

# Generational Trauma in African Americans

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# What is Trauma?

TRAUMA IS A BOUNDARY VIOLATION WHICH  
DISTURBS ONE'S SENSE OF SAFETY. IT  
PRODUCES A DISTRESSING, OVERWHELMING,  
PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE



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# What is generational trauma?

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA IS THE  
TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMATIC  
EXPERIENCES AND REACTIONS THROUGH  
ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PROCESSES. AS IT IS  
PASSED DOWN, IT BECOMES ENGRAINED IN  
THE PSYCHE AND IN FAMILIAL PATTERNS.



# Why and How Generational Trauma?

CHattel SLAVERY AND SYSTEMIC  
OPPRESSION  
  
PERSISTENT ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND  
SOCIAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT  
  
STIGMA AND INSULAR COMMUNITIES

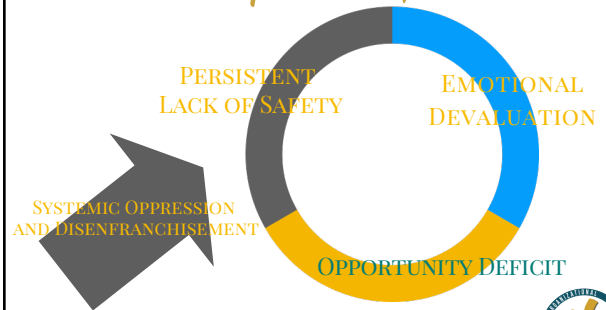


### *Vanik Volkan on Transgenerational transmission of Trauma*

- “WHEN A WHOLE SOCIETY HAS UNDERGONE MASSIVE TRAUMA, VICTIMIZED ADULTS MAY ENDURE GUILT AND SHAME FOR NOT HAVING PROTECTED THEIR CHILDREN. THE BY-PRODUCT OF SUCH TRAUMA IS A PERENNIAL, COLLECTIVE MOURNING OVER THE LOSS OF GROUP DIGNITY, SELF-ESTEEM, AND IDENTITY. THE MOURNING IS CHARACTERIZED BY CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS COMMUNICATIONS PASSED DOWN TO GENERATIONS IN AN ATTEMPT TO MOURN THE GROUP'S LOSSES AND REMOVE THE COLLECTIVE SENSE OF VICTIMIZATION.



### *Component Parts*



(ADAPTED FROM DEGRUY LEARY, 2005)



### *Systemic Oppression*

- RACISM AND RACE-RELATED STRESS
- POVERTY AND JOBLESSNESS
- DEFICITS IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



### *Persistent Lack of Safety*

- CULTURAL PARANOIA
- THE WORLD IS UNSAFE
- FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES



## Opportunity Deficits

- WORK TWICE AS HARD TO GET HALF AS FAR
- AWARENESS AND IMPACT OF TOKENISM
- IN- GROUP COMPETITION



## Emotional Devaluation

- EMPHASIS ON PHYSICAL OVER EMOTIONAL/RELATIONAL NEEDS
- SECRET KEEPING
- FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION



## Impacts

- LESS LIKELY TO NAME "TRAUMA" AS TRAUMA
- DIFFICULTY WITH SELF ASSESSMENT- EMOTIONAL IGNORANCE OR EXCESS
- RESILIENCE AND GRIT
- POWERFUL, PERSISTENT VALUE SYSTEMS



## Clinical Strategies

- ATTEND TO THE BODY
- PROTECTION OF FAMILY AND ITS NORMS
- EXPLORE AND REFLECT ON PATTERNS
- NAME WITHOUT BLAMING
- CAPITALIZE ON STRENGTHS



## *Attend to the Body*

- ASSESS FOR PRESENTING SOMATIZATION
- USE BODY TO EXPLORE EMOTION
- ATTEND TO INTUITION AND GUT RESPONSES
- EXPLORE FAMILIAL PATTERNS OF CHRONIC ILLNESS



## *Protection of the Family*

- TREAT SECRETS AS SACRED
- BE PATIENT
- BE CAREFUL WITH PATHOLOGIZING LANGUAGE



## *Explore and Reflect on Patterns*

- GENOGRAMS
- DETAILED FAMILY HISTORY INCLUDING EXTENDED FAMILY
- EXPLORE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES



## *Name without Blaming*

- FAMILIES HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS
- FAMILIES DO THEIR BEST
- FAMILIES DO WHAT THEY KNOW TO DO



## Capitalize on Strengths

- LEAN ON VALUE OR FAITH SYSTEMS
- ARTICULATE STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE
- EMPHASIZE ADAPTATION AND THRIVING



## Managing Stigma

- EXPLORE HELPFULNESS OF CULTURAL NORMS
- EXPLORE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT SEEKING HELP
- AFFIRM HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS
- SHARE STORIES



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