Gender Differences in PTSD

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Olff, Langeland et al
Gender Differences in PTSD

2007, Psychological Bulletin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Exposure</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Developing PTSD</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
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</tbody>
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| Types of Trauma          | More susceptible to negative effects of childhood neglect | • Greater exposure to traumas that have high rates of PTSD  
• More than 1/3 of women experienced intimate partner violence within the past 12 months  
• More susceptible to negative effects of sexual abuse  
• More exposure at a younger age |
<p>| Prior Traumatization     | No difference |               |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Appraisal</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                    | • Higher levels of perceived control  
• Lower reliance on blaming others |  
• More likely to report threat and loss appraisals  
• More likely to appraise events as stressful  
• Higher perceived distress loss of personal control and lack of available coping strategies  
• Pick up on threat signals more readily |
## Perry’s theory
### Psychological and Biological Response

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| Coping| • Instrumental Mastery  
• Fight or Flight                                                                | • Tend and Befriend  
• Freezing  
• Passive avoidance                                                   |
|       | **Are more sensitized to physiological hyperarousal systems**  
– conduct disorder, ADD, antisocial  
- Higher SNS activity                                                      | **More sensitized to dissociated systems – anxiety, physical complaints, withdrawal**  
- HPA dysregulation  
- Oxytocin  
- Estrogen  
Endogenous Opioids                                                      |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Health Outcomes</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</table>
|                | More aggressive behaviors | Higher PTSD rates  
|                |                  | More anxiety, depressive disorders, somatization, alcohol and drug use |
How Our Bodies Respond to a Real or Perceived Threat or a Trigger

- Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal Axis (HPA) Brings body into balance
  - Sympathetic Nervous System
    - Fight, Flight or Freeze
      - Heart rate
      - Sweat response
      - Energy increase
Our Body’s Chemical Response

- **Cortisol**
  - Regulation of the Adrenalines
  - Increase of energy

- **Adrenalines**
  - Fight or flight
  - Sharpens our focus and stimulates memory
  - Increases blood pressure and heart rate
  - Shunts blood away from systems that are not needed in danger response to the brain and muscles
Our Body’s Chemical Response 2

- Our natural Opioids
  - Prevents experiencing the pain
  - Prevents memory consolidation

- Oxytocin
  - Inhibits memory consolidation

- Vasopressin
  - Prevents dehydration
Biochemical changes during and after the traumatic event

- Adrenaline - levels are chronically increased resulting in constant hyperstress and inability to distinguish danger signals
- Inability to sleep, flashbacks, trouble with concentrating
- Shuts off the brain
Biochemical changes during and after the traumatic event

- Cortisol - Chronically low or high levels - results in reduced immune functioning, impaired regulation of the adrenalin, and damage to passages in the brain responsible for memory.
- While high, cortisol, thins stomach lining and bones, impairs the immune system, decreases blood flow to the intestines.
Gender Differences in the Trauma Response

- Females - tend to dissociate and paradoxically, trauma bond
- Males - fight or flee, exert power and control
- However - Both sexes will experience power and control and difficulties with species preservative behavior if the traumas and/or triggers continue too long
Gender Differences in Trauma Response 2

- Females - Tend and Befriend
  - Shelley Taylor, UCLA

- The role of our hormones
  - Estrogen amplified the effects of oxytocin
  - Androgens diminish the effects of oxytocin
Girls and Boys are Different 3

- Estrogen activates a larger field of neurons in women’s brains during an upsetting experience so they experience the stress in greater and more precise detail.
  - Dr. Marianne J. Legato, Columbia University, Reader’s Digest Mar. 08
Traumatic Events:

(1) render victims helpless by overwhelming force;

(2) involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or close personal encounter with violence and death;

(3) disrupt a sense of control, connection and meaning;

(4) confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror; and

(5) evoke the responses of catastrophe.

(Judy Herman, Trauma and Recovery, (1992)

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Traumatic Reminders

- Loss of Control
- Power Differential
- Lack of Predictability
Matthew Kelly: The Seven Levels of Intimacy

"Visit any mental institution and you will discover that most of the patients have forgotten their own story. They simply cannot put the yesterdays of their lives into any cohesive or structured memory. As a result they lose sight of the reference point that the past provides us in mapping our future. When we forget our story, we lose the thread of our lives, and we go mad. To varying degrees, we all forget our own stories, and to the extent that we do so we all go a little mad. Great relationships help us to remember our stories, who we are and where we have come from. And in some strange and mystical way, by remembering our stories we celebrate ourselves in a very healthy way. What's your story?"