Group approaches that foster hopeful resilience: Reclaiming wellness in individuals & community

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Who are Puerto Ricans?

- **Puerto Ricans**, the inhabitants, and citizens of the Commonwealth of **Puerto Rico** (a United States territory), and their descendants.

- Ethnic composition: A mix of Taíno Indians, Spanish, Africans, Asian and “mixed”.

- After 450 years of occupation, in 1898 Spain renounced all claims to Puerto Rico, and transferred sovereignty over to the United States.

- On March 2, 1917, United States granted Puerto Ricans U.S. statutory citizenship.
Impact of colonization

• Dismantling of cultural patterns.
• Imposition of colonizers’ “superior” values on the colonized.
• Alterations of original identity, modes of coping and emotional regulation, suppression of language.

Interestingly:
• The result of repeated, sustained engagement in diverse cultural tasks cause relevant brain pathways to undergo substantial rewiring creating an unexpected degree of neuroplasticity. (Resilience?!)
Resilience

• The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties (“toughness”)

Psychological resilience:
- ability to mentally or emotionally cope with a crisis
- Regaining the capacity to
  - Connect to others
  - Be flexible
  - Take action (mobilize energy)
  - Manage strong feelings
  - Humor
The Stress Response

• If there is no danger, the doing brain goes back to normal functioning.

• If there is danger the thinking brain shuts down, allowing the doing brain to act.
Stress and PTSD

• Stress taxes the system
• PTSD - a predictable response to overwhelming, uncontrollable, and potentially life threatening events.
• A normal response to abnormal circumstances that can result in:
  • Sleep disturbances (nightmares)
  • Emotional instability
  • Impaired concentration, unclear memory of events
  • Intrusive thoughts
  • Flashbacks
  • Increased startle reflex
  • Hypervigilance (arousal)
Impact of PTSD on the brain

• Endocrine factors - core endocrine features include abnormal regulation of cortisol and thyroid hormones.

• Core neurochemical features include abnormal regulation of catecholamine, serotonin, amino acid, peptide, and opioid neurotransmitters, found in brain circuits that regulate/integrate stress and fear responses.

• Brain regions altered in patients include the hippocampus and amygdala as well as cortical regions including the anterior cingulate, insula, and orbitofrontal region. These areas interconnect to form a neural circuit that mediates, among other functions, adaptation to stress and fear conditioning.

• Basically, the flight, fight, freeze responses are activated
Trauma occurs in layers, with each layer affecting every other layer. Current trauma is one layer. Former traumas in one’s life are more fundamental layers. Underlying one’s own individual trauma history is one’s group identity or identities and the historical trauma with which they are associated.

--- Bonnie Burstow
Effects of Trauma

• **Arousal modulation:**
  • Dissociative states (black outs, out-of-body experiences, a “blank stare”)
  • Abrupt outbursts of anger and/or aggression
  • Hyperactivity or “mania”-like presentation

• **Behavioral control:**
  • Difficulties in impulse control
  • Self-destructive behavior
Effects of Trauma

**Emotion and Mood:**
- Difficulty describing feelings
- Feelings are experienced as overwhelming, with limited ability to modulate
- Depression, anxiety, and numbness are common
- Lack of affect
Lasting Effects of Trauma

• **Cognition:**
  • Problems with attention and concentration
  • Difficulty retaining new information
  • Short term memory problems
  • Limited autobiographical memory
  • Poor self-image and self-esteem
  • Persistent intrusive thoughts and images, sometimes resembling hallucinations
  • “Arrested development”
In order to foster change, people’s reparative experiences must be
• Predictable
• Consistent
• Repetitive
• Appropriate for developmental stage of the person in the specific area of activity, rather than their chronological age
• Inclusive of any and all caregivers
Wellness

• An active process
• Increased awareness and empowerment to choose a healthy, adaptive existence
• Multidimensional and holistic including:
  • Lifestyle
  • Mental
  • Spiritual
  • Environmental
  • Other aspects
Neuroscience Supported Counseling Interventions

- Breathing
- Mindful Awareness
  - Observing thoughts, feelings, sensations
  - Monitoring arousal states
- Make Implicit Memories Explicit
- Narrative Therapy
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- More Focus on Positive than Negatives
- PsychoEducation about the brain
- Movement/Exercise
  - Yoga/Martial Arts
  - Dance
- Animal-assisted Therapy
- Play Therapy
- Dramatic Arts

(Badenoch, 2008; Ivey & Zalaquett, 2011; Siegel, 2010; van der Kolk, 2015)
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