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Reconsidering Trauma: Treatment Advances, Relational Issues and Mindfulness

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An alternative perspective to the medical model: Trauma, pain, and suffering

- Buddha's two arrows
 - Pain (the first arrow)
 - The direct effects of adverse things, traumas, losses, and unprocessed memories of those things (including posttraumatic stress)

Trauma, pain, and suffering

- Suffering (the second arrow problem)
 - Pain is misinterpreted as “bad,” unacceptable, evidence of failing or inadequacy
 - Pain is resisted
 - Because it means the loss of preconceptions about self, others, future, permanence, immortality (“attachments,” “ignorance”)
 - As a result, pain is avoided, denied, suppressed, numbed, or, ironically, clung-to

Trauma, pain, and suffering

- “Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional”
- Except that
 - Some attachments are good (love, connection, interpersonal needs)
 - Some circumstances don't easily allow the option of not suffering
 - Pain exceeds capacity
 - Circumstances out of control
 - Oppression, poverty, victimization

The compassionate therapeutic relationship

- Relational processing
 - Triggers for early implicit attachment schema
 - Activation of schema and source attribution errors
 - Disparity
- The vehicle for compassion
 - Awareness of suffering, non-egocentric desire to assist, and non-power-laden intervention
 - Physiologic effects: Activation of attachment circuitry and modulation of distress

Mindfulness

- Moment-by-moment nonjudgmental attention to internal/external experience
- Openness to inner experience
- Acceptance of feelings without needing to act
 - “Inviting your pain to tea”
- Observation without attachment
 - *Metacognitive awareness*: “Just” thoughts and feelings
 - Letting go (versus suppression)
- Contraindications

The Pain Paradox

- *Suppression, rejection, or avoidance of pain = increased suffering and decreases awareness*
 - Literature on substance abuse, dissociation, thought suppression
 - Limits to processing, the downside of numbing
- *Nonjudgmental acceptance of pain = decreased suffering and increases awareness*
 - Direct experience of pain/distress allows it to be processed, decatastrophized, and gained from (posttraumatic growth)

ReGAINing

- Recognize you are triggered
- Ground yourself
- Acept experience but don't act (pause the process)
- Investigate activation, link it to past
- Non-identify with source attribution errors
 - Just because I think/feel what I am thinking/feeling doesn't mean it's true

Suggested readings

Briere, J. (2019). *Treating Risky and Compulsive Behavior in Trauma Survivors* NY: Guilford.

Briere, J. (2012). Working with trauma: Mindfulness and compassion. In C.K. Germer & R.D. Siegel (Eds.), *Compassion and wisdom in psychotherapy* (pp. 265-279). New York: Guilford.

Briere, J., & Scott, C. (2014). *Principles of trauma therapy: A guide to symptoms, evaluation, and treatment, 2nd edition, DSM-5 update*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cloitre M., Cohen, L.R., & Koenen, K.C. (2006). *Treating Survivors of childhood abuse: psychotherapy for the interrupted life*. New York: Guilford.

Follette, V., Briere, J., Rozelle, D., Hopper, J., & Rome, D. (Eds.) (2015). *Mindfulness-oriented interventions for trauma: Integrating contemplative practices*. NY: Guilford.