



Story Shifters

TRAUMA: IT'S NOT THE SOUL OF YOUR LIFE:

RE-CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND THE ROLE OF
STORY SHIFTERS IN GENERATING ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

DR. BARBARA WARD

What is Trauma?

- ▶ What words come to mind when you hear the word trauma?



The Dominant Discourse of Trauma and Opportunities for Change

- ▶ Trauma can become “the soul of your life”
- ▶ Pathological view 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



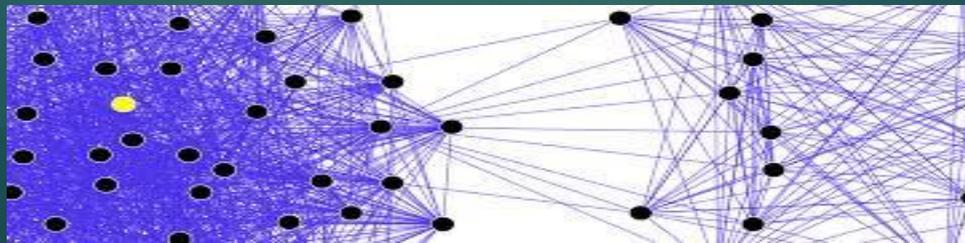
Research Questions:



- ▶ 1. How do we shift the story about trauma that people hold when it is rooted in the dominant discourse of trauma and based on individual and deficit-based perspectives to one that instead can provide alternate stories, meanings and identities that engage the Resilient Voices as well as involve the community and relational context?
- ▶ 2. What discursive context dimensions are involved in how we co-create an alternate story that people hold about the trauma they experienced?
- ▶ 3. Could we generate a tool that is resilience and strength based, as well as aligned with the concept of post-traumatic growth, to help those listening to a story about a trauma experience hear all aspects of the story (i.e. both the pain and impact as well as the resilience, growth and hope for the future).

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



Qualitative Methods

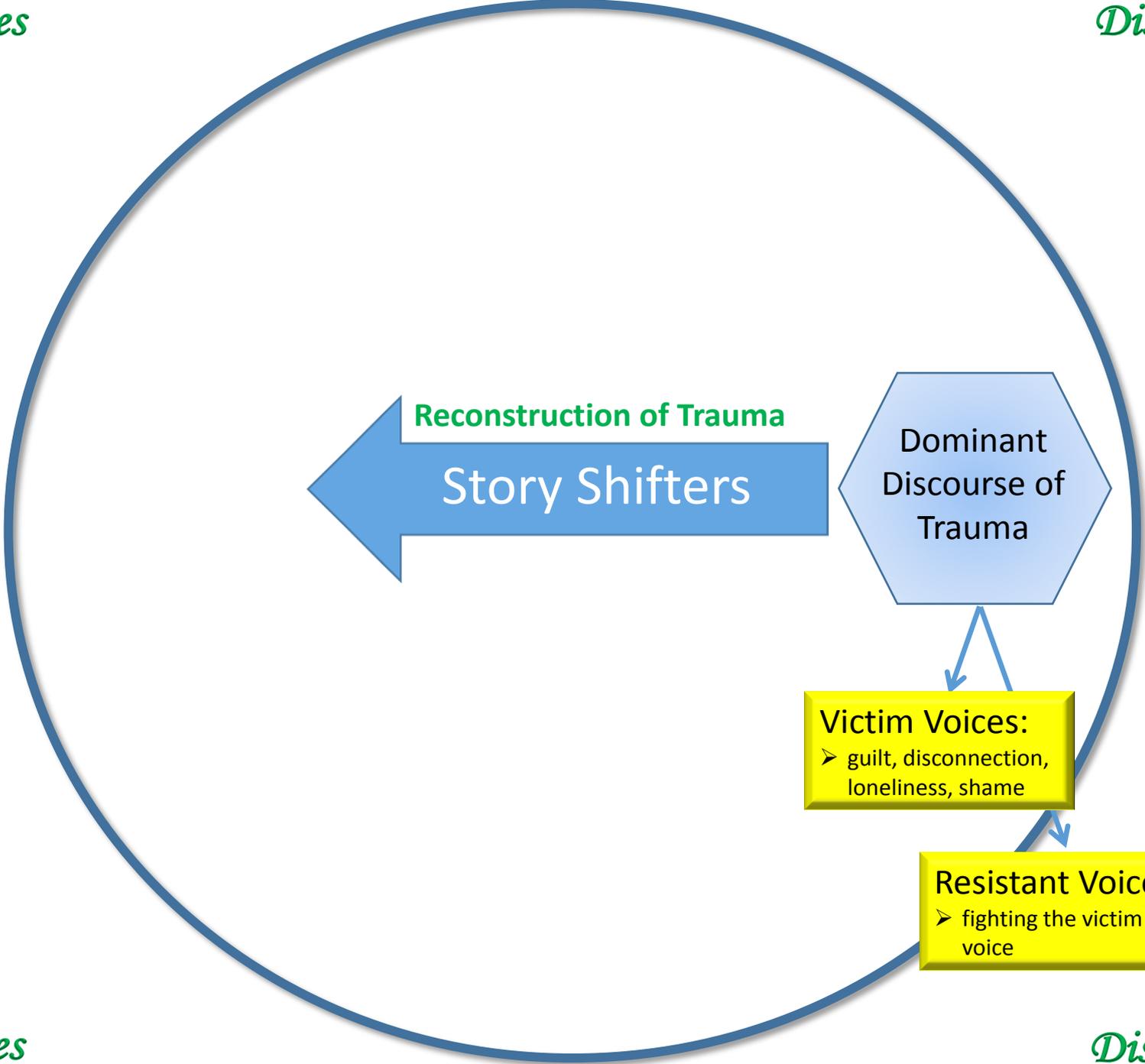
- ▶ Interviewed adults who experienced significant adverse childhood events
- ▶ Carol Gilligan's Listening Guide to hear the different voices within the stories
- ▶ Gives consideration for voices being rooted in societal, cultural, historical, political and relational contexts
- ▶ Allows for interviewer's relationship on the interview and the interviewees' stories
- ▶ The Listening Guide involves four sequential readings of the interview

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Methods (continued)

- ▶ Developed theoretical framework
- ▶ Conducted two focus groups with diverse community members for feedback on the meaning of the framework
- ▶ Also conducted focus groups with a group of practitioners
- ▶ Interviewed a family who experienced inter-generational trauma
- ▶ Interviewed individual therapists





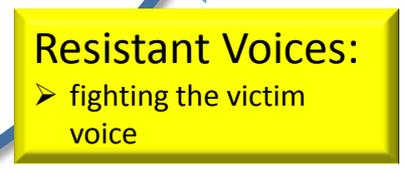
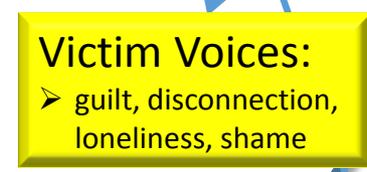
How Do We Shift from the Dominant Discourse to an Alternate Discourse?

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



Discursive Context

- different contexts create different meanings
- how we make sense of what is happening, our relationships
- creates our social interactions, knowledge, identity and reality
- provides meaning, is the place where the shifts in stories are happening
- is constructed through social interaction, conversation, action
 - is rooted in history, culture, social, political context



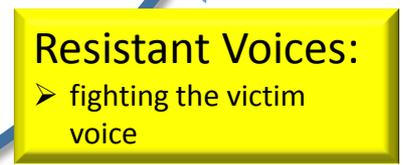
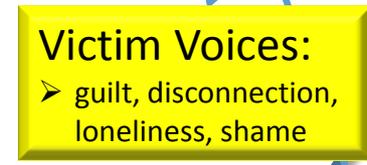
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Dimensions of the Discursive Context:

- 1) Relational Activity**
A Stance of Not Knowing; Nature of the Relationship and the Establishment of Safety and Trust; Meaning of the Response While Telling the Story; A Shared Experience
- 2) Culture and Linguistics**
Knowledge Generation, Media, Social Constructs, Language.



Story Shifters for Relational Activity

- ▶ 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



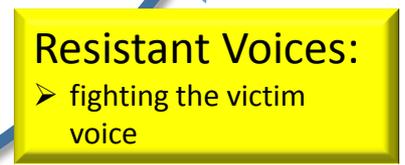
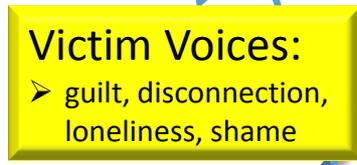
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Story Shifters for Culture and Linguistics

- ▶ 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

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.



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As Alternative Stories, Meaning & Identity are given more space, the Dominant Discourse of Trauma is shifted, and as the victim voice is decreased



Alternative Stories, Alternative Meaning & Identity

Reconstruction of Trauma
Story Shifters

Dominant Discourse of Trauma

As the Dominant Discourse of Trauma is shifted, the victim voice is decreased, as Alternative Stories, Meaning and Identity are explored, given space



Resilient Voices:
➤ increased sense of self, belonging, connectedness, personal agency

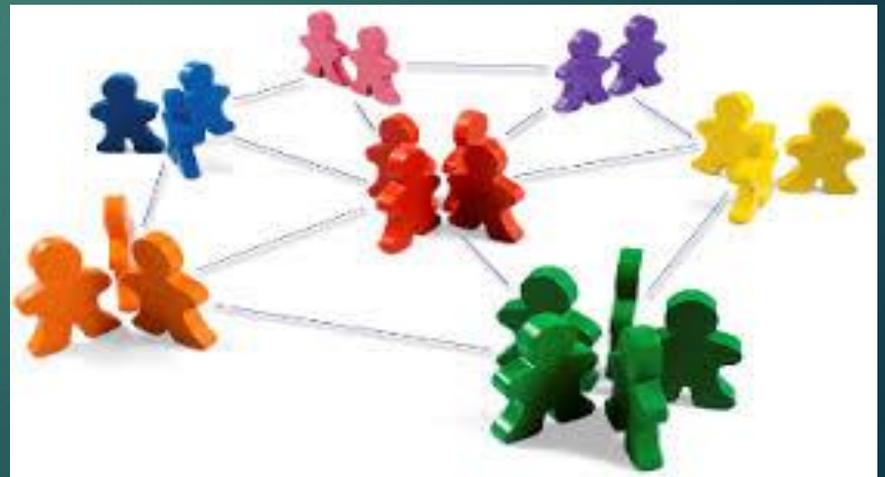
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Victim Voices:
➤ guilt, disconnection, loneliness, shame

Resistant Voices:
➤ fighting the victim voice

What Meaning Do Story Shifters Hold?

- ▶ Education
- ▶ Other Fields in Mental Health
- ▶ Other Professions
- ▶ Therapeutic Setting
- ▶ Community Setting
- ▶ Other Cultures



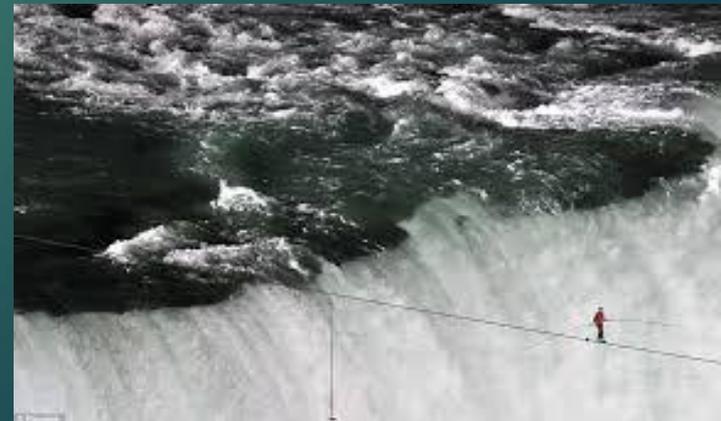
Growth and Resilient Rating Scale

- ▶ A potential tool for practitioners to generate dialogue about the dominant discourse of trauma
- ▶ Provides opportunity to explore alternative discourses of hope, resilience etc.
- ▶ Opens conversation on exploring the story shifters, as well as the voices and the role they play in the trauma story for the client



Limitations of the Story Shifter Framework

- ▶ Case study-2 participants, demographics
- ▶ Type of trauma vs complex trauma
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Focus groups limitations
- ▶ Potential for re-victimization
- ▶ Potentially dismissive of other voices



Potential Future Research



- ▶ How could the Growth and Resilience Scale be meaningful in therapeutic setting
- ▶ How could Story Shifters help prevent “flooding” and assist the therapeutic technique of “grounding”?
- ▶ What safeguards are required when using the Story Shifter Framework?
- ▶ How could the Story Shifters be used in group settings?
- ▶ What impact do the Story Shifters have on Vicarious Trauma?
- ▶ What other story shifters might emerge if interviews were expanded to others?

Questions and Comments

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