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Integrated Treatment for Eating Disorders:
Trauma and Eating Disorders
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Speakers

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Title: Addressing Trauma-Based Schemas, Shame and Projections in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

Bio: Dr. Linda Buchanan founded the Atlanta Center for Eating Disorders (ACE) in 1993 and serves as co-clinical director. ACE offers Intensive Outpatient and Day Treatment Center in three locations in metro Atlanta.. Dr. Buchanan received a Masters degree in Counseling from Georgia State University, and her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Georgia State University. She has published two chapters on her model of treatment of eating disorders which have been used as texts in local doctoral programs for Clinical Psychology students. Additionally, she has published four research articles on the treatment of eating disorders including two outcome studies of the treatment provided at ACE. She has been married for 30 years and is the mother of two teenaged boys.

Abstract: Individuals who have experienced trauma generally develop schemas (beliefs, narratives, or scripts) as a direct result of the trauma. These schemas include identity-based introjections such as “I am bad” or “I am worthless” and schemas related to beliefs about others such as “People will hurt me” or “No one will help me”. Additionally, the traumatic experiences and the associated scripts often make it difficult for the individual to differentiate the emotional states of toxic shame, healthy guilt and remorse.

Although these schemas often initially serve as a protective mechanism, over time they may become cognitively rigid and detrimental to recovering from the trauma sufficiently to lead a satisfying life. Particularly of interest in treating individuals with eating disorders is the direct impact that these schemas, narratives and projections may have on the treatment. Potential impact is implied in the specific beliefs embedded in the schemas, making an identification of these schemas vital in the early phases of treatment. Without a thorough assessment, therapists are vulnerable to prematurely discount the schemas, be the target of them, or unknowingly participate with the schemas.

Participating in clients' schemas can take many forms. The most common is to prematurely counter the schemas without fully understanding the function and basis of these. Such as simplistically trying to convince a patient that he or she is not bad. Another possible participation occurs when a schema is serving a function that the client is convinced is still needed such as keeping them safe from others. Therapists may try to convince the patient that he or she is in a safe environment (in therapy) when it is the internal environment of the client that is actually making him or her feel unsafe. Another form of participation occurs when the client projects their schema onto the therapist who is seen as uncaring, too busy, judgmental, etc. Similarly, a client may complain to the therapist about another person and the therapist may take the clients' side in what is actually a shame-based projection in which the incident is distorted in the clients' mind. In these situations, since it is nearly impossible to know if the client's interpretation is accurate or the result of a shame-based projection, the therapist will be most effective when utilizing skills promoting a sense of being on the client's side without taking the client's side.

Participants in this workshop will learn strategies for helping their clients understand how shame-based schemas are formed and how to identify their specific shame-based schemas or scripts. Additionally, participants will increase their skills in side-stepping the potential forms of participating in schemas. They will learn a model for helping clients differentiate toxic shame from healthy guilt and regret. Finally, they will learn specific strategies based on Mindfulness skills and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to enable clients to acknowledge schemas, identify their emotional states, and expand their awareness of when a shame-based script is operating.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Help their clients understand and identify trauma-based schemas and projections while avoiding participating in the schemas or being the object of the projections.

2) Utilize Strategies from Mindfulness skills and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to enable clients to expand awareness and narratives related to trauma-based schemas.

3) Utilize a model for differentiating between the emotional states of Toxic Shame, Guilt and Regret.