Building Resilience in the Face of Climate Change-Related Traumatic Experiences

Theopia Jackson, PhD

Chair, Clinical Psychology Program;
Saybrook University
Oakland, CA; January 25, 2018
Expanding Transformative Resilience

Resilience, Complex Trauma, & Intersectionality in Communities of Color
- Trauma Defined (Social Context, Residuals)
- Historical and Persistent/Contemporary Trauma
- Collective Bouncing Back

Working from a Strengths-based Trauma-Informed Approach
- Fostering Provider Resilience
- Promoting Community Cultural Allies (preventive and responsive)
- Implications for how you approach your work

PREPARED BY THEOPIA JACKSON, PHD
The Tunnel Experience

Durvasula, 2017
Expanding our thinking...

**SCARCITY**

“...captures the mind......The mind orients automatically, powerfully, toward unfulfilled needs. For the hungry, that need is food. For the busy it might be a project that needs to be finished. For the cash-strapped it might be this month’s rent payment......”

“...costs us, we neglect other concerns, and we become less effective in the rest of life”

**BANDWITH**

“...measures our computational capacity, our ability to pay attention, to make good decisions, to stick with our plans, and to resist temptations.....

By constantly drawing us back into the ‘tunnel’ scarcity taxes our bandwidth, and as a result, inhibits our most fundamental capacities”

(Mullainathan & Shafir, 2014 as cited by Durvasula, 2017)
Bandwidth is a cognitive concept

Bandwidth is associated with working memory, processing of new information, and elements of executive functioning such as circumspect anticipation of future consequences.

Bandwidth depletions deplete processing of new information – as such even the best designed public health campaign which requires people to absorb new information may not work.

The candy by the cash register:
- These bandwidth depletions also make it more difficult to exert behavioral control and health promoting behaviors.

Durvasula, 2017
Historical trauma is entirely different than consciously holding onto the past when it resides in your ancestral memory and DNA. It results in numerous defense mechanisms, developmental malfunctions, and behavioral issues. This is scientific and is supported in studies.

~Tony Ten Fingers/Wanbli Nata’u, Oglala Lakota
Implications of Social Context

**Systems of Oppressions**
- Individualized
- Institutional
- Internalized
- Cultural

**System of Microaggression**
- Microaggressions
- Macroaggressions
- Microinvalidations

**Intersectionality:** integrates analysis, theorizing, advocacy, and pedagogy through four theoretical interventions through...
1. Centering the Experiences of People of Color
2. Complicating Identity (multifaceted)
3. Unveiling Power in Interconnected Structures of Inequality
4. Promoting Social Justice and Social Change

*Denies one’s humanity and adversely informs reality.*

PREPARED BY THEOPIA JACKSON, PHD
Afrikan Trauma Cycle

(Ani, n.d.)
Intersectionality: Climate Change & Trauma

COMPLEX TRAUMA & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Much of what we see today is the result of history, unaddressed, repeating itself. That is why people need to know the history, to truly confront it and heal from what has gone before us."

~Isabel Wilkerson

COMPLEX TRAUMA & CLIMATE CHANGE

“But climate change and disasters have been an important ‘threat multiplier’ over many years, exacerbating food insecurity, decimating water reserves, expanding drylands and creating underlying levels of social vulnerability.”

~Ali, 2017
Many people exposed to climate related or weather-related disasters experience stress and serious mental health consequences. Depending on the type of the disaster, these consequences include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and general anxiety, which often occur at the same time.

The majority of affected people recover over time, although a significant proportion of exposed individuals develop chronic psychological dysfunction.

Dodgen, 2016
Key 2: Specific Groups of People are at Higher Risk

Specific groups of people are at higher risk for distress and other adverse mental health consequences from exposure to climate-related or weather-related disasters.

These groups include children, the elderly, women (especially pregnant and post-partum women), people with preexisting mental illness, the economically disadvantaged, the homeless, and first responders.

Communities that rely on the natural environment for sustenance and livelihood, as well as populations living in areas most susceptible to specific climate change events, are at increased risk for adverse mental health outcomes.

Dodgen, 2016
Many people will experience adverse mental health outcomes and social impacts from the threat of climate change, the perceived direct experience of climate change, and changes to one’s local environment.

Media and popular culture representations of climate change influence stress responses and mental health and well-being.

Dodgen, 2016
Key 4: Extreme Heat Increases Risks for People with Mental Illness

People with mental illness are at higher risk for poor physical and mental health due to extreme heat. Increases in extreme heat will increase the risk of disease and death for people with mental illness, including elderly populations and those taking prescription medications that impair the body’s ability to regulate temperature.

Dodgen, 2016
Climate Vulnerability and Resilience

**Vulnerability:** The susceptibility of a system to disturbances determined by exposure to perturbations, sensitivity to perturbations, and the capacity to adapt. (Nelson, Adger and Brown, 2007)

Vulnerability- and resilience - to climate change:

- Related to existing social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities.
- Needs to be informed by local knowledge
- Will not be evenly distributed

Ibarraran, Brenkert, & Malone, 2008
Strengths-based Approach

Positive characteristics, abilities, and experiences of the communities.
Building upon communities’ strengths when addressing current issues.
Interested in the communities’ resources and abilities.

Your role is to facilitate finding each communities’ strengths.

Focusing on positives instead of negatives empower communities to believe change is possible and that they have the ability to make it happen.

Building upon communities’ agency and self-determination thought it may not be what you want for them.

Co-Constructing: Matching their efforts, following their lead, sharing your knowledge.
Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

“Trauma-Informed Care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.” (Hopper et al, 2010)

“Trauma-informed organizations, programs, and services are based on an understanding of the vulnerabilities or triggers of trauma survivors that traditional service delivery approaches may exacerbate, so that these services and programs can be more supportive and avoid re-traumatization.” (SAMHAS)
Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment
- Voice and choice
- Peer support and mutual self-help
- Resilience and strengths based
- Inclusiveness and shared purpose
- Cultural, historical and gender issues
- Change process

Darryl Turpin, retrieved 2017
SAMHSA’s Definition of a Trauma Informed Approach: The Three R’s

A program, organization or system that is trauma-informed **REALIZES** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing;

**RECOGNIZES** the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and

**RESPONDS** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.
Resilience: The Personal & The Community

The capacity of a (person/community) to deal effectively with...

- stress and pressure
- cope with everyday challenges
- rebound from disappointments, mistakes, trauma, and adversity
- develop clear and realistic goals
- solve problems
- interact comfortably with others
- hear oneself and others with respect and dignity

**Personal Factors**
- Biological
- Attachment
- Control/Sense of Agency

**Community and Cultural Factors**
- Access to support services; Community networking
- Attachment to the community; Participation in community group
- Community/cultural norms
- Strong cultural identity/ethnic pride

Brooks, 2005

Kelly, 2015
Cultural Humility

...as a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis with (persons), communities, colleagues, and with themselves...a process that requires humility in how we bring into check the power imbalances that exist in the dynamics of communication.

Lifelong Learning
Self-Reflection
Self-Critique

The most serious barrier to culturally appropriate care is not a lack of knowledge of the details of any given cultural orientation, but the providers’ failure to develop self-awareness and a respectful attitude toward diverse points of view.

Trevalon, 2008
Vicarious Resilience

- is the process of clinicians learning about overcoming adversity from the trauma survivors they work with
- the resulting positive transformation and empowerment in those clinicians through their empathic engagement with the stories of trauma and resilience of their clients (like VT but in a positive healing direction)

Berthold, 2011

On *Becoming* in Trauma Work!
Progress and Patterns of Thinking

Shifting the Paradigm

We have to change our perspective in order to change our perception.

We have to identify our cycles of thinking which contribute to our drama cycles.

We must think in the positive in order to transform tragedy into triumph.

How to recognize what has already been happening and move from a problem-saturated victim-expert stance to an active collaborative strengths-based approach!

- What’s happening with me so I can be there with them?
- How do I partner with protective factors before climate change adversities?

Center for Optimal Life

PREPARED BY THEOPIA JACKSON, PHD
Summary: Both/And Approach and YOU!!!!

It is recommended that effective services take into account the unique experiences of (communities of color) and culturally-congruent healing approaches such as Black psychology and Culturecology (culture is the defining substance of all human action).

Service providers should be able to articulate how such realities are addressed in their work: Cultural Accountability.

In order to understand a people one must understand their:

- **Cosmology** - how people organize the universe
- **Axiology** - the values of a given people
- **Ontology** - the essence of creation
- **Epistemology** - the nature of knowledge acquisition of a people

Rowe & Webb-Msemaji, 2004

PREPARED BY THEOPIA JACKSON, PHD
A Community Based Self-Affirming Self-Help Process

Family-Care, Community-Care and Self-Care Tool Kit: Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma
(http://www.communityhealingnet.org/resources/)
Informed by the EECs℠ and provides information for understanding trauma and suggested responses that are culturally-centered.
Kitchen Table Talks

Effective Cultural Allies
Paul Kivel
(http://www.communityhealingnet.org/resources/)
Offers a menu of resources in fostering effective cultural allies.

PREPARED BY THEOPIA JACKSON, PHD