which brings swift and tangible results. It can thus shorten and deepen other therapeutic interventions and be invaluable in maintaining any progress which has been achieved.” Working With Your Chakras Ruth White

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## Altered States

- The altered state associated with trauma can be thought of as fertile soil. You can plant healthy seeds that will help the person heal and replenish their emotional soil and healing capacity--or you can let torrents of fear erode the soil so that nothing grows expect more fear.”

Mother-Daughter Wisdom by Christiane Northrup, M.D.

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- “Even though the trauma may have occurred long ago, patients treat themselves in ways that repeat it...These patients have typically been abused and are now abusing themselves.”

Seeking Safety Lisa M.Najavits, Ph.D.

- Cutting & other forms of self-harm
- Abusive relationships
- Substance use/abuse
- High risk behaviors

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## Seeing How Trauma Feels

- “Broken Column” by Frida Kahlo



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## Adaptations

- “My therapist was always trying to point out how I had split myself into two women: one was the onstage personality who was confident and sassy, and the other was often crying out to be loved and would do anything to get affection. I learned that this type of behavior isn’t unusual for victims of sexual abuse and for those who’ve suffered through dysfunctional family lives.” Kick Up Your Heels... by Loretta LaRoche

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## Feeling How Trauma Looks from the Inside

- “The Two Fridas” by Frida Kahlo



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## Coping and Surviving

- Distortions
- Associations
- Generalizations

*Trying to make sense out of what does not make sense.*

*Stress and anxiety pervade and a state of hyper-arousal results.*

*Human contact is dangerous.*

*You risk connection, or you die.*

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### Case Example

- “She was afraid of people, yet she needed them. Everything which could have been joy turned into pain. She was seriously depressed.”

Working With Your Chakras

by Ruth White

*Many suffer from the longing for connection and the sense that something is missing.*

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### “Broken and Unfixable”



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What does it mean?  
Dance at Bougival, 1883  
*Pierre Renior*

Safe?



Danger?

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## Challenges

- Rethink safety, coping and support



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## Openness & Flexibility

- Observe – Create safe space
- Approach – Share power; give space
- Engagement – Follow their leads; listen

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## Listen

- **“All people want is someone to listen.”**  
Hugh Elliott

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## Validate

- Respect the ways they have healed...



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## See the Strength in Their Survival

Understand what they do protect themselves



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## Creativity & Healing

- Unity
  - Self-Expression
- “Self Portrait with Necklace” by Frida Kahlo



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Help them Make Peace with the Past

- “Awakenings of the Three Parts of Me” by Sharon Wise



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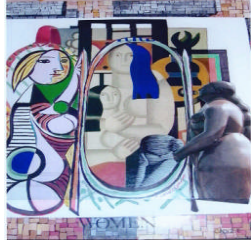
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Connecting to Self & Others

- Individualize the Meaning of Success  
“Women” by Edwin Cadiz



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