

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Presented by Dr. Theresa Burke

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1. Eating disorders as symptoms of other emotional issues
  - a. Binds anxiety
  - b. Can become traumatic reenactment of abortion
2. 43% of women are post abortive by age 45
3. 50% hide abortion from researchers, family and friends.
4. Post Abortion Reactions- There is an extensive continuum of symptoms
  - a. Some individuals exhibit all the symptoms, others just a few, there may also be a delayed onset.
  - b. Symptoms may appear immediately after the abortion or years later.
5. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - a. PTSD is a psychological disorder which results from a traumatic experience that overwhelms a person's normal defense mechanisms.
  - b. Symptoms may include numbness, irritability, guilt, memory impairment, trouble concentrating, difficulty relating emotionally to others
6. Traumatic event defined by DSM IV as:
  - a. Any event in which one witnesses or experiences actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of self or another.
  - b. The shock is so great that a person's defenses become disorganized and disconnected from reality temporarily or for prolonged, indefinite periods of time.
  - c. Accompanied by fear, horror, and/or helplessness.
7. Clinical Diagnosis of PTSD requires identification of symptoms in three categories: hyper arousal, intrusion, constriction
  - a. Hyper arousal- panic/anxiety symptoms not associated with a specific stimulus
    - i. A few symptoms include shortness of breath, heart palpitations, feelings of disembodiment, and nausea.
      1. Symptoms often mistake for other medical problems
8. Psycho-physiological reenactment: the body reenacts sensations of trauma.
9. Etiology- beginning/origin and connectors/triggers to grief
  - a. Music or weather
  - b. Pregnant women or children
  - c. Death of family member or even pets
  - d. Anniversaries of trauma and holidays
10. Intrusion- re-experience of traumatic event in one of many ways. This is a second category for diagnosis PTSD.
  - a. Symptoms include: flashbacks, nightmares, repeat pregnancies, intrusive thoughts, and obsessions.
11. Clinical Diagnosis: three main categories continued
  - a. Constriction: the numbing of one's emotions or behaviors designed to avoid sights, sounds, smells or feelings associated with the trauma (marked by feelings of helplessness).
  - b. Symptoms include drug/alcohol abuse, avoidance of "reminders," withdraw from relationships, restricted affect, suicidal ideation.
12. The individual has the desire to both deal with and constrict memories.
  - a. Hyper arousal: very high levels of emotion
  - b. Constriction: numbing of emotions

- c. Approach/ avoidance conflict develops out of this struggle

13. *With Child* by Phyllis Chesler

- a. Phyllis Chesler is a feminist author and cofounder of The Association for Women in Psychology.
- b. The book is the autobiographical account of the only pregnancy Chesler carried to term; four previous pregnancies had ended in abortion.

14. History of Trauma

- a. Sigmund Freud: studied “hysterical” women. Most had a history of sexual abuse, common at that time as women were viewed as property. Freud abandoned the study of trauma and developed psychoanalysis instead.
- b. Trauma in soldiers: Soldiers returning home from war with symptoms of trauma were not politically or socially accepted. It was not until Vietnam vets gathered in coalitions of support with each other that they were able to bring attention to PTSD as a diagnosable trauma.

15. Trauma’s impact on memory

- a. Hypernesia: ability to remember every detail; sharp vivid recall; extremely intrusive memories of trauma.
- b. Amnesia: pathological memory loss; experience becomes completely inaccessible; individual unable to recall events within a set period of time; powerful desire to forget; selective amnesia.
- c. Disassociation: ability to “blank out” on cue; feeling of floating over one’s own body; split between conscious, identity and behavior.

## **Traumatic Reenactment**

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1. Traumatic reenactment

- a. Created to gain mastery over traumatic event.
- b. One creates traumatic conflict in order to achieve a more acceptable outcome; trying to “get it right.”
- c. Repetitious behavior is a means to release trauma related tension.

2. The actions that provoke similar feelings and thought which accompany the trauma include:

- a. Helplessness
- b. Grief
- c. Abandonment
- d. Anger
- e. Terror
- f. Humiliation/shame

3. The trauma keeps the person locked into a particular conflict and they continue to engage with the same struggle over and over again.

4. Trauma must be worked through, some will attempt to do so by unconsciously recreating situations which resemble some aspect of the trauma.

5. Principle repetitions include

- a. Dreams which repeat themselves
- b. Fantasies
- c. Repeated visualizations and intrusive thoughts

6. Re-enactment involves post traumatic perceptions and memories.

7. Signs of psychic trauma
  - a. Repetition
  - b. Avoidance
  - c. Hyper Alertness
8. Repetition (or re-enactment) is the most obvious indicator of trauma and the most reliable demonstration that trauma has occurred.
9. Return of trauma related feelings
  - a. Complaints regarding sexual intercourse
  - b. Painful abdominal sensations/cramps
  - c. Stomach discomfort
  - d. Pelvic pain
  - e. Vaginal numbness
10. Avoidance vs. preoccupation with traumatic event
  - a. When grief is inhibited some women develop an obsession with some particular issue related to pregnancy or abortion, or they avoid ever becoming pregnant again.
11. Multiple abortions as a form of traumatic re-enactment.
  - a. 46% of abortions annually are repeat abortions.
  - b. Women will persist in their repetitive behavior- as if locked in the trauma, becoming pregnant again and again with an unconscious desire to complete the trauma.
  - c. Repeat abortions are based upon unconscious psychological repetitions of the original trauma.
    - i. The re-enactment can become addictive and require psychotherapy. Traumatized people can become addicted to crisis behavior.
  - d. Masochism or self-punishment has been identified as a factor in some repeat abortions.
12. Eating Disorders as a symptom of inner conflict, are just one way that painful feelings may be re-channeled into another direction, always attempting to find expression.
  - a. Food can be used to symbolically swallow a feeling, regurgitate its toxicity, or purge an aversion.
  - b. A traumatized woman will recreate an emotion or regenerate a sensation within her body.
  - c. The repeated bodily sensations mimic the physical sensations that originally were associated with the trauma.
  - d. Vomiting may be a way to evacuate anger and rage, or rejection.
  - e. Some women may become stuck in patterns of repetition of the helpless emotional state which accompanied their trauma (abortion), recreating the feeling in an addictive trauma driven pattern (eating disorder).
13. The Adrenaline fix
  - a. A common symptom of trauma is the creation of crisis, which releases adrenaline and self medicates feelings of grief, loss and depression.
    - i. Crisis = any situation that evokes tension or stress.
  - b. The body releases adrenaline during crisis which temporarily relieves symptoms of depression.
  - c. Focus on crisis keeps focus off self-examination and grief work.
14. Suicidal impulses can also result from years of depression, repressed grief and feelings of self-hatred.
  - a. Statistically high correlation between suicide and abortion.