



# Trauma Informed “Parts” Perspective

Richard C. Clark

Personality Psychology

May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

# Announcements

- ❖ Grading assignment 4 due Friday!
- ❖ Final due May 19<sup>th</sup> (No Re-Dos/ No extensions)
- ❖ Content warning for this week: Trauma, Experiences causing trauma

## A Calm Peaceful Place

Take a minute to create a space in your mind that brings you a sense of peace and a feeling of safety. This can be somewhere you've been before, a place you've seen, or a place you create anew.

Discuss this place in small groups.

# What is Trauma?

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that can have lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional well-being. Trauma persists and influences people deeply because the brain and body are unable to fully process/integrate the event, series of events, or set of circumstances.

# 3 Types of Trauma

## Acute

- Trauma that stems from a single incident
- Ex: surviving a car crash, police violence, or natural disaster.

## Chronic

- Trauma that stems from repeated and prolonged exposure
- Ex: Growing up with abusive parents, discrimination

## Complex

- Trauma that stems from varied and multiple traumatic events
- Ex: Living in an abusive household while COVID becomes global

# Trauma and Personality

- Psychological Trauma is something that has only been thought about since the late 1800's.
- It was Pierre Janet who was the first to theorize that traumatic events can lead to severe reactions that interfere with day-to-day functioning even when the threat is long gone.
- Janet also said that these people would suddenly react to "reminders" of this event.
- Next it was Freud who expanded on the nature of Trauma in the early 1900s.
- He categorized trauma as a memory that "acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must be regarded as an agent still at work"
- He was the first to note that these traumatic events essentially caused the psyche to fragment and that these fragments are important to personality
- This idea of fragmentation has since been deepened & expanded on to form the "parts" perspective we'll talk about this week

# Brain & Trauma

- Brain plays an essential role in trauma and fragmentation because of how its divided
- The right side of the brain holds all our traumatic experience
- The left side of the brain holds little to NO memory of trauma.
- Before the age of 12 we are **EXTREMELY** susceptible to trauma
- This is why Attachment and Adverse childhood experiences are so important

## Left Side

- Verbal/Narrative
- Language memory
- Analytical & Rational
- Planning
- Problem Solving
- Side that oversees carrying on with normal life at all costs
- Takes dominance in adolescence and adulthood

## Right Side

- **NONVERBAL** no language understanding at all
- Perception, Sensation, & Emotion
- Instincts & Survival
- Emotional, Sensory, and traumatic memory
- Dominant from birth to around 9 years old

Corpus collosum begins allowing the sides of the brain to communicate and process after it fully develops around the age of 12

# Trauma-related Fragmentation

Pre-Trauma  
Personality

Going on with  
normal life  
personality

Trauma

Traumatized  
part of  
personality

Left brain carries on  
with normal life and  
functioning

Right brain holds bodily  
memories and prepares  
for future threat.



# Traumatized Personality

---

This part of the personality further fragments and compartmentalizes if further trauma happens.

---

Separate parts evolve each offering different survival strategies

---

Dominant strategies: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Submit, Cry for Help

---

These parts demand our attention

---

These parts fear normal life and see it as dangerous.

---

These parts of us are fighting to survive in all the old ways that kept us safe.

---

These become parts of our personality and who we see ourselves to be.

# Parts & Functions

## Fight

- Vigilance
- Angry, judgmental, distrustful, self harm, suicidal, violence

## Flight

- Escape
- Ambivalence, distancing, non-committal, Addiction, Disordered eating

## Freeze

- Fear
- Terrified, Wary, anti-perception, anxiety, flashbacks, panic attacks

## Submit

- Shame
- Self-sacrificing, ashamed, self-hatred, passive, depression, perfectionism

## Cry for help

- Needy
- Desperate, craves connection, innocent, dependent, manipulative

These parts may be operating simultaneously or one after the other. Sometimes we can only look at one part through the eyes of another.

# Who's driving?

Tamara and Henry get into a heated argument. Tamara can't track her feelings, nor does she want to. She proceeds to shut down. Her mind drifts elsewhere, she begins imagining all the things she could be doing instead listening to him.

Henry sees that Tamara isn't fully there, calms down, and gently puts a hand on her shoulder. Tamara's attention snaps back to her body, she takes his hand off and shoves him away from here. She says "Don't f\*\*\* touch me A\*\*\*\*\*!"

Which part(s) are driving Tamara?

# Who's Driving?

Alex and Danny are hanging out. Their plan today was to play video games and hook up. As the day goes on Alex begins feeling extremely anxious remembering a traumatic experience. He doesn't know what to do and he feels a bit stuck in his body. They stop playing video games and Danny makes the first move. He sees Alex is a bit tense and checks in to see if he's alright. Alex is uncomfortable but says, "Yeah, I'm perfect no worries. Ugh, you're so hot Danny!" they proceed to hook up. Afterwards Alex feels disgusted.

Which part(s) are driving Alex?



# Trauma Informed “Parts” Perspective

Richard C. Clark

Personality Psychology

May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

# Announcements

- ❖ Grading assignment 4 due Friday!
- ❖ Final due May 19<sup>th</sup> (No Re-Dos/ No extensions)
- ❖ Content warning for this week: Trauma, Experiences causing trauma
- ❖ Just 3 more class sessions after this!

# Parts & Functions

## Fight

- Vigilance
- Angry, judgmental, distrustful, self harm, suicidal, violence

## Flight

- Escape
- Ambivalence, distancing, non-committal, Addiction, Disordered eating

## Freeze

- Fear
- Terrified, Wary, anti-perception, anxiety, flashbacks, panic attacks

## Submit

- Shame
- Self-sacrificing, ashamed, self-hatred, passive, depression, perfectionism

## Cry for help

- Needy
- Desperate, craves connection, innocent, dependent, manipulative

These parts may be operating simultaneously or one after the other. Sometimes we can only look at one part through the eyes of another.

# Who Drives You?

Remembering the various parts that form in response to trauma. Are there any you feel might show up for you? Maybe some more than or in relation to others? What does this look like in your behavior and thinking?

Discuss with care in small groups.

Remember your calm peaceful places from the first activity.



# Going on with Normal Life Personality

- Fortunately, our core self is always whole and remains undamaged no matter how severe or long lasting the trauma. This self strives to be: curious, compassionate, calm, clear, creative, courageous, confident, and connected
- However with continued exposure to trauma the left brain must also fragment and develop parts in order to hold the hurt of life, suppress the traumatized pieces, prevent triggers, and continue life.
- These parts become differentiated and specialized these parts are: Exiles, Managers, and Firefighters

# Exiles, Managers, Firefighters

- When deal with trauma and have already begun fragmentations we develop **wounded parts or Exiles.**
- These parts hold all the hurt, not only traumatic but anything threatening to us that and the hope for healing/resolution.
- We develop **Adaptive parts or Managers** who maintain our day-to-day safety and suppress the exiles feelings and desires. Preemptive, controlling, calculating
- The “Never again” voice that attempts to dictate all aspects of life from our appearance to relationships. Ex: Caretaker, Taskmaster, Approval seeker, victim, Pessimist, Self-Imitator.
- Finally, as a last line of defense, we develop **protector parts or firefighters.** These parts spring into action when managers can't prevent Exiles from being triggered.
- Actions we take to deal with the trigger: Avoidance, outsourcing, distraction, violence, neglect, illness, debilitation

# Managers, Firefighters, & Personality

- Managers are internal parts of our personality. They dictate how we anticipate and deal with the world.
- They are the parts of ourselves we develop to relate to or not relate to people.
- Managers control the level of intimacy, spontaneity, and connection we are capable of.
- Firefighters are the action oriented reactive parts.
- This is the part of our personality that stays present and bears the brunt of the hurt.
- Firefighters use our body and dictate what strategies we use to push the hurt away some socially acceptable and some not

# Trying to get to know your team

- Discuss a narrative or story you have about yourself. Ex: I'm a hard worker, I'm a weirdo/freak, I'm real/I'm a realist.
- Discuss what personality characteristics or behaviors this narrative allows and think carefully about which it doesn't.
- If something were to happen to unsettle this narrative you have of yourself, what might you do?

# Personality Development and Trauma

- In this perspective the goal is to eliminate the traumatized personality entirely. As this is not seen as part of our whole self.
- However, it recognizes that these parts dictate our behavior throughout life and effectively become part of how we know ourselves.
- It also recognizes some people may never actively do the work of processing their trauma. Thus, these parts are important to understanding someone's personality
- So in terms of personality assessment and gauging personality development it is typically only used in therapeutic or Psychiatric contexts rather than in the everyday like many of the others.

## Proceed with Care

As you move forward and think about this perspective and connect it to your own life, I urge you to do so with care. Please, recognize that all your triggers and parts of yourself only came about because you were not safe whether psychologically or emotionally. This is **NEVER** your fault no matter what.