



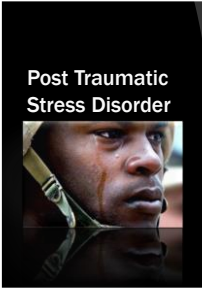
SAM SIMMONS, LADC, BEHAVIORAL CONSULTANT

## “From Racial Trauma to Healing”

*“Fear Of The Truth Of The Past Blinds Future Generations Of The Goal Of Healing”*

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

## THE JOURNEY



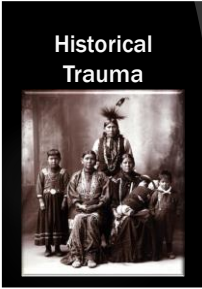
### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- ❑ **P.T.S.D.** 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:
  - ❑ **Repeatedly thinking about the trauma:** include flashbacks, hallucinations, and nightmares.
  - ❑ **Being constantly alert or on guard:** easily startled, difficulty sleeping, concentrating and/or having angry outbursts
  - ❑ **Avoiding reminders of the trauma:** people, places, thoughts, that remind one of the event; may feel emotionally numb.



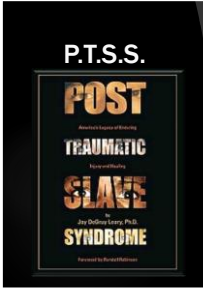
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### Historical Trauma

- ❑ **Historical (Collective) Trauma** is 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.
- ❑ **Historical Unresolved Grief:** Grief that has not been expressed, acknowledged and resolved.
- ❑ Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD, conceptualized historical trauma in the 1980's, to address why life for many Native Americans is not fulfilling **"the American Dream"**.



### P.T.S.S.

- ❑ **Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome** 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 CITIZENSHIP 1619 - 2017



Racial Trauma

- **Racial trauma** is one term used to describe the physical and psychological symptoms that people of Color often experience after exposure to particularly stressful experiences of racism (Carter, 2007).
- Similar to survivors of other types of trauma **fear and hypervigilance, headaches, insomnia, body aches, memory difficulty, self-blame, confusion, shame, and guilt after experiencing racism**
- **Experiencing racism brings up both previous experiences as well as a person's awareness of the longstanding history of racism in the US.**

Racial Trauma

- Racial trauma is a cumulative experience, where every personal or vicarious encounter with racism contributes to a more insidious, chronic stress (Carter, 2007).
- The cumulative emotional effects and psychological wounding that is transmitted across generations is also known as intergenerational trauma can result in higher rates of mental health and physical health issues within communities of Color.

African Americans experience

- **These dangers may be real or perceived discrimination, threats of harm and injury, police incidents, and humiliating and shaming events.** These events have long-term impact on our perception of ourselves and our social environments.
- Repeatedly witnessing African Americans **suffering on television news is painful, and for some triggers very strong emotion.**
- Living in black and poor neighborhoods increases one's risk of experiencing traumatic events and **it increases the risk of experiencing secondary traumas in witnessing these dangers.** These communities are socially isolated, monitored vigorously by police, have fewer resources for daily living.

*"An inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism"*

CURRENT LOOK

Seems Like I Gotta Do Wrong  
Whispers, 1972



Another day has come and gone  
In a world where I don't belong  
Another week has passed me by  
It's not because I didn't try

Nobody saw me walking  
And nobody heard me talking  
Seems like I gotta do wrong,  
Gotta do wrong, gotta do wrong  
Before they notice me

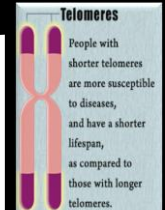
## Rules of a Black Man

- When shopping announce when you are moving to the next aisle
- It is impolite to mention "white privilege"... pretend it doesn't exist
- If stopped please no make threatening moves such as being a black male
- It is ok to protest but under the watchful eye of tank operators

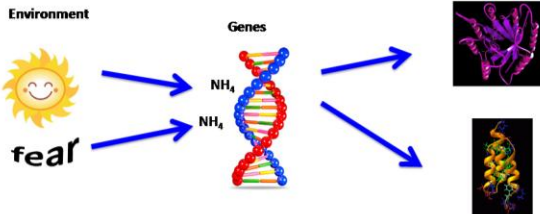


## Telomeres Aging, chronic stress, income level & ethnic identity

- Researchers found signs of **accelerated aging** in African-American men who reported high levels of racial discrimination and who had internalized [others'] anti-Black male attitudes.
- Telomeres are tiny caps at the ends of DNA strands, akin to the plastic caps at the end of shoelaces, that protect cells from aging prematurely. Telomeres naturally shorten as people age. **But various types of intense chronic stress are believed to cause telomeres to shorten, and short telomeres are associated with an array of serious ailments including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.**



## Epigenetics stressful experiences can



Each gene can be translated into various different proteins, depending on its environment.

## Psychological Dilemma: Responding to Microaggressions

- Racial Microaggression:** A brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional insults to the target person or group.
- The Catch-22:** How should I respond? What are the consequences if I do?
  - Clash of racial realities:** "Did the person of color simply misinterpret the action?"
  - The Invisibility of Unintentional Expressions of Bias:** How do we make the perpetrator aware of it?
  - Perceived minimal harm of Racial Microaggressions:** The perpetrator usually believes that the victim has overreacted, is being overly sensitive and/or petty.

*"Fear of the pain blinds us to the goal of healing. Only by seeing our problems clearly and experiencing them can we do something about them." -Bob Hoffman*

## TRAUMA RESPONSE

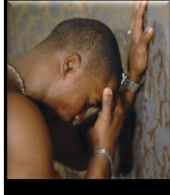
## Effects of Historical Trauma

- Increase aggression** - Street gangs, domestic violence, defiant behavior, and appearing tough and impenetrable are ways of coping with danger by attempting to control our physical and social environment
- Increase vigilance and suspicion** - Suspicion of social institutions only trusting persons within our social and family relationship networks
- Increase sensitivity to threat** - Defensive postures, avoiding new situations, heightened sensitivity to being disrespected and shamed, and avoid taking risks.



## Effects of Historical Trauma

- ❑ **Increase psychological and physiological symptoms** – Unresolved traumas increase chronic stress and decrease immune system functioning, disrupt the quality of emotional attachment in family and social relationships
- ❑ **Increase alcohol and drug usage** – initially useful (real and perceived) in managing the pain and unresolved traumas but become their own disease processes
- ❑ **Narrowing sense of time** – living in a chronic state of danger do not develop a sense of future and frequently view dying as an expected outcome



## Survival Stress Management

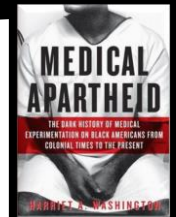
- ❑ A process of adapting to stressful situations by **reacting without thinking of the consequences of our choices. Resulting in increased stress and/or depression:**
  - Judgmental and distorted thoughts and feelings, impatience, exploitation, aggression, abuse and violence directed against one's self 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 of **resiliency of Hope.**

*Fear of the truth of the past blinds future generations of the goal of healing"*

**OBSTACLES TO HEALING**

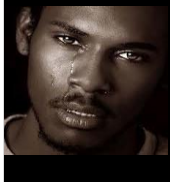
## Community Beliefs

- ❑ **Continued institutional racism, oppression and distrust**  
Middle-class African-Americans with insurance were less likely to get a call back from therapists than whites with similar characteristics.
- ❑ **Mistrust of health professionals and psychiatry in particular rooted in the form of research projects**
- ❑ **"Code of Silence"** (Used to counter the negative ideas and images that are displayed in American about African American people.)
- ❑ **Belief that suffering is a part of Black Life**



## Other Beliefs

- ❑ **Black males trauma is ignored** (Trauma effect ideals of manhood and masculinity.)
- ❑ **Lack of culturally competent services and research** (historical trauma and racism dismissed as irrelevant)
- ❑ **Fail to understand and address the effects of the legacy of slavery and racial injustice**
- ❑ **Belief that suffering is a part of Black Life**



## Parallel Trauma

- ❑ The process of when staff own unresolved issues or trauma (historical) or oppression parallels that of client.
- ❑ **Powerlessness of the client parallels that of staff and staff feels a great need to "fix it" or client's use it against them.**
- ❑ The staff acts out against uncomfortable feelings in a negative way, including being overly critical, and punishing or rejecting the client
- ❑ **Believing self-care is less important than the care they provide others.**



*Human compassion is equal to human cruelty and .... It is up to each of us to tip the balance." Alice Walker*

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE

## Community Beliefs

- ❑ Begin the healing by embracing our story/our history and reflect on the pain and/or the current conditioning as away to empower.
- ❑ Develop and support trauma informed intervention initiatives geared to black males.
- ❑ Men bond around non-violence and respect for their partners and hold each other accountable
- ❑ It's About Parents Too! provide support and education on affect of trauma on parenting styles.



## Community Leadership

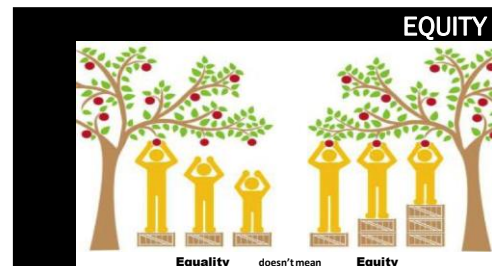
- ❑ **Community Leadership, need to role-model the willingness to start their own healing journey**
- ❑ **African American institutions, community leaders, health professionals and clergy to encourage and promote:**
  - ❑ Reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment.
  - ❑ **Help the community link trauma informed strategies to address jobs, housing, schools, violence and crime.**
  - ❑ **Prepare others to experience increased anxiety, fear, and stress during their journey of learning healthier ways of adapting to trauma**
- ❑ **Narrative of Resiliency that include Forgiveness and Hope.**

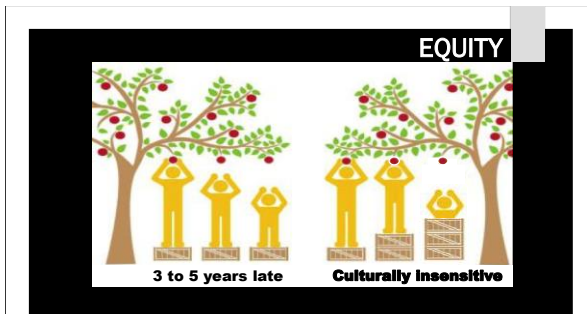
*"Change does not come without people in power being willing to be uncomfortable."*

## THE SYSTEM

## Provider/Leadership

- ❑ **Develop ways of addressing historical trauma (slavery) and its legacy by augmenting the medical model, evidence-based, individual approaches to therapy and research.**
- ❑ **Providers be aware not to add to the trauma with your beliefs**
  - work through racial issues and/or biases – **Race Matters**
  - refrain from over-empathizing (based on what you can't handle)
  - Be aware of their trauma
- ❑ **Identify policy changes that will enable ex-offenders to re-enter communities as better fathers, husbands, workers and citizens.**
- ❑ **If it doesn't work – change it, try something else**





## 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.

## Ways to Reverse Damage

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Mindful/Meditation
- Mental Health Interventions
- Healthy relationships



## QUESTIONS

*You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late." Ralph Waldo Emerson*



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