

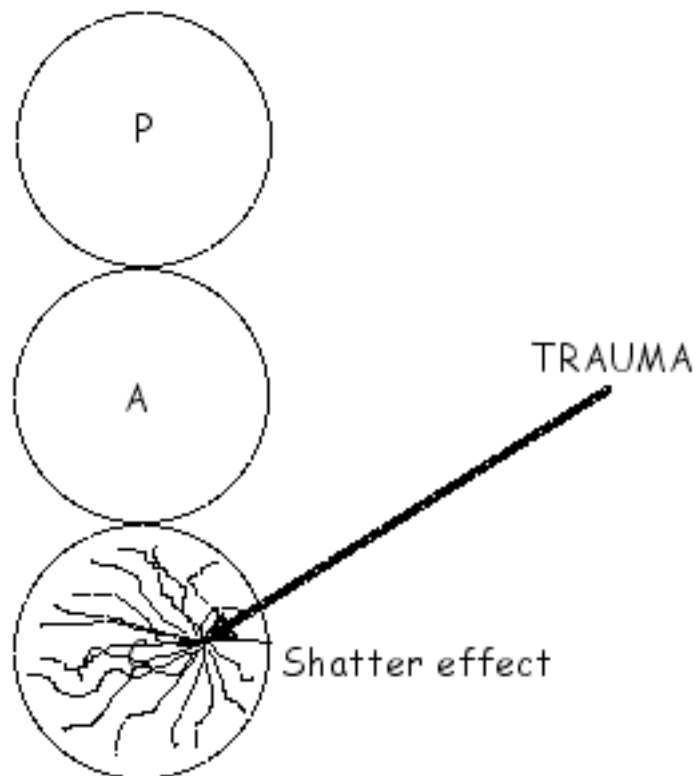
The trauma transaction

Tony White
Saturday, 25 April 2009

What happens to humans when they are confronted with a traumatic event? One can diagram it such that the Child ego state is like a fragile glass ball and the trauma transaction shatters it. I have worked with trauma sufferers for 20 years and as a consultant to an ambulance service specifically as a trauma counsellor for 10 years.

What happens when traumatised

A trauma is anything that significantly jars the Child ego state. It's like the Child gets punched repeatedly in the face. Imagine what that would feel like, after 30 punches and you know there is another 30 to come. Traumatic events can be any event where your life is significantly threatened, natural disasters, war, torture, car accidents, rape, incarceration and so forth.



The trauma transaction

A common symptom following a traumatic event can include re-experiencing the event. This can be in dreaming and nightmares or intrusive thoughts where you find self repeatedly thinking about the event during the day. Or suddenly re-

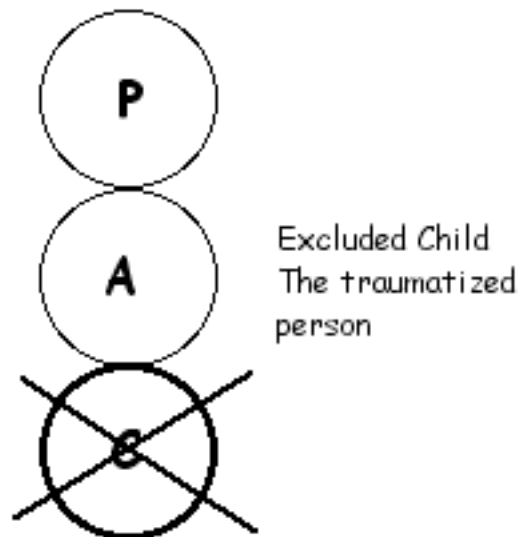
experiencing the feelings you had during the trauma when something reminds you of the event.

With this can go very strong emotional responses such as acute anxiety or intense anger. Some times there can be a numbing where the person feels like they are detached or separate from reality and others. Alcohol and drug abuse can also occur as well.

In addition there may be insomnia, hyper vigilance, memory impairment especially about the event, strong avoidance of anything about the event such as talking about it. One hears accounts about men who returned from WW11 and never spoke about it for 40 years. Alternatively one gets people who will strictly avoid an intersection where they had a car accident.

In essence the person has a breakdown and ceases to function effectively or they just function enough to survive. On odd occasions there can be a delayed reaction. This happens when the person finds some way to distract self from remembering the trauma with work, alcohol, always doing things, and so forth. If you start asking any trauma sufferer to relate the events then it is not long before the cracks appear.

This can be diagrammed as so:



The Child part of self or the emotional part of the person shuts down. This is a normal survival mechanism that is a good solution in the short term. If there is a lack of emotions or at least overwhelming emotions then the person can operate much better in their Adult ego state and thus the "danger" will be dealt with more effectively. If cave men were out hunting sabre tooth tigers it was a good idea not to be too emotional about it. This will allow the person to think more clearly in such a dangerous situation. If one is fighting in a war it is wise to not

have the Child ego state around as this allows the Adult to function more effectively.



It's dangerous to experience the sensitive emotions when living in a war zone.

Problems occur when the excluded Child stays excluded for too long. If one is imprisoned, then released and the person keeps the Child shut down then after a time problems will start to come up. The Child ego state will force itself to the surface and will not stay out of the consciousness for too long. An example of this is when the PTSD symptoms begin to show. This is how the Child ego state shows itself when it is shut down for too long.

The hard men of society

The goal of procedures like trauma debriefing is to again resensitize the Child ego state. Stop it being shut off and make it sensitive again. If the person is motivated to do this then trauma debriefing is usually quite a simple therapeutic procedure and often quite successful.

However there is one situation that therapists' need to be careful with and

sometimes can result in re-traumatizing the client. If the person is in an ongoing traumatic situation then resensitizing the Child ego state must not be done. Trauma debriefing is definitely contraindicated if there are more traumas to come for the individual. One does not do trauma debriefing with such a client but instead adopts a management strategy in the interim.

One does not suggest resensitizing the Child ego state of a soldier when he is still in the war zone. If a person is in the middle of ongoing serious legal battles one waits until it is over before suggesting the Child ego state is opened up again. If an ambulance officer is in a situation where he is likely to be confronted with more very unpleasant situations then one also would not suggest trauma debriefing.

There has in recent times been some discussion in my community about how women have been politically active and achieved government supported health services for both physical and emotional support. It has been noted that the men's movement in this way has been largely ineffectual, fragmented and uncoordinated. There has been calls for a more co-ordinated approach to this. I wonder if that is a wise thing to do and wonder why it has not happen already. If the demand was there surely it would have happened already?



Somebody has to clean up the mess.

In our society we need to have a significant section of the community who can do the very dirty jobs. We need people to fight the wars, we need people to slaughter the animals, we need ambo's to pick up the body parts on the train tracks, we need the police to deal with the violence, abuse and threats. To

resensitize such people who are in ongoing trauma situations is a bad idea and it wouldn't work anyway. Their Child ego states would simply refuse to open up as they know what is going to confront them tomorrow or the next day.

Perhaps this is the reason why the men's movement in terms of health has only ever been fragmented. Somebody has to do the ongoing dirty work and it is usually men. We need 'hard men' in our society and by and large there are a significant number of men would be OK to take on that role.

The diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

These days every man and his dog has PTSD. It is one of those diagnoses that has become very fashionable in recent times. It has an interesting history.

In WW1 doctors identified a condition in some returning soldiers which they called shell shock. The term 'shock' was used because it was believed that the shock from the exploding shells actually physically damaged the brain inside the soldier's skull.



An example of this was naval aviators some of whom developed night blindness and vertigo. With these symptoms obviously they could no longer engage in battle. Upon physical examination there was found to be nothing wrong. Instead their Child ego states were so traumatised they just refused to go into battle anymore and thus the symptoms were created. In WW11 the term battle fatigue was coined and after the Vietnam and Falklands wars it became known as PTSD. They all seem to be identifying a similar set of symptoms.

It should also be noted that trauma is quite an individualistic thing. What is traumatic for one person may not be for another, barring a few exceptions. Reactions to the same traumatic event can vary considerably even in things like child sexual abuse. The level of traumatic reaction can be quite variable.

One of the few exceptions to this is when a persons life is placed under considerable threat. If one is placed in a situation where it is quite possible or quite likely that they will die then the vast majority of people will develop PTSD to a significant degree.

This assumes that the person accurately perceives the danger and is one reason why the anti social personality can make a good soldier because they tend to underestimate the physical threat to them. However most people who are threatened with death will suffer PTSD.