

Healing from Trauma and Rewiring the Brains

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Abstract

Traumatic stressors, including early trauma, engender post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Indeed, stress culminating from traumatic occurrences precipitates a plethora of physiopathological and psycho-emotional outcomes (Iribarren, Prolo, Neagos, & Chiappelli, 2005). Traumatic stress variously affects brain structure and function (Bremner, 2006). The brain areas implicated with trauma include the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex; these regions play a central role in stress response. Preclinical studies reveal that trauma disproportionately impacts the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex, which perform vital functions in memory, reinforcing the robust association between memory and trauma response (Bremner, 2006). Studies show that PTSD alters the three brain areas (Bremner, 2006). Since treatments for curing PTSD promote neurogenesis, foster memory, and augment hippocampal volume, they can help rewire the brain following a traumatic incident.

Moreover, individuals with traumatic childhood experiences develop personality disorders in adulthood, with their hallmark entailing rigid, negative behavior patterns. Research shows that specific interventions leveraging neuroplasticity can alter those comportments and increase behavior adaptability and flexibility (Williams-Carter, n.d.). Deploying the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which encompasses psychoeducation, exposure, and relaxation and affective modulation skills, can help rewire the brain. Specifically, CBT may correct severe behavior problems in individuals with past trauma experiences (Dorsey, Briggs, & Woods, 2011; Watkins, Sprang, & Rothbaum, 2018). Leveraging virtue, mindfulness or concentration, and wisdom—the three pillars of Buddhist practice—can assist with rewiring the brain. Three fundamental functions of the brain—learning, regulation, and selection—reinforce mindfulness, virtue, and wisdom (Hanson, 2009). Enhancing control, selection, and learning can help rewire the brain by facilitating the development of virtue, concentration, and wisdom (Hanson, 2009). Moreover, social support can aid individuals in rewiring their brains via adaptation—trauma is a variation in brain structure and functioning (Van der Kolk). In this respect, social support assists individuals in developing a sense of community and strong affiliations with their feelings and sensations (Van der Kolk, 2015). Eventually, social support can facilitate the rewiring of a traumatized brain.



Biography:

Wendy Burton Corrales completed her Master's degree in Counseling from the University of Arizona. She is a highly trained and experienced clinician at Cottonwood de Tucson treating mental health and substance use disorders. Wendy uses the latest research on the neurobiology of human development and the neuroscience of addiction and mood disorders to provide cutting-edge, patient-responsive treatment. Her philosophy of treating the whole person – body, mind, emotions and spirit, and helping her patients in establishing renewed health, a greater sense of wellness, and a spiritually-directed lifestyle adds to her ability to successfully treat mental health issues in adults and adolescents.

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