

Interrupting Intergenerational Trauma

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What is intergenerational trauma?

- Family systems-Unspoken experiences without attached narrative or emotion; incongruent affect, mixed messages; parent plays out their fears onto child, not seeing them as a separate individual
- Social and cultural - Social norms are passed down through social learning. Observation and imitation. Learned understandings of the self and the world
- Biologic - Fear, hyper-alertness is encoded in our brains, neurotransmitters, epigenetic vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder
- For African Americans, there is even a proposed diagnosis-Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome – Joy Degruy
<https://www.joydegruy.com/>

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Summary

- Witnessing something/experiencing something on a sensory level but not having it validated/addressed creates a dissonance, a confusion in the child that leads to problems, like
 - not believing your experience
 - blaming yourself
 - not being able to speak up for yourself
 - denying your body sensations
 - acting out
- Leads to many psychological and physical problems.

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“I need to beat my daughter so she won’t be sassy”

- Mother was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, psychotic disorder, depression anxiety, and borderline personality disorder
- 3 girls were diagnosed with anxiety, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder.
- Mother doesn’t show emotions. Attended parenting classes but can’t apply “lessons”
- Mother didn’t show up to her own therapy because she didn’t have bus fair. So we sent her bus fair. We sent a car to pick her up and she was not ready, missed appointments. That was not enough.
- I got to know her history, came to find out she was sexually abused, was in foster care, her dad disappeared
- Theraplay sessions provided joy, activation between mother and children
- What did this mother need?

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Healing has to be on every level

Individual
Family
Community
Country
Society

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A coherent autobiographical narrative.
What is it?

The ability to tell the story of your life with detail, perspective and balance (you aren't all good or all bad), as well as be able to make meaning or show understanding of how events and experiences affected your life today.

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Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) classification is passed down to next generation

- A 60-90 minute clinical interview that asks 20 questions of adult about their childhood, like:
 - Describe your relationship with your parents as a young child
 - Which parent did you feel closer to and why?
 - When you were upset as a child, what would you do?
 - What was the first time you remember being separated from your parents?
 - Did you ever feel rejected as a child?
- Coherent autobiographical narrative
- Can predict 75% accuracy the attachment classification of the yet to be conceived child of adult

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A man who wouldn't protect his son

- Child, now 11, adopted from orphanage age 4
- Forced his son to do things which terrified him, coping with dogs, going on school bus, going to bed at night.
- None of my psychoeducation helped and we got into control battles
- I switched to adult psychotherapy and did a shortened version of AAI. His history: His own father didn't protect him/actually terrorized him. His grandfather came as a poor orphan. His great grandfather was conscripted to the Russian Army, leaving 7 children, and never came back.
- Son was afraid of going to sleep at night and father refused to be comfort him. Did the weather report and he did not know how to touch because he had no feeling in his hand.

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The magic question: What is the hardest thing you find in your child (or partner) to have empathy for?

It often connects to your own attachment and other relationship history. What you can and can't cope with can be surprising.

- I'm unlovable
- It's hopeless
- I'm damaged
- I'm alone
- It's always my fault
- I'm ashamed
- I will be left alone
- There is something really wrong with me
- I'm trapped
- I can't cope
- I'm powerless

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Summary

- Requires social justice for post-traumatic healing
- 12 step programs and peer support groups
- Parent healing work
 - Coming to terms with history; inner-child work; practicing self-regulation
- Child-parent attachment therapy that includes
 - Repair
 - Construction of coherent auto biographical narrative
 - Skills building in co-regulation with child, including touch, movement, rhythm
- Rituals, traditions, honoring ancestors, putting meaning and taking personal action to prevent suffering/help others

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