

Review of: "Viewing trauma as a developmental process emerging from chronic repeated experience and reiterated meaning-making mental processes"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review of Tronick and Hunter: *Viewing trauma as a developmental process emerging from chronic repeated experience and reiterated meaning-making mental processes*.

General comments:

While I agree with the authors' general position, they do not argue it well, or even properly.

1. This is not an original scientific study. It is opinion, and should be marked as such.
2. It is far too long for the informational content. It needs severe pruning by at least one third. Note Edgar Doctorow's comments on Arthur Miller's plays: "They read well. The elegance of their construction – in the logician's meaning of elegance as the exclusion of the inessential – can be appreciated" *Creationists*, p127. "exclusion of the inessential" Just so.

Specific comments:

3. Constantly makes vast, sweeping statements that require solid justification if they wish to move from opinion to a scientific statement, e.g. Intro, p2: "...a biological view of humans (any organism) as a dynamic, open system that must apprehend (appropriate) environmental resources – energy and information –" Do they mean reductionist biological view? If so, they exclude information: see Norbert Wiener: "The mechanical brain does not secrete thought 'as the liver does bile,' as the earlier materialists claimed, nor does it put it out in the form of energy, as the muscle puts out its activity. Information is information, not matter or energy. No materialism which does not admit this can survive at the present day." *Cybernetics* 1948.

Also: "... an infant with a low threshold for reactivity of the amygdala may find an event fear-inducing, whereas another infant with a higher threshold may hardly react at all." p3. This isn't proven, it sounds impressive but it isn't established fact.

"...new systems of meaning-making emerge, such as language and symbolic thought." Do they have a theory of language and symbolic thought? If so, I'd like to see who wrote it (because it's probably wrong). They can't just invoke such ineffably

complex matters to carry their case and assume everybody (a) knows exactly what they mean and (b) agrees with them. This definitely applies to that useless word "stress." Do they know how it entered the psychology/psychiatry literature, as an error? Years ago, I found 7 different uses of the word.

4. "It follows that we disagree with the argument made by some clinicians and researchers, and reified in some of our diagnostic manuals that specific events are inescapably traumatic." p3,

The whole case seems to be against a straw man: who actually believes that post-traumatic states can only be seen after single, massive traumatic events, or that specific events are inescapably traumatic? I don't. I spent well over 40yrs seeing military and veterans; some had experienced single, traumatic events, the great majority hadn't. I've seen hundreds of people who experienced childhood sexual abuse. It NEVER happens just once. And it is almost never isolated: it is part of a pattern of family/social breakdown. So if they want to argue against the "single traumatic event hypothesis," they need to provide citations showing that is just what the expression "post-traumatic" means and implies. DSM5 (p271) specifically states "1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s)...." Plural. Anyway, about one third of people say it wasn't such a big deal (Lukianowicz, *Brit J Psychiat*, 1956 or so).

5. Too much reliance on unproven associations from the scientific literature. e.g. "Epigenetic changes... likely contribute to persistent changes in cognitive flexibility, threat assessment, and reward systems..." This is at the level of supposition, nobody has the faintest clue how the brain generates the experience of thought or emotions, so all talk of epigenetic influences is little better than clang association. Don't talk about mitochondria, again, this is pure supposition. The bit about type 2 diabetes is fanciful, the association is actually via obesity.

6. They can't invoke "conditioning" (p5) without locating it in a valid science of mental life. As far as I'm aware, conditioning and language, for example, were shot down by Chomsky in about 1959.

That will do. It happens that I agree with them and have often raised the question of whether we should see all adult mental disorder as the reaction to early life experiences, but Freud said that a hundred years before I did. However, this paper doesn't prove the point. It needs to be totally reworked before it can be part of the scientific literature. In the alternative, it could be published as it is but only after the word "OPINION" is inserted before the word "Viewing..." in the title. And get rid of the stupid picture. Is this science or is it pop psychology?