WELCOME!

Learned Helplessness and Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Charlotte Webb, M.Ed., CPSS, BHT
Chief Recovery Officer

Suzanne Brown, Ph.D., CPSS, BHT
Recovery Support Coordinator

PSA Behavioral Health Agency
PSA = People-Service-Action
PSA Behavioral Health Agency

PSA is a private, nonprofit behavioral health agency dedicated to the treatment and recovery of individuals with psychiatric illnesses who may also have challenges related to substance abuse, trauma, and/or other behavioral health issues.

PSA promotes
Hope, Recovery, Diversity & Wellness

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

1. Learners will increase knowledge of learned helplessness and its debilitating effects;

2. Learners will increase knowledge of cultural dynamics leading to learned helplessness;

3. Learners will be provided antidotes to combat learned helplessness;
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Questions to Consider . . .

1. What do you think learned helplessness is?
2. Can you see a relationship between learned helplessness and trauma?
3. Can you see a relationship between learned helplessness and intercultural dynamics today? (Intergenerational trauma)
4. Can a person or group overcome learned helplessness? What are some ways of doing this?
5. Is there a connection between learned helplessness and stigma?
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

- What is Learned Helplessness?
- How do we “Learn” Learned Helplessness?

Examples of Learned Helplessness?
What is Learned Helplessness?

“Learned Helplessness is a mental state where people feel completely powerless to improve their own situation in life.” [Learned Helplessness in Recovery, DARA Drug & Alcohol Rehab Asia, 2013.]
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

WHAT IF I FAILED?... I'M GOING TO STAY RIGHT HERE WHERE I'M SAFE AND SOUND.
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

How do we Learn “Learned Helplessness?”

Basic research shows that when we are repeatedly given circumstances where we have no control over the outcome, no matter what we do in an aversive situation, we give up.

*Depression, Anxiety, and Stress are often the result.*
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

- Some Behaviors Associated with Learned Helplessness Are:
  - Tendency to give up easily when faced with a problem;
  - Belief that things will turn out badly no matter what we do;
  - Belief that there is no way to control things that are going to happen in the future.

- Some Examples?
What is Culture?

Culture is a set of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group [with] characteristic features of an everyday shared existence.

Culture is a set of shared values, conventions, and social practices in a field or activity.

Culture is a set of shared values passed down in families, generations.

Examples of [a] CULTURE?
Cultural Trauma

Cultural Trauma defined, “as the culturally defined and interpreted shock to the cultural tissue of a society,”

©2000, Piotr Sztompka: The Other Face of Social Change

Some Contributing Factors: Dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric affecting a group of people that had achieved some degree of cohesion. . . will be played over and over again in individual consciousness [becoming] ingrained in collective memory,”

© 2002, Ron Eyerman, Cultural Trauma

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Two Intertwined Types of Cultural Trauma That Can Lead to Learned Helplessness

- **Historical Trauma**
- **Intergenerational Trauma**

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

- **Epigenetics**
  - The study of heritable changes that occur without changing the DNA sequence.
  - Term coined by Conrad H. Waddington in 1942
  - Consensus definition developed at a Cold Spring Harbor meeting in 2008: stably heritable phenotype resulting from changes in a chromosome without alterations to the DNA sequence.
  - Heritable traits (heredity) can be affected by environment
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma “Is a constellation of characteristics associated with cumulative group trauma across [many] generations,”
(Brave Heart, 1999).

Some Contributing Factors: Being Displaced, Exiled, Uprooted, Incarcerated . . . ACCENT is on the EMBEDDED HISTORY of a culture.

Some Examples: Trail of Tears; Slavery; The Long Walk; Holocaust
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

The Long Walk of the Navajo to Bosque Redondo

Hweeldi

Gen. James H. Carleton – 1862
Colonel Kit Carson - 1864

1863-64 Start of “forced march”
1868 Start of homeward journey; The signing of the Treaty of 1868

18 Days (duration of walk)

300 Miles over 200 Navajo died on the “Walk”; at the “reservation” 8,000-9,000 people settled in a 40 square mile tract called Bosque Redondo
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Bosque Redondo (Hweedli)

- Some Navajo managed to escape the Walk. These survived in Navajo Mountain, the Grand Canyon, Utah, or in Chiricahua Apache Territory.
- Hailed as a “miserable failure”
  - Poor planning
  - Disease
  - Crop failure and poor conditions for agriculture
  - Trying to convert people’s way of life: Navajos were not farmers. The government felt that making them into farmers would subdue them.
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

- The Long Walk of the Navajo (Hweeldi)
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

- Cherokee Trail of Tears – nu na da ul tsun yi
  - DATE: 1838
  - CAUSE: Indian Removal Act of 1830 signed by and supported by President Andrew Jackson
  - PURPOSE: To clear former Native Americans (Cherokee) lands for white settlement and the gold “rush” in Georgia.
  - STATISTICS:
    - NUMBER forced to relocate: >16,000
    - who died along the way– 2000-6000
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

The Cherokee Trail of Tears
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Reflection - Written by a Navajo in 1865

“Cage the badger and he will try to break away from his prison and regain his native hole. Chain the eagle to the ground – he will strive to gain his freedom, and though he fails, he will lift his head and look up at the sky which is home – and we want to return to our mountains and plains, where we used to plant corn, wheat and beans.”
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational Trauma is a “cumulative and psychological wounding across generations resulting from massive tragedies,” (Archibald, 2006).

Some Contributing Factors: Changes in Family Dynamics; ACCENT is on passing down trauma from GENERATION TO GENERATION.

Examples: Family members can still feel repercussions generations later; Generations passing down Child Abuse; Substance Abuse; Domestic Violence.

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

What do these Cultural Trauma Types Have to do with Stigma?

- **Historical Trauma and Stigma?**

- **Intergenerational Trauma and Stigma?**

- **So, Is Cultural Trauma Stigmatizing or Vice Versa?**
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Where do Cultural Trauma, Learned Helplessness, and Stigma Intersect?

-Sometimes Suggested: Cultures Need to Raise Profile of their Suffering, so They Can Get Help.

-However, Concerns: “Raising Profile of Suffering Perpetuates Stereotypes, such that [Indigenous] Peoples are Considered Drains on the Health Care System,”

Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Let’s Look at Native American Traditional Culture today, for example:

- *Events (e.g., Dancing) can be Sacred or Social, or a Mixture of Both;*

- *Elders hold a High Position for Wisdom, Knowledge, Oral History;*

- *Spiritual Leaders Men or Women Ceremonial Leaders &/or Healers;*

- *Deep Respect for the Stages of Life and Death.*
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Let’s Look at Hispanic/Latino Traditional Culture, for example:

- **Strong Family Values toward Nuclear and Extended Members**;
- **Respect Shown as Self Worth, & to Others, Community, Elders**;
- **Politeness over Assertiveness, Confrontation, Direct Criticism**;
- **Family Hierarchy such that**:
  - **Father is Gallant, Honor Protector**
  - **Mother is Obedient, Spiritual Advisor**.

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
HOPE AND CHANGE

- Hope is necessary for those who struggle in the face of adversity.
- We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.
- Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness.
- Optimism is faith leading to achievement.
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

As Practitioners in the Behavioral Health field:

✓ Do We Believe that Hope is Possible?
  ✓ Do We Believe that Change is Possible?

✓ Do We Believe that Recovery is Possible?

*****

✓ Is Being Hopeless the Same as Being Helpless?
  ✓ How Can We Instill Hope in Another?

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

HOW MAY WE HELP OTHERS INSTILL HOPE?

✓ Later Research (1990s) by Martin Seligman . . .

✓ Studies Show Affirmations / Positive Self Talk May Create Hope and Healthy Optimism.

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Learned Helplessness

- Blames self when things go wrong
- Sees failure as evidence of worthlessness
- Devalues attributes and accomplishments
- Focuses on weakness and mistakes
- Loses motivation in the face of obstacles
- Increases stress and avoidance
- Feels overwhelmed and shut down
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Learned Optimism

✓ Sees bad events as unlucky, unfortunate
✓ Sees failure as part of life
✓ Gives credit for attributes and accomplishments
✓ Focuses on strengths
✓ Maintains motivation to overcome obstacles
✓ Uses stress to push towards goals
✓ Works harder to find a solution
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Ichabod the Optimistic Canine

Life is Good!

Luck of the Stroll

Oops, this is unfortunate...

Naptime I suppose.

© Ayla Stardragon 2014
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Example of Pessimist Belief:

Winning a game of racquetball: “Today was just my lucky day.” [Temporary, Not Permanent]

Getting a promotion: “I worked hard on that project.” [Specific, Not Pervasive]

Getting an “A” on a paper: “The teacher was being lenient.” [Personal; External]
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Example of Optimist Belief:

Winning a game:
“I play racquetball well.” [Permanent; Positive]

Getting a promotion:
“I am a valuable employee.” [Pervasive; Universal]

Getting an “A” on a paper:
“I did a good job on it.” [Personal; Internal]
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

1. Learners will increase knowledge of learned helplessness and its debilitating effects;

2. Learners will increase knowledge of cultural dynamics leading to learned helplessness;

3. Learners will be provided antidotes to combat learned helplessness

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency
Intercultural Dynamics: Fostering Change

Thank You!

Contact:
Charlotte. Webb@azpsa.org
Suzanne. Brown@azpsa.org

2255 Northern Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85021
602/995-1767

© 2018 PSA Behavioral Health Agency