

Annie Hightower

Hightower Consulting, LLC

November 2, 2021

TRAUMA AND PEOPLE- CENTERED INVESTIGATIONS



UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

What is Trauma?

- According to the APA:
 - Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event* like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical.
 - Longer term *normal* reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

What is Trauma?

- Psychological trauma includes:
 - Intense fear
 - Helplessness
 - Loss of control
 - Threat of death or harm
- Based on perception
 - Ability to respond is overwhelmed
 - Different people react differently

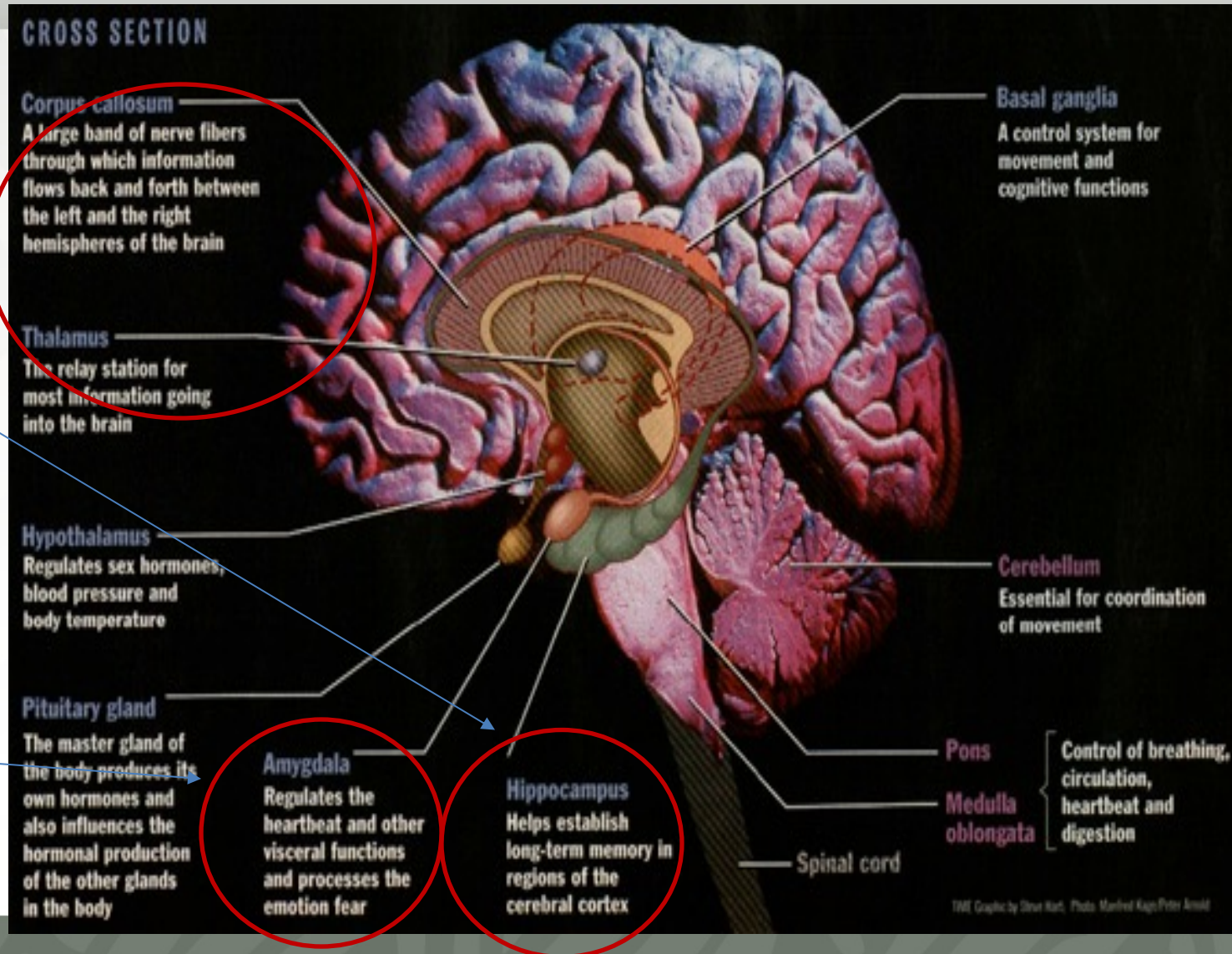
Trauma

- Body's normal response to an abnormal situation
 - Not a sign of a mental health problem
- May create profound and lasting changes in a person's emotion, cognition, levels of arousal and memory

Trauma

- May be chronic
 - If a party has a history of trauma, their experience of the event and/or the investigation process may be complicated or unexpected

Trauma and the Brain

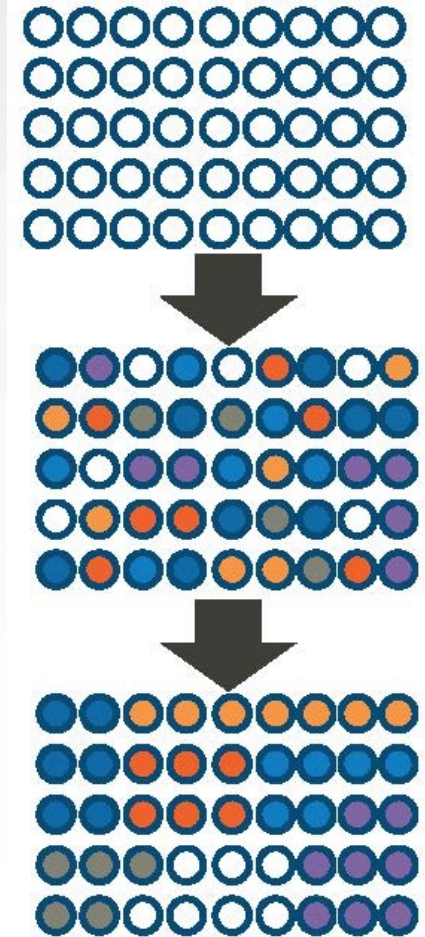


Thinking
Planning, problem
Solving, organization

Doing
Identify threats

Memory and Trauma

- **Hippocampus** processes information into memories
- Encoding = Organizing **sensory** information
- Consolidation = Grouping information into memories and storing them
- **Amygdala** specializes in the processing of emotional memories (works with the hippocampus)
- **Both structures are VERY sensitive to hormonal fluctuations**



Life Happens



Encoding

Your brain groups sensory information



Consolidation

And then it makes and stores memories



This is what many investigators expect to get during investigation interviews

Hormones

But remember the hippocampus and amygdala are VERY sensitive to hormone fluctuations

This may impact memory creation and storage, and how a person acts during an incident and even a later interview

Hormone Flood

Catecholamines
Increase

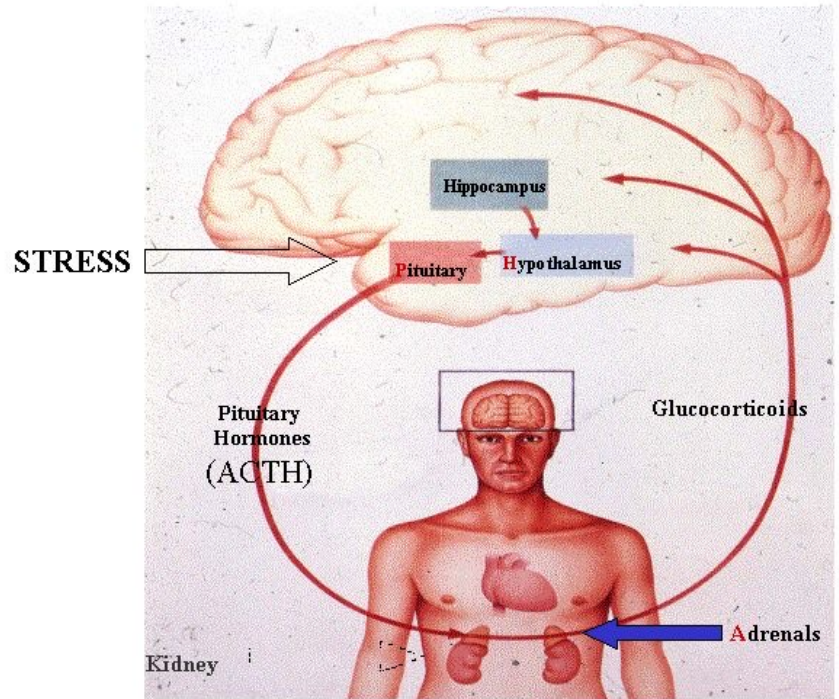
- Impairs rational thought

Opioids Increase

- Causes flat affect

Corticosteroids
Decrease

- Reduces energy



How hormones impact encoding and consolidation



All the pieces are there!



This is what you may get during one or more interviews

Caveats



Why?

Alcohol or drugs



Trauma and Cognition

- Trauma may impact information stored about a particular incident and how either party responds during an investigation.
- Based on what you've learned so far, how do you think trauma experienced by either party may impact an investigation?



**TAKING A PERSON-CENTERED
APPROACH TO
INVESTIGATIONS**

Person-Centered Investigations

- Are committed to preventing unnecessary harm
- Recognize that behaviors and responses during investigations may be related to trauma
- Take into consideration the power dynamics and prior experience in investigation mapping and questioning

People-Centered Investigations

- Reduce the impact of trauma, avoid triggers, and create an environment in which parties feel comfortable talking to you
- Are thoughtful in how they approach questioning and create the relationship and environment necessary to support full disclosure and cooperation of interviewees

Breakout groups: People-Centered Investigations

- Based on what you've learned so far, what are ways you think you can make your investigation questioning more people-centered?
- Things to consider:
 - Environment
 - Building rapport
 - Pace of interview
 - Avoiding appearance of bias in questioning

People-Centered Interviews

- Logistics? Environment and timing.
- Build rapport!
- Active listening and following pace of individuals:
 - Plan to take some time – let people tell their experience how they want to
 - You can fill in the gaps later
 - Allow time to think – be okay with pauses

People-Centered Questioning

- Asks relevant questions in a way most likely to illicit a full response
 - Ask one question at a time without prompts
 - Avoid asking “Why” or “What”
- For sensitive questions or questions that may be perceived as biased – consider whether it is relevant and if so, provide context
 - Clothes, alcohol, etc.

People-Centered Questioning

- People centered questioning involves:
 - Understanding your policy
 - Understanding or recognizing the needs of the parties
 - Mapping your questions ahead of time and determining when additional explanation or discussion may be necessary

Questions?

Annie Hightower
Hightower Consulting, LLC
Hightowerconsultingllc@gmail.com

