

Story Shifters: Co-creating New Stories about Trauma



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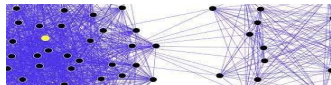
What is Trauma?

Reflection: What words come to mind when you hear the word trauma?



Social Construction Orientation

- Locates the source of meaning, value and action in the relational connection among people
- New ways of life emerge from shared connections
- Explains human behavior and social phenomena through the interactive process of two or more people and the meaning of language. The individual and reality are socially constructed through language.
- Pays attention to the historical, cultural and political ways that knowledge is generated and sustained



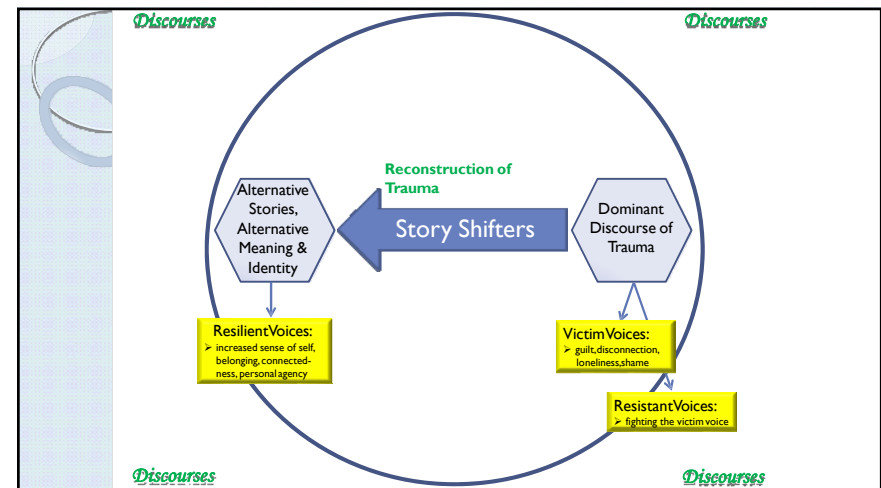
The Dominant Discourse of Trauma and Opportunities for Change

- Trauma can become “the soul of your life”
- Pathological view is dominant discourse of those who experienced childhood trauma
- Our trauma response is rooted in stories
- Relational aspect to stories is critical to create space for alternate stories



Your Stories About Yourself

- Think about the narratives you carry around about yourself
- Reflect on how they were shaped by others and your environment, culture, history, politics, and dominant discourses.
- What could happen to change this narrative?



How Do We Shift from the Dominant Discourse to an Alternate Discourse?

- How do we create a different story?
- Story Shifters happen through conversations and interactions in the “discursive context”



Story Shifters

Two Dimensions:

Relationships (or any “relational activity”)

Culture and Linguistics

Story Shifters in Relationships

- A Stance of Not Knowing (being curious)
- Nature of the Relationship and the Establishment of Safety and Trust
- Meaning of the Response While Telling the Story
- A Shared Experience



Questions to Help Shift the Trauma Story

Questions that may be considered to further generate conversation that may offer alternatives to the dominant discourse of trauma and lead to alternatives for the future:

- Who is on your side?
- What are your hopes for those who are close to you?
- What are your hopes for yourself?
- Which experiences have been useful to you in your community/communities where you've lived? Which community resources do you use?
- What are the good parts of your life?
- What else is there for you besides the trauma?
- What helps you do all these great things?
- Have you experienced a turning point in your life that helped you see alternatives? What advice would you give to others? What do you think others could learn from you and your experiences?
- What other questions should I ask to better understand your experiences?
- **Based on your values, what actions, decisions, choices and risks do you want to take in the near future?
- **Who in your life made a major contribution to your development and growth? Are there people you would want to reconnect with that you have lost contact with over the years? What would you say to them? What would be meaningful to you that they could say to you? What would renewing this connection mean to you? (**revised from *Healing Conversations Now: Enhance Relationships with Elders and Dying Loved Ones*. Chadbourne & Silbert. Taos Institute Publications, 2011).

Story Shifters in Relationships

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Shifting the Relationships Story

- Building peer relationships
- Repairing peer relationships
- Repairing adult relationships
- Repairing Parent-Child relationships
- Building allies

- Showing other people around the client that they are more than their trauma
- Resources and Opportunities-resiliency theory

Story Shifters for Culture and Linguistics

- Knowledge Generation
 - Media
 - Social Constructs
 - Language
-
- Provides new information that creates a difference and models resilience in the trauma story

Story Shifters: Knowledge Generation and Media

Knowledge Generation

- Information is generated that creates a difference.
- Through social interaction, education or therapeutic settings

Media

- How the media portrays trauma
- When media portray messages of hope for people who are touched by trauma, and when it gives the message that trauma does not have to define you, then this can lead to a new construction of trauma and stories for people.

Resilient Voices become stronger

Theory Integration-Social Constructs

- Take a moment to reflect upon the impact of trauma in a well-known person or movie character
- Think about the resiliency factors they used to cope
- What is the impact of the focus and messaging (was what was conveyed helpful or not helpful)?



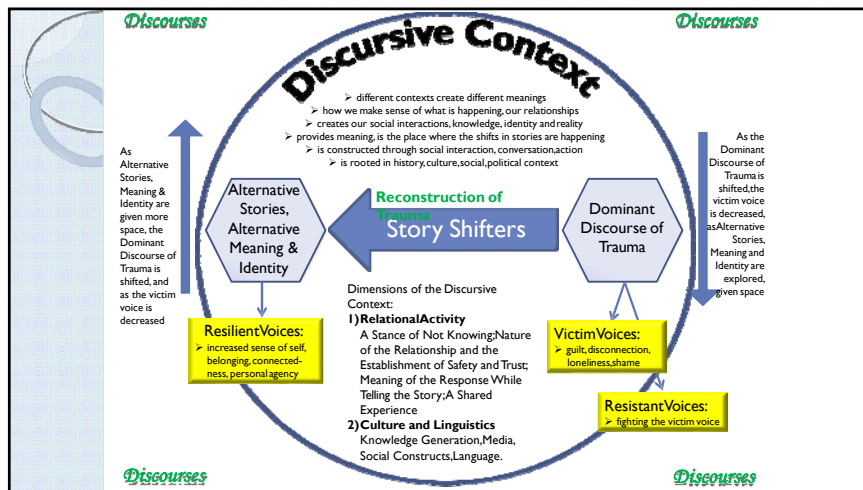
Sheldon Kennedy
and Theo Fleury



Story Shifters: Social Constructs and Language

- Contributes to the story shifters generating different conversations.
- This is where shifts in the language we use to talk about trauma and constructs can lead to shifts in the re-construction of trauma and alternatives are opened up to possibility.





Limitations of the Story Shifter Framework

- Case studies research
- Type of trauma vs complex and developmental trauma
- Participants were not trapped in trauma story
- Sole researcher-biases
- Social Construction Orientation
- Lack of research regarding connection of Story Shifter Framework to neurobiology, attachment, therapeutic relationship etc.
- **NOT MEANT TO DISMISS value of therapeutic work**
- Focus groups limitations
- Potential for re-victimization
- Potentially dismissive of other voices



Resilience and Growth Rating Scale

- Generated out of the conversations that emerged in the consultation and feedback sessions re: the Story Shifter Framework
- Usefulness and meaning of this tool has not been tested
- Includes statements that could generate dialogue to provide information on where someone might be at that moment in time regarding the dominant discourse of trauma in relation to their own journey of trauma healing.
- Opens conversation on exploring the story shifters, as well as the voices and the role they play in the trauma story for the client
- For practitioners to use with clients who have experienced trauma

Resilience and Growth Rating Scale

- Posttraumatic growth theory shows us that growth and distress can co-exist
- Rating scale identifies resiliency in trauma journey and possible areas where client may feel unable to move forward
- May be able to open space to increase presence of other story shifters in client's life
- Client rates self on a continuum containing 2 statements that best describes where they are presently at
- No official "score". Purpose is to open conversation on impact of resilient, resistant and victim voices.



Resilience and Growth Rating Scale

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

People usually hurt or disappoint me.....I look for the best in others as much as I can
 My future doesn't look promising.....My future is bright
 My life is pretty meaningless.....I can find meaning in my life
 I think of death more often than before the trauma event.....I look forward to the future
 I rarely feel happy.....I recognize and cherish moments of happiness
 I feel like I can hardly trust anybody.....I have greater faith in some people now
 I have little faith or sense of spirituality.....My spirituality or faith feels stronger
 I now can't accomplish my life's goals.....I feel like I can succeed now
 My relationships don't bring me much value.....I value my relationships more than ever
 I feel destroyed inside.....I feel strong, resilient, more alive than ever
 I don't bother taking care of myself.....I am much better at self-care
 I can't make a difference.....I am an advocate for the issues I care most about
 I have no control over most things in my life..... I find new opportunities when I look for them
 I have no one to support me.....I have people in my life that I can count on I
 feel defeated.....I feel like a warrior
 I feel like I don't belong to my community.....I have a sense of belonging in my community.
 I feel like I can't reach out.....I can connect and relate to others around me in my community
 My community can't help those who really need it.....I can count on my community to help me and others if I
 need it.
 I have to fight for almost everything.....Good things come my way sometimes
 I am a victim of trauma.....I can change my story, trauma doesn't define who I am

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Final Thoughts

“Shutting down one kind of feeling inevitably shuts down all of them. In protecting ourselves from the unbearable affect of trauma, we also close ourselves off from love, joy, empathy. Our humanity resides in our feelings, and we reclaim our humanity when we direct our curiosity at that which we would prefer to avoid.” (Epstein, 2013, p.97)

Summary

- We can choose **how** we see what happens to us by the meaning we give to it, even if we can't control what happens to us
- Our stories that we carry around can shift depending on our interactions with others, and how they see our stories, and ourselves
- Healing from trauma is contextual and is about relationships, resources and opportunities
- **Anyone can be a Story Shifter!**

Questions?

Thank You

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