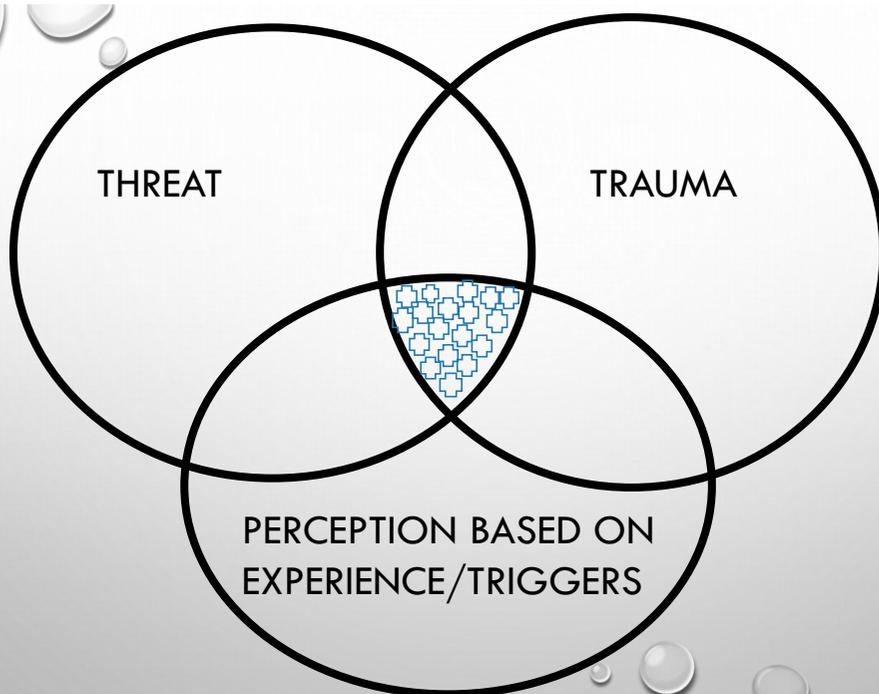


THREAT, TRAUMA & TRIGGER

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

BY

SHARLENE GRAHAM BOLTZ



THREATS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **THREAT**

- A STATEMENT SAYING YOU WILL BE HARMED IF YOU DO NOT DO WHAT SOMEONE WANTS YOU TO DO.
- SOMEONE OR SOMETHING THAT COULD CAUSE TROUBLE, HARM, ETC.
- THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOMETHING BAD OR HARMFUL COULD HAPPEN.
- A PERSON OR THING LIKELY TO CAUSE DAMAGE OR DANGER.

- **TRAUMA**

- A VERY DIFFICULT OR UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE THAT CAUSES SOMEONE TO HAVE MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS USUALLY FOR A LONG TIME.
- MEDICAL : A SERIOUS INJURY TO A PERSON'S BODY.

- **TRIGGER**

- A STIMULUS SUCH AS A SIGHT, SOUND OR SMELL WHICH SETS OFF A MEMORY TAPE OR FLASHBACK TRANSPORTING THE PERSON BACK TO THE EVENT OF HER/HIS ORIGINAL TRAUMA.

What is a threat?

Who is a threat?

DEFINITIONS OF THREAT

- A TRUE THREAT
 - A **STATEMENT MADE IN A CONTEXT** OR UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES WHEREIN A REASONABLE PERSON WOULD FORESEE THAT THE STATEMENT WOULD BE INTERPRETED BY THOSE TO WHOM THE MAKER COMMUNICATES THE STATEMENT AS A SERIOUS EXPRESSION OF INTENTION TO INFLICT BODILY HARM UPON OR TAKE THE LIFE OF ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL AND
 - WHETHER A STATEMENT OR CONDUCT CONSTITUTES A **TRUE THREAT** IS SUBJECT TO AN OBJECTIVE TEST.
 - TEST FACTORS: CONTEXT, CONDITIONAL, REACTION OF LISTENER OF RECEIVER.

UNDERSTANDING THREAT

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

- THE PERCEPTION OF THREAT WHERE CRIMINAL PROSECUTION IS THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION?
- THE PERCEPTION OF THREAT WHERE THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE IS TO PROTECT THE HUMAN TARGET OF THE THREAT FROM ESCALATION OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR?

INDICATORS OF DANGEROUSNESS

1. SUBJECT DOES NOT SHOW RESPECT FOR NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS.
2. SUBJECT EXHIBITS IMPAIRED DECISION-MAKING AND JUDGMENT WHEN FACED WITH A SITUATION OF HIGH ANXIETY AND TENSION, AND HAS A TENDENCY TO ACT OUT WHEN PLACED IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE;
3. SUBJECT HAS A MENTAL DISABILITY WHICH WILL CAUSE THEM TO ACT RASHLY AND WITHOUT EXERCISING DUE DELIBERATION.
4. SUBJECT LACKS INTERNAL MECHANISMS OF CONTROLLING AND INHIBITING PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR OR ACTIONS.
5. SUBJECT HAS A HIGH LEVEL OF AGGRESSION AND HOSTILITY.
6. COMPLICATING FACTORS MAY INCLUDE CERTAIN DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.

LETHALITY 101

- WHAT IS LETHALITY?
 - LETHALITY AS A VIOLENCE PREDICTION MODEL FOCUSED ON THE LEVEL OF DANGEROUSNESS AS VIEWED AS RESIDING DEEP WITHIN AN INDIVIDUAL, NOT SUBJECT TO CHANCE AND EITHER PRESENT OR NOT PRESENT IN AN INDIVIDUAL.[\[1\]](#)
 - LETHALITY WAS OFTEN PREMISED UPON THE PRESENCE OF PRIOR VIOLENT ACTIONS AS A PRIMARY PREDICTOR OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR IN THE FUTURE.[\[2\]](#)
 - [\[1\]](#) LETHAL VIOLENCE: A SOURCEBOOK ON FATAL DOMESTIC, ACQUAINTANCE AND STRANGER VIOLENCE, EDITED BY HAROLD V. HALL 1999.
 - [\[2\]](#) THREAT ASSESSMENT, BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES & THE LAW, VOLUME 17, NUMBER 3, 1999.

LETHALITY V. THREAT

- AGGRESSION V. COERCIVE ACTION
 - INTERACTIONIST THEORY OF LETHALITY BY TEDESCHI AND FELTON: PERPETRATOR HAS 3 PRIMARY GOALS.
 - FIRST, TO GAIN COMPLIANCE.
 - SECOND, TO RESTORE THE PERPETRATOR'S SENSE OF ORDER.
 - THIRD, TO ASSERT AND DEFEND PERCEIVED IDENTITIES OR ROLES BETWEEN PERPETRATOR AND VICTIM.
- LETHALITY V. THREAT
 - VIOLENCE AS A PROGRESSIVE PROCESS IS THE FIRST FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF THREAT ASSESSMENT THEORY. IT MEANS THAT VIOLENCE DOES NOT OCCUR WITHOUT WARNING AND WITHOUT A CONTEXT OR WITHOUT SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH BUILD UP TO THE VIOLENT ACTION.
- PSYCHOLOGICAL/BIOLOGICAL V. BEHAVIORAL

TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

BRAIN SCIENCE IN A NUTSHELL

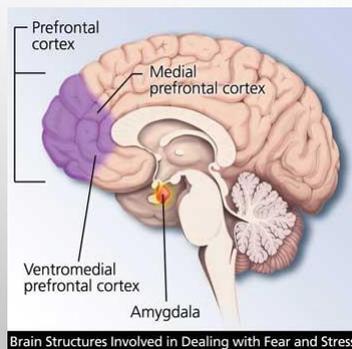
- HOW DO WE REMEMBER?
- RECALL
 - MORE DIFFICULT – INVOLVES MENTALLY REBUILDING THE EXPERIENCE
 - WE RECONSTRUCT OUR MEMORIES EVERY TIME AND EVERY TIME IT IS DIFFERENT
 - QUESTION: WHY DO WE BELIEVE CHANGES IN THE STORY OR RETELLING THE EXPERIENCE OR INCONSISTENT STATEMENTS EQUALS A LIE?
- RECOGNITION
 - EASIER – HOWEVER, HAVE YOU EVER HAD DIFFICULTY PLACING A NAME TO A FACE.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE BRAIN SCIENCE

- WHAT WE CANNOT RECALL, WE INVENT.
- MEMORY IS DESIGNED TO FILTER THE WORLD AND DISCARD WHAT WE DEEM IRRELEVANT.
- WE TEND TO HONE IN ON THE DETAILS OF THE EVENT – CALLED WEAPON FOCUS.
- WE RECALL THE GRISLY DETAILS OF THE WEAPON POINTED AT US, BUT WE MAY NOT REMEMBER THE ROBBER'S FACE OR THE OTHER PEOPLE IN THE STORE.
- IF OUR BRAINS WERE PERFECT VIDEO CAMERAS, WE WOULD BE PARALYZED BY INFORMATION OVERLOAD.

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PREFRONTAL CORTEX AND NON-TRAUMATIC SITUATIONS



- **CHOSEN AND DELIBERATE IN CONSCIOUS AWARENESS (ARNSTEN, 2009)**
- **TOP-DOWN GUIDANCE OF ATTENTION AND THOUGHTS**
- **INHIBITION OF INAPPROPRIATE ACTIONS**
- **REGULATING EMOTIONS**
- **REALITY TESTING**

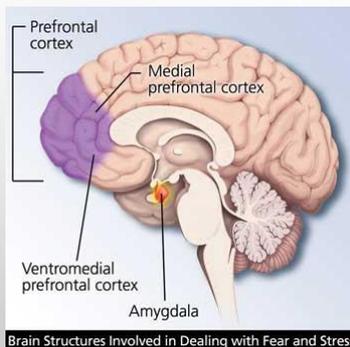
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THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

- HIGH STRESS EVENTS RESULT IN AN IMPAIRED PREFRONTAL CORTEX.
- **STRESS CHEMICALS BASICALLY TURN THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX OFF.**
- OLD AND PRIMITIVE BRAIN STRUCTURES TAKE CONTROL
- WE CANNOT
 - CONTROL OUR ATTENTION
 - REMEMBER OUR VALUES
 - THINK LOGICALLY
 - OVER-RIDE EMOTIONAL REFLEXES OR HABITS
- EVOLUTIONARY ORIGINS FOR THIS RESPONSE.
- WHY?

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THE AMYGDALA



Brain Structures Involved in Dealing with Fear and Stress

- **AMYGDALA TRIGGERED AUTOMATIC RESPONSE**
- **CHEMICALS FROM THE BRAIN STEM IMPAIR PREFRONTAL CORTEX**
- **AUTOMATICALLY CAPTURED BY ANYTHING DANGEROUS OR THREATENING**
- **EMOTIONS ARE REFLEXIVE.**

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COMPARISON

AGGRESSOR

- NOT STRESSED
- PREFRONTAL CORTEX IN CONTROL.
- THINKING AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE
 - PLANNED
 - PRACTICED
 - HABITUAL

TARGET OF AGGRESSION

- TERRIFIED, OVERWHELMED
- AMYGDALA IN CONTROL
- ATTENTION AND THOUGHTS DRIVEN BY TRAFFICKER'S ACTIONS
- BEHAVIOR CONTROLLED BY EMOTIONAL REFLEXES AND HABITS FROM CHILDHOOD (INCLUDING ABUSE)*****

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PROGRESSIONS

- YOUR MENTAL STATE LEADS TO THE MANIFESTATION OF EMOTIONAL TRAITS.
- CONSIDER THE PROGRESSIVE RANGE OF MENTAL STATES:
 - CALM
 - AROUSAL
 - ALARM
 - FEAR
 - TERROR
- PROGRESS OF MENTAL STATE CHANGES THE AREA OF THE BRAIN IN CONTROL AND THEREFORE CHANGES THE COGNITIVE RESPONSE AND SENSE OF TIME.
(DR. BRUCE PERRY)

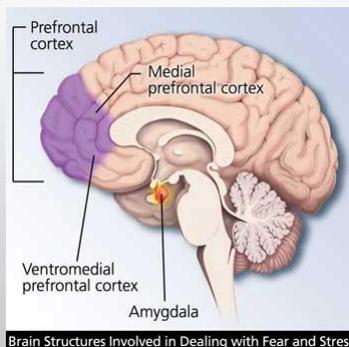
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PROGRESSIVE STATES AND IMPACTS

Arousal:
Concrete/Time
perceived in days
and hours

Calm:
Abstract/Time
extends to the
future

Alarm:
Emotional/Time
perceived in Hours
and Minutes



Fear:
Reactive/Time
perceived in
Minutes and
Seconds

Terror:
Reflexive/Time
perceived in as a lost
sense of the passage
of time

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PROGRESSION OF EVOLVED AND ADAPTIVE RESPONSES – BRAIN AND BODY

- FREEZE
 - FLIGHT
 - FIGHT
 - DISSOCIATION
 - TONIC IMMOBILITY
- **FREEZE: SITUATION ASSESSED, YOU FREEZE TO AVOID AN ASSAULT OR AN ESCALATION OF THE ASSAULT.**
 - **FLIGHT AND FIGHT: GOAL IS TO AVOID THE ASSAULT OR ESCAPE AN ESCALATION OF THE ASSAULT.**
 - **WHEN FLIGHT IS IMPOSSIBLE AND FIGHT IS USELESS...**
 - **DISSOCIATION – SELF PROTECTION FROM OVERWHELMING SENSATIONS AND EMOTIONS**
 - **TONIC IMMOBILITY – LAST DITCH ATTEMPT TO AVOID ASSAULT OR ESCALATION OR ... TO AT LEAST SURVIVE!**

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POST ASSAULT BRAIN AND BODY RESPONSES

- IMMEDIATE POST ASSAULT EFFECTS INCLUDE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:
- DISORGANIZATION, LOSS OF CONTROL OF MIND AND BODY
- INTRUSIVE MEMORIES, NIGHTMARES
- FLASHBACKS: RELIVING OR REENACTING EXPERIENCE
- **EXTREME EMOTIONS V. NUMBING, DISSOCIATION**
- **FEAR AND HYPER-VIGILANCE V. CALM AND DENIAL**
- **GUILT, SHAME**
- SHOCK, DISBELIEF
- **IRRITABILITY, ANGRY OUTBURSTS**
- **DEPRESSION, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, SELF-DESTRUCTIVE ACTS**
- SLEEPLESSNESS, FATIGUE
- PHYSICAL PAIN

(Hopper, 2012)

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POST ASSAULT BRAIN AND BODY RESPONSES

- POST ASSAULT OUTWARD ADJUSTMENTS MAY INCLUDE
- **ATTEMPTS TO DENY OR MINIMIZE IMPACT**
- RATIONALIZATION OF WHY IT HAPPENED, INCLUDING SELF-BLAME
- AVOIDANCE OF REMINDERS
- **CONTINUED FEAR, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION**
- DECREASED INTRUSIVE MEMORIES AND FLASHBACKS
- **CAPABLE OF EASILY RETURNING TO CRISIS MODE**
- INCREASED OR DECREASED ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESS EMOTIONS ABOUT ASSAULT
- **DEVELOP SOME COPING SKILLS**

(HOPPER, 2012)

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EMOTIONAL HABITS

- **INCLUDES BEHAVIORS SELDOM USED BUT DEEPLY LEARNED, WHICH CAN TAKE OVER WHEN THE “RIGHT” TRIGGER COMES**
- **ASSAULT RESPONSES OFTEN REFLECT HABITS DEVELOPED IN CHILDHOOD (OR WITH SOLDIERS, COMBAT)**
- **HABITS OF RESPONDING TO ABUSE, E.G. DISSOCIATION**
- **GENERAL EMOTIONAL HABITS, E.G. OBEYING THOSE WHO DOMINATE, THREATEN OR ATTACK YOU.**
- **WHEN THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX SHUTS DOWN, EMOTIONAL HABITS “TRAINED” DURING CHILDHOOD (TRAUMAS) CAN TAKE OVER,**

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PERCEPTIONS AND TRIGGERS

IMPLICIT BIAS 101

- DEFINITION
- UNLIKE EXPLICIT BIAS (WHICH REFLECTS THE ATTITUDES OR BELIEFS THAT ONE ENDORSES AT A CONSCIOUS LEVEL), **IMPLICIT BIAS IS THE BIAS IN JUDGMENT AND/OR BEHAVIOR THAT RESULTS FROM SUBTLE COGNITIVE PROCESSES (E.G., IMPLICIT ATTITUDES AND IMPLICIT STEREOTYPES) THAT OFTEN OPERATE AT A LEVEL BELOW CONSCIOUS AWARENESS AND WITHOUT INTENTIONAL CONTROL.**
- THE UNDERLYING IMPLICIT ATTITUDES AND STEREOTYPES RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLICIT BIAS ARE THOSE BELIEFS OR SIMPLE ASSOCIATIONS THAT A PERSON MAKES BETWEEN AN OBJECT AND ITS EVALUATION THAT "...ARE AUTOMATICALLY ACTIVATED BY THE MERE PRESENCE (ACTUAL OR SYMBOLIC) OF THE ATTITUDE OBJECT" (DOVIDIO, GAERTNER, KAWAKAMI, & HUDSON, 2002, P. 94; ALSO BANAJI & HEIPHETZ, 2010). ALTHOUGH AUTOMATIC, IMPLICIT BIASES ARE NOT COMPLETELY INFLEXIBLE: THEY ARE MALLEABLE TO SOME DEGREE AND MANIFEST IN WAYS THAT ARE RESPONSIVE TO THE PERCEIVER'S MOTIVES AND ENVIRONMENT (BLAIR, 2002).

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IMPLICIT BIAS 101

- WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF IMPLICIT BIAS?
- **IMPLICIT BIAS CAN DEVELOP OVER TIME WITH THE ACCUMULATION OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.**
- PERSONAL EXPERIENCES INCLUDE NOT ONLY TRADITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE TARGET (I.E., CLASSICAL CONDITIONING; OLSON & FAZIO, 2001), BUT ALSO SOCIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES (I.E., VIA OBSERVING PARENTS, FRIENDS, OR INFLUENTIAL OTHERS; GREENWALD & BANAJI, 1995).

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IMPLICIT BIAS 101

- RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE DEMONSTRATE A LINK BETWEEN IMPLICIT (BUT NOT EXPLICIT) RACIAL BIAS AND NEURAL ACTIVITY IN THE **AMYGDALA**, A REGION IN THE BRAIN THAT SCIENTISTS HAVE ASSOCIATED WITH EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND FEAR CONDITIONING. (PHELPS, O'CONNOR, CUNNINGHAM, FUNAYAMA, GATENBY, GORE, & BANAJI, 2000; SEE ALSO STANLEY, PHELPS, & BANAJI, 2008).

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TAKE THE IMPLICIT BIAS TEST FOR YOURSELF

- **[HTTPS://IMPLICIT.HARVARD.EDU/IMPLICIT/TAKEATEST.HTML](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)**

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DOES IMPLICIT BIAS REALLY MATTER?

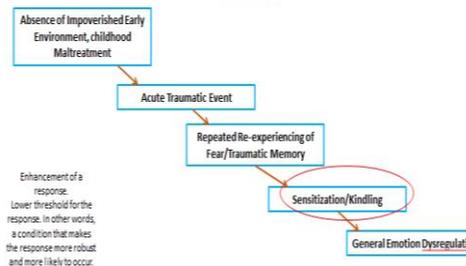
- A RECENT META-ANALYSIS OF 122 RESEARCH REPORTS FOUND THAT ONE IMPLICIT MEASURE (THE IAT) EFFECTIVELY PREDICTED BIAS IN A RANGE OF RELEVANT SOCIAL BEHAVIORS, SOCIAL JUDGMENTS, AND EVEN PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES ($R = .274$; GREENWALD, POEHLMAN, UHLMANN, & BANAJI, 2009).
- **IMPLICIT BIAS CAN INFLUENCE A NUMBER OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENTS AND ACTIONS IN THE “REAL WORLD”** (SEE JOST, RUDMAN, BLAIR, CARNEY, DASGUPTA, GLASER & HARDIN, 2009) THAT MAY HAVE LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS.

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FEAR CONDITIONING (LANIUS, 2010)

FEAR CONDITIONING THROUGH STRESS SENSITIZATION & KINDLING

- PATHWAY 1: Lanius et al. (2010)

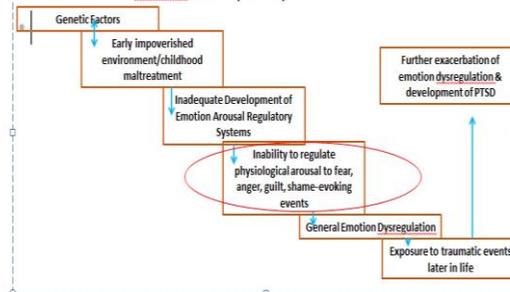


Lanius et al. (2010). Fear Conditioning and early life vulnerabilities: two distinct pathways of emotion dysregulation and brain dysfunction in PTSD. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, Vol 1 (2010)

Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capua

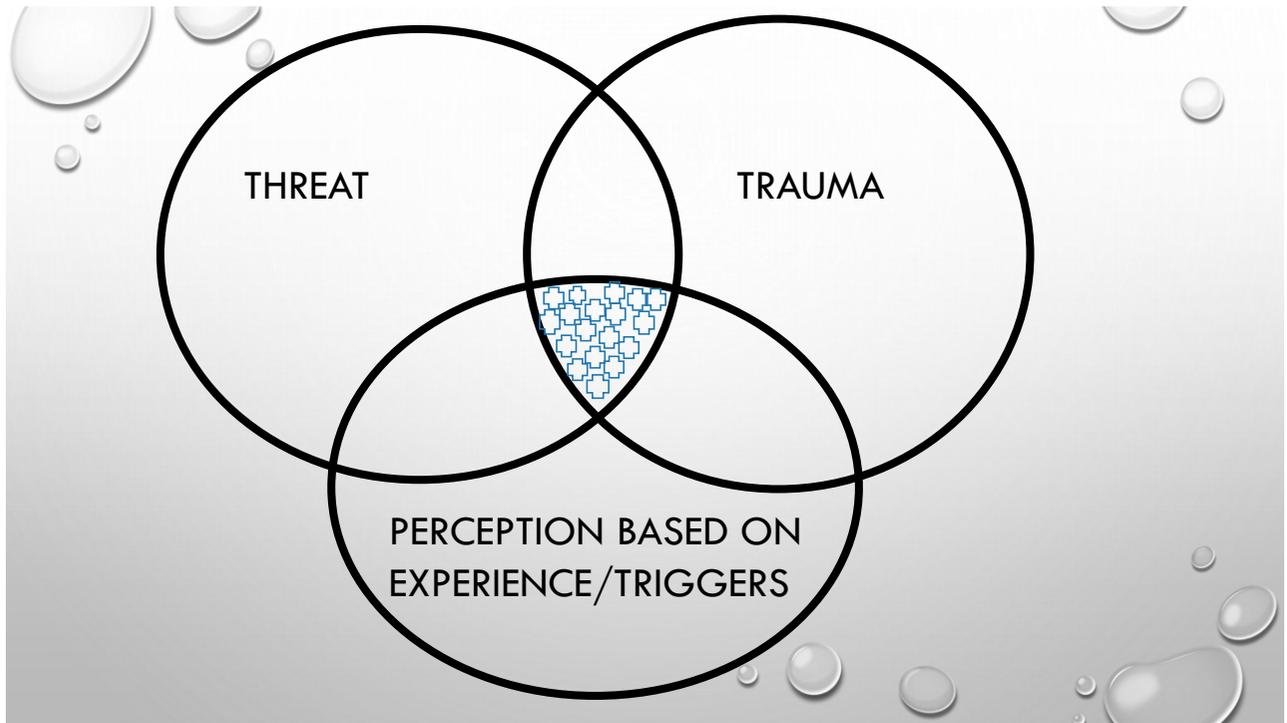
EARLY LIFE VULNERABILITIES

- PATHWAY 2: Lanius et al. (2010)



Lanius et al. (2010). Fear Conditioning and early life vulnerabilities: two distinct pathways of emotion dysregulation and brain dysfunction in PTSD. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, Vol 1 (2010)

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QUESTIONS

COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

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