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## THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON SELF STORIES

1. People subjected to traumatic events often perceive themselves as controlled by some external force or person. They believe they have little ability to impact their circumstances.
2. When this experience of helplessness and powerlessness becomes part of the conversations that are internalized about self, people begin to experience less and less agency in circumstances outside of the traumatic event.
3. People who have experienced trauma may internalize stories that disqualify themselves and their experiences.
  - a. These stories create an **"abuse dominated lens"** which only allows the person to notice information that reinforces a view of self as powerless. They fail to notice or ascribe meaning to those lived experiences where they behaved in a competent manner or where others treated them as a person of worth.
  - b. The stories invite the person to participate in interpersonal patterns that have the effect of isolating them from the experiences of other people and the experiences that other people have of them.
  - c. Access to alternative knowledge derived from lived experience is limited by inner dialogues that disqualify self-knowledge. These disqualifying inner conversations can contribute to self-pathologizing behaviors that invite further disqualification from others.
4. The **disqualifying conversations** internalized by persons who have experienced trauma allow little opportunity for **dialogue or reflection**.
  - a. People who have internalized disqualifying conversations view knowledge, including self-knowledge, as being outside of themselves and coming from those in authority.
  - b. Their internal conversations often take the form of monologues that isolate the persons from alternative knowledges that might challenge disempowering stories about self.
  - c. When people notice the discrepancy between their experiences and the dominant story, the disqualifying inner dialogues may invite them to pathologize themselves.

## EXTERNALIZING DISQUALIFYING SELF-STORIES

1. Developed by Michael White, externalizing the problem involves locating the problem outside of the person.
2. The process of separating the person from the problem creates space for persons who have experienced trauma to begin to access **self-knowledge** and give voice to their own experiences.
3. Questions are asked about lived experience that help people become aware of how they participate in disqualifying self stories.
4. This examination of experience promotes the **experience of choice**. The person discovers that he or she can: (a) choose to continue to participate in inner dialogues and interpersonal patterns that maintain the experience of disqualification; or (b) choose to interact in more self validating ways.

## INTERNALIZING PREFERRED STORIES

1. People begin to escape from a view of the problem as caused by some personal defect and come to view the problem as a consequence of their experiences of oppression and disqualification.
2. Questions are asked that help people recognize exceptions to the problem as examples of protest that have been disqualified in the past. This new reading of events promotes the experience of **agency**.
3. Agency continues to evolve as the person begins to consider **alternative knowledges** that contradict the disqualifying story.
  - a. **Information about other people's experiences** has the effect of challenging specifications and the pathologizing self-stories that can result from comparing one's self to those specifications.
  - b. **Unique Outcomes** - Examples of competence from the person's lived experience.
  - c. The person's **experience of others who refuse to participate in the disqualifying story**.
4. The **preferred story** begins to emerge as the person develops the ability to take a **self-observing or reflexive perspective**.
  - a. Questions that **collapse time** help the person observe progress. People are invited to notice their evolving competence by comparing how they are reacting to situations in the present to how they responded to similar situations in the distant and/or recent past.
  - b. Reflection is facilitated by questions that inquire about the "fit" between beliefs, expectations, interactions and the person's own experiences.

## INTERNALIZING PREFERRED STORIES - cont.

5. The person's sense of agency is extended when questions are asked that invite them to **revise their relationship with themselves**.
  - a. Questions are asked that invite the person to develop a new story about self that takes into account the competencies they are discovering.
  - b. The person is invited to redescribe his/her story about self by questions that ask him/her to speculate about what qualities others have noticed that would have led them to predict current accomplishments.
  - c. Self-acceptance is encouraged by questions that locate exceptions to the disempowering story in the person's **own internal experience**, such as times when the person was able to stand apart from the story of disqualification and recognize their competence.
  - d. **Compassion for oneself** can be encouraged by asking the person to assume the perspective he or she might have had as a child and commenting on those qualities he/she would appreciate about the adult.

## EXPANDING THE PREFERRED STORY

1. Questions about the future help people become aware of their ability to use self-knowledge to influence the direction of their lives.
  - a. Questions that **collapse time forward** invite the person to speculate about how he or she will handle similar situations in the future.
  - b. Questions that invite the person to consider the **possibilities** that are available to them now that they have escaped the effects of trauma extend the experience of agency.
2. **Relapses** are storied in a manner that punctuates the person's emerging agency. The person is encouraged to understand relapse as an opportunity to develop a better understanding of ways to challenge the restraints that contribute to the disempowering story.
3. Questions are asked that encourage the person to **recognize and celebrate small steps** that take them in the direction of the preferred story. More elaborate celebrations can be planned and rituals can be developed that mark transitions.
4. The preferred story is strengthened when the person shares his/her **new view of self with others** and develops new relationships with people who interact with the person in an empowering manner.

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