



HISTORICAL TRAUMA:

"Sexuality in the African American Community"

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Some Numbers

- › Black women experience intimate partner violence at rates 35% higher than their white counterparts (The Violence Policy Center).
- › Approximately 40% of black women report coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18 (National Black Women's Health Project).
- › 3.3 million African-American women have been sexually abused and 1.9 million African-American men have been sexually abused.
- › The rate of new HIV infection in African Americans is 8 times that of whites based on population size.

THE JOURNEY

"People who fit don't seek. The seekers are those that don't fit." Shannon L. Alder

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- ▶ **PTSD** may develop after a person is exposed to a traumatic event like physical or sexual assault, exposure to disaster or accidents, combat or witnessing a traumatic event, can last years. The three main symptoms:
 1. **Reliving or re-experiencing:** include flashbacks, hallucinations, and nightmares.
 1. **Avoidance:** of people, places, thoughts, or situations that may remind they of the trauma.
 2. **Increased arousal:** Being easily startled; Feeling tense or "on edge"; Having difficulty sleeping, and/or having angry outbursts



Intergenerational Trauma

- ▶ Intergenerational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next.
- ▶ Intergenerational trauma was first observed in 1966 by clinicians alarmed by the number of **children of survivors** of the Nazi Holocaust seeking treatment in clinics in Canada



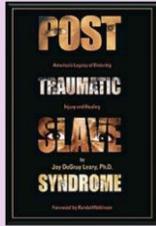
Historical Trauma

- ▶ Historical (Collective) Trauma is trauma upon trauma that occurs in history to a specific group of people causing emotional and mental wounding both during their lives and to the generations that follow. (Native American Children & Family Services Training Inst., 1999)
- ▶ Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD, conceptualized historical trauma in the 1980's, as a way to develop stronger understanding of why life for many Native Americans is not fulfilling **"the American Dream"**.



Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

- › P.T.S.S. is a condition that exists as a consequence of centuries of chattel slavery followed by institutionalized racism and oppression have resulted in **multigenerational adaptive behavior, some positive reflecting resilience, and others that are harmful and destructive.**
- › Theory of P.T.S.S. was developed by Dr. Joy DeGruy as a result of twelve years of quantitative and qualitative research.



AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAUMA EXPERIENCE

"My cattle at home are better cared for than these unfortunate persons."
 Col. Frank S. Nickerson, U.S. Army

American Chattel Slavery (1619-1865)

- › **Chattel Slavery** (personal property, bought and sold as commodities or like cattle)
- › 1619 first African arrived in Jamestown, Virginia
- › 1808 importing Africans as slaves was banned.
- › **Breeding farms** produce more slaves.



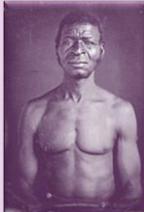
Slave Families

- ▶ A typical slave family was matriarchal in form, for the mother's role was far more important than the father's and many times fathers names was omitted from birth records.
- ▶ Fathers couldn't act to prevent their wives and children from being assaulted, beaten or sold (a "weak" and "unmanly" position).



Male Slaves

- ▶ **Treated like a breeding bull**
 - forced to mate/procreate with random female slaves including other plantations. **It didn't matter if the women were their mothers, daughters or sisters.**
 - **Mandingo:** Invented by white slave owners, the notion that male African slaves were animalistic, oversexed, and primitive in nature.
 - **Secret sex treats** for white woman (even man)



Female Slaves

- ▶ **Treated like breeding cows**
 - Function of female slaves was to produce more slaves.
 - **Jezebel Image:** use by male slavers to justify sex with female slaves.
 - **Mammy Image:** asexual, obese, older woman with large breasts working in servitude.
 - **Woman or child** was forced to have sex at the slave master's pleasure and profit.



Jim Crow (South, 1865-1965)

- › 1865 – 13th Amendment/Slavery Abolished
 - either slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a **punishment for crime**...
- › **Share Cropping** – keep blacks on plantations
- › 1866 – **Ku Klux Klan**: Confederate veterans
- › 1866 – **Convict Leasing**: to companies.
- › **Lynchings (often included castration)** often accused of raping a white woman.
- › Many southern white **men's first sexual experience was often with a black women**



"Great Migration"/Ghetto (1915-68)

- › Leaving share cropping and abuse.
- › Menial and manufacturing jobs; segregated housing and employment.
- › 1919 "Red Summer" Chicago, IL, Knoxville, TN and Washington, D.C.
- › Black women was tired of being sexuality assaulted in public by white men and in private by black men.
- › Before the 1960s not a single Southerner was imprisoned for raping a black woman



Ghetto and Welfare (1968-1975)

- › **Welfare rules** "no adult men in the home"
- › The exodus of manufacturing jobs and middle class
- › Drugs, crime, poverty and family disintegration took a heavy toll on the inhabitants of the inner city.
- › **Use of Sex for work, food and shelter**



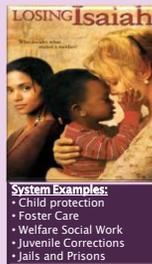
Hyperghetto and Prison (1975-1990)

- › **Hyperghetto** extreme concentration of poverty, underprivileged groups and police presents.
- › Blacks and whites use and sell drugs at about the same rate, but blacks are 20 times more likely going to Jail.
- › Drugs had major impact on the women and children.
- › **Sex for drug and increased in the sex trade (pimping)**



Institutionalized Generation (1985 -)

- › Generations after the crack era.
- › overrepresentation in social service systems.
- › Creating an inferiority, dependent mindset and extreme level of learned helplessness.
- › **Sex for significance, security and belonging**



African American Citizenship 1619 - 2015

Time Span	Years	Proportion of time in US	Status
1619-1865	246 years	62%	Chattel slavery
1865-1965	100 years	25%	Jim Crow virtually no (south) or limited citizenship rights honored (north)
1965-2015	50 years	13%	Citizenship Rights: USA struggles to transition from segregation of inclusion of African Americans
Total	396 years	100%	The struggle continues

THREAT RESPONSE AND HISTORICAL TRAUMA EFFECT

"People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them."

James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

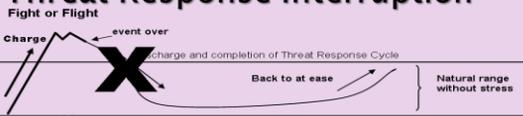
Threat Response Cycle



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| <p>Charge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle contraction • Adrenalin and Cortisol secretion • Increased heart rate • Survival energy production | <p>Discharge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tingling • Trembling • Tears • Completion of defensive movements |
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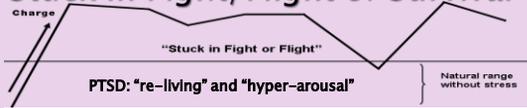
Adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, a school of somatic (i.e., body-focused) therapy for healing trauma.

Threat Response Interruption



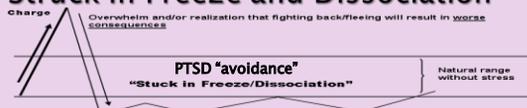
- Some Causes:**
- **Not wanting to feel out of control:** stop ourselves "get a grip (literally)" and "Just get over it,"
 - **Situational priorities:** (attend to a child's needs)
 - **Ongoing threats** (recurring abuse/violence, racial microaggressions, oppression)
 - **New situations that prompt more threat responses**

Stuck in Fight/Flight or Survival



- Anxiety, hypervigilance, difficulty relaxing or sleeping
- Difficulty with staying engaged in relationships/jobs/projects
- **Tendency to connect the dots** that do not belong together
- **In Children:** Hyperactivity, poor concentration, bullying
- **Community** Having to work hard to manage anger/fear, conscious/unconscious expectations of being treated unfairly

Struck in Freeze and Dissociation



- Depression, feelings of emptiness, detachment and difficulty defending self or facing conflicts
- **Inability to connect the dots** that are right in front of them
- **In Children:** difficulty processing information, loner, fearful
- **Community** A pattern of not speaking up about inequity followed by a sense of resentment/shame / selfblame.

Survival Stress Management

- › A process of adapting to stressful situations by **acting or reacting without thinking of the consequences of our choices. Resulting in increased stress** and/or depression:
 - Judgmental and distorted thoughts and feelings, impatience, exploitation, aggression, abuse and violence directed against one's self or others.
 - Addictive substances and behavior (i.e., **drugs, alcohol, sex**, shopping, **fast money**, gambling, food, video games, etc.) produces a limited sense of relief requires repetitions.
- › **Loss of a narrative resiliency**

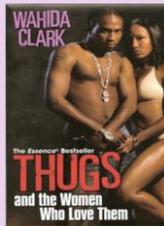
A CURRENT LOOK

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana, philosopher

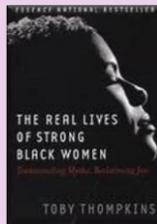
African-American Men

- **Sexualized masculine/Hyper-masculine identity:**
 - a high physical pain threshold
 - hyper objectification (female-dependent)
 - misogyny (dislike of women)
 - sexual prowess
 - conceiving children
- ▶ **Poor emotional regulation**
- ▶ Consistently portrayed in media as a sexualized, primitivism manner or super-masculine **that appeal to white audiences, but simultaneously fear them.**



African-American Women

- ▶ **Feel need to be strong** - this leads to a denial of vulnerability
- ▶ **Feel responsible for themselves and others around them** - this leads to self-blame, self-sacrifice, and shame
- ▶ **Feel responsible for keeping family together** - this leads to remaining in a violent situation to avoid "destroying the family."
- ▶ Consistently portrayed in media as sexually insatiable, and morally corrupt or aggressive, emasculating, rude, **shrill and loud (Sapphire)**



Adolescents

- › Between the ages of 13 to 25
- › Have attachment issues
- › Experienced trauma both as **perpetrator and victim.**
- › **Sex for Significance, Security and Belonging**
- › **Male Needy or Female-dependent**
- › **Glorification of death** i.e. Biggie and Tupac
- › **Rite of passage involves an trauma**



And it continues.....

- › **Mandingo stereotype continued**, black men are consistently portrayed in a sexualized, primitivist manner and super-masculine images appeal to white audiences, who simultaneously fear them and are fascinated by them' (hooks 1990)
- › **Jezebel stereotype continued** black women are consistently portrayed in today's media as promiscuous, sexually insatiable, exotic, wild, alluring and morally corrupt. David Pilgrim (2003)



OBSTACLES OR CHALLENGES TO HEALING

"African Americans have not made addressing sexual assault and abuse a collective priority. Because people have been so ashamed and this is something that has happened to them..."
 Ruth Sallee-Gresham

The Dilemma

- › A behavior, thought or attitude that worked in the past to help an individual or group to cope or survive stressful or traumatic experiences but used now makes it difficult to respond to new situations in a healthy way. ***“Scare to give up the behavior.”***
 - **The collective coming before the needs of the individual:** survival technique for the black populations but devastating for an individual.
 - **Leading avoid the system at all cost:** Slave masters, social workers, justice system, etc. ***Ain't nobody's business!***
 - **Let's not talk about sex.** Due historical sexual shame.

Community Beliefs

- › **Definitions of abuse** (beliefs that that child sexual abuse is more typical among whites. about the same rates as whites.)
- › **Strong cultural stigma attached to mental illness and trauma** (“part of African American life” or “considered a weakness”)
- › **Distrust of institutions** (African-American women are less likely than white women to involve the legal system)
- › **Loyalty to the community and family** (beliefs that “what goes on in here stay in here.”)
- › **Religious views** (Strong influence on cultural values; sexual restriction; beliefs that God will take care of the situation)

Other Obstacles

- › **Continued institutional racism, oppression and Racial Microaggression:** A brief and commonplace daily indignities, whether intentional or unintentional
- › **Gender Socialization**
 - males are about 14 percent of all young victims, according to police reports. 20 percent of boys are abused by women. Due to homophobia boys deny abuse.
- › **Lack of culturally competent services and research**
 - Multigenerational trauma continue to be treated as secondary or dismissed as irrelevant and limited frames of reference around racial issues
- › **Lack of parental awareness**
 - 81% of parents surveyed either believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

"The village that hides the truth cannot expect to heal but to pass on the pain."

Provider/Leadership

- Develop and incorporate historical trauma or cultural perspectives as part of trauma informed care and mental health intervention initiatives and training in and outside the community.
- › Be aware not to add to the trauma by work through racial issues and/or biases conscious or unconscious bias that have unintended consequences for the African American community.
- › **It is important for teenagers to have an understanding of the full meaning of sexuality and of the importance of defining sex as a whole range of behaviors** (Remez, 2000).

The Community

- › Create a task force that involves African American institutions, community leaders, health professionals and clergy to encourage and promote participation of in mental health services, speak out on domestic violence and other forms of sexual assault.
- › Education is critical in the African American communities on healthy sexuality, relationships, masculinity, available resources, etc.
- › **Community Leadership**, need to role-model the willingness to start their own healing journey.

Compassion Accountability

Some people we relate to and others we don't or even repulse us. Doing what is easy can have consequences like...

- **Compassion *without* accountability** can encourage chaos.
- **Accountability *without* compassion**, complacent, self-satisfying
- **Swing back and forth**, we are not consistent, fair or clear.
- ▶ **Compassion Accountability**: help us seek truth, understanding, forgiveness, justice, humility and leave others empowered without blame and excuses.

Questions and Answers



"The pain of the past can blind us to love but healing can allow us to accept it"

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References & Resources

- Movies and Documentaries:**
- ▶ **HIP-HOP: beyond beats and rhymes**: produced and directed by Byron Hurt (2006)
 - ▶ **The Slavery by Another Name**: based the book *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* by Pulitzer-Prize winning Douglas A. Blackmon (2012) PBS Programming

- Websites:**
- ▶ American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/releases/sexabuse/homepage.html>
 - ▶ Burstow, Bonnie. *The Trauma Healing Project*, www.healingattention.org
 - ▶ Center for the Study of Social Policy –Information on Strengthening Families and Protective Factors – www.cssp.org
 - ▶ Center for Injury Prevention and Control – www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention
 - ▶ www.cdc.gov/parents
 - ▶ www.historicaltrauma.com
 - ▶ National Child Traumatic Stress Network – www.nctsn.org

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