



Complex Trauma: From Impact to Healing

Julia Fisher, MS, LPC (she/her)

Counselor

jfisher@rogucecc.edu



What is Trauma?

“Psychological trauma is the unique experience of an event, a series of events, or a set of enduring conditions, in which:

- The individual’s ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed and/or
- The individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity or sanity.”

-Saakvitne et al, 2000

What is Complex Trauma?



⚡ Single-incident trauma → one-time event i.e. car crash, home invasion

🔄 Complex trauma → chronic, interpersonal, relational

Pervasive and enduring effects.



Various Forms of Complex Trauma

- Childhood abuse (emotional, physical, sexual)
 - Prolonged neglect
 - Domestic violence
 - Growing up in environments of chronic danger (e.g., war, gang violence)
 - Cultural and Societal Factors
- 
- 



Trauma and Identity Intersect

Trauma intersects with various aspects of individuals' identities and lived experiences.

- Cultural trauma*
- Historical trauma*
- Racial trauma*
- Marginalized communities' trauma
- Intergenerational trauma

* These terms and definitions are from Alishia McCullough, LCMHC



What Happens in the Brain and Body?

Survival Takes Over

- Cortisol release → shuts down hippocampus
- Memories stored as sensations and/or feelings
- Survival mode overrides logic

Implicit Memories

Sensory Elements Without Words = Implicit Memory

Implicit memory is
Sensory elements
include sounds, sights,
take many forms
automatic memory
smells, touch, taste.

Our bodies remember what our mind
can't recall



How can you tell when you are triggered?

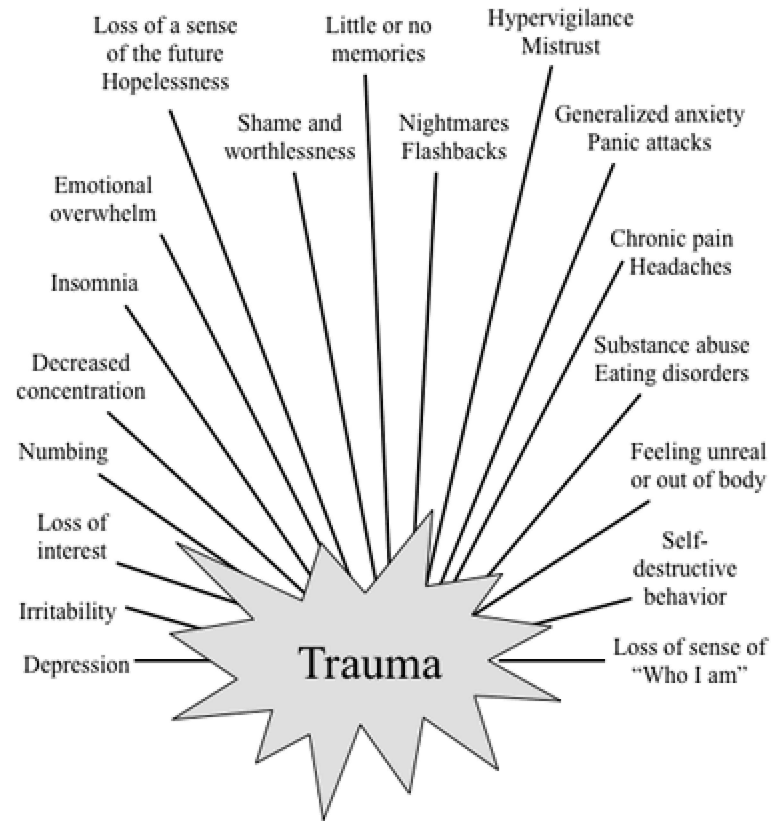
Triggered reactions are sudden, intense, and hard to shift

You may notice physical responses

You may notice thought responses

You may notice emotional responses

...Or you may notice all of the above.



"Trauma survivors have symptoms instead of memories" [Harvey, 1990]

Adapted from Bremner & Marner, 1998

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Common Long-Term Effects

Features of PTSD show up for those with complex trauma, as well as:

- Nervous system dysregulation
- Persistent sadness
- Disturbances in identity & self-esteem
- Difficulties in relationships/attachment issues
- Challenges with safety and trust in relationships
- Pervasive sense of hopelessness

Over Identification With Symptoms

Not understanding trauma, individuals identify with their implicit memories- “It’s who I am”

*“Long-lasting responses to trauma result not simply from the experience of fear and helplessness but **from how our bodies interpret those experiences.**”*

Yehuda, 2004

Disidentify With Symptoms









Part of the work is to separate yourself from the symptoms

- Separate
- Reframe
- Heighten curiosity

Changing the Story: From 'I Am' to 'I Notice'

How to Heal

Fostering posttraumatic growth

-  Seeking Support
-  Psychoeducation/Awareness
-  Emotion Regulation
-  Acknowledgement of what has happened
-  Acceptance of what has happened
-  Narrative development
-  Service
-  Practicing Self-Compassion

How to Heal

Therapy is an option

Students enrolled at RCC have access to no-cost counseling services! Support is available, you don't have to do this alone.

Scan the QR code to go to the Counseling Department webpage:



Tools to Cope

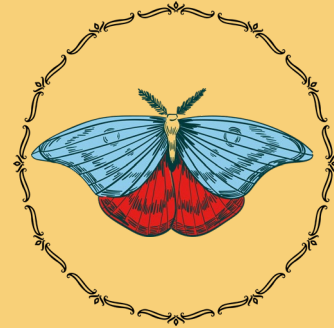
3 tools to help bring balance to your system



Body Scan



Listen
To Your
Body



Tapping

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02bN4JFx10Y>



Questions?



Sources/ Recommended Reading

- **Trauma and Recovery** by Dr. Judith Hermann
- **The Deepest Well** by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
- **What my Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma** by Stephanie Foo
- [Dr. Janina Fisher's](#) work on the treatment of trauma
- **Reclaiming the Black Body: Nourishing the Home Within** by Alishia McCullough, LCMHC
- **The Body Keeps the Score** by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk



Thank you

Contact info:

RCC Counseling Department: 541-956-7443 or

counselingfrontdesk@rogucecc.edu

Julia Fisher: 541-956-7195 or jfisher@rogucecc.edu

