

Kinsey Institute

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Exploring love, sexuality, and well-being

January 24, 2018

Dear Clinician,

I am writing to announce the establishment of the Traumatic Stress Research Consortium in the Kinsey Institute and to invite you to be an active participant in our research mission. The Kinsey Institute has a distinguished history of innovative research investigating human sexuality and relationships. Consistent with this history, the Kinsey Institute is now expanding its research focus to study the effects of traumatic stress on human sexuality, health, and relationships. Currently, our understanding of the consequences of trauma is limited by our knowledge of the experiences of survivors. In studying trauma, scientists have been far more constrained than clinicians. Scientists have limited opportunity to engage directly in research with survivors, while trauma therapists are immersed in the experiences of their clients. As a trauma therapist, you have been privileged to learn from your clients and to observe their courageous attempts to deal with the disruptive impact of trauma on mental health, physical health, relationships, and sexuality.

During the past two decades I have been fortunate to be welcomed into the community of trauma therapists. Through frequent interactions with passionate clinicians and often with survivors of trauma I have gained tremendous respect for the clinicians and their clients, who work heroically as a team to restore feelings of safety in their clients. As a scientist, I know that laboratory studies are not sufficient to understand the personal trajectories of trauma survivors. Thus, we have attempted to conceptualize a research model to document what clinicians know and what trauma survivors have experienced.

We have been working on how science can be helpful in understanding the mechanisms disrupted by trauma and in providing a guide to therapists that would support an optimistic narrative for survivors. The establishment of the Consortium is an attempt to bridge the academic-scientific community with the knowledge obtained by clinicians and experienced by survivors of trauma. The goal of the Consortium is to engage trauma therapists and their clients to document the personal trajectory of survivors, to understand the effectiveness of treatments, and to further understand the consequence of trauma on health, neurophysiological, psychological, and psychosocial mechanisms. This information will inform both researchers and clinicians to develop and implement more effective and efficient treatment models.

The mission and goals of the Consortium are consistent with the objectives of the Kinsey Institute. Since its founding in 1947, the Kinsey Institute, located on the campus of Indiana University, has been at the forefront of the scientific study of human sexuality and the advancement of sexual health and knowledge worldwide. In the 70 years since the establishment of the Institute, there has been a growing awareness that abuse, neglect, and trauma negatively impact health and social relationships including human sexuality. As we evaluate current social issues, sexual harassment and violence, bullying, and other forms of abuse are being

acknowledged. However, the consequences of these disruptive experiences are still not part of public awareness.

Through the Consortium, an international and interdisciplinary group of clinicians and scientists will examine the neurophysiological, psychological, developmental, and social processes through which trauma disrupts and compromises the human experience. The focus of the research is to examine the disruptive impact of trauma on the nervous system and look through the lens of brain-body functions at the clinical issues that bring clients to treatment. The goals are to: 1) document the consequences of trauma on health, sexuality, and psychosocial processes; 2) understand the neurophysiological mechanisms that are disrupted by trauma; 3) provide insights and tools for clinicians and clients; and 4) assess the effectiveness of interventions.

To achieve these goals, we are assembling a worldwide group of approximately 1000 clinicians who specialize in working with trauma and will identify clients from their clinical caseloads to participate in Consortium studies. We are interested in learning about the experiences of trauma survivors and also of the clinicians who work with them. Information will be collected through use of a secure Internet portal. Demographic information and standardized questionnaires comprise one part of the data collection. Surveys used will include questions about childhood trauma, life events, physical pain, sexual satisfaction, body awareness, and autonomic nervous system reactivity. As the Consortium is established, we will pilot and implement new innovative means of collecting physiological indices through the Internet. New technologies are being developed in the Consortium laboratories to use noncontact devices such as webcams and microphones to measure nervous system function. As the Consortium develops we will be collaborating with affiliate clinics to create remote laboratories that will have the capabilities to transmit physiological indices through voice and video channels to the Consortium research team. This innovative strategy will enable us to blend psychophysiological research technologies, formerly only available in research institutions, with survey research requiring only a personal computer and an Internet connection.

As a clinician associated with the Consortium, you will be asked to recruit clients for research protocols. You will be asked to discuss with them the value of learning from their experiences and risks and benefits of participating in the project. Trauma survivors often feel alone in their experience – uniquely affected and isolated from the people around them who they perceive as ‘normal.’ Through participating in this research study, clients have a way to share the personal response patterns that have been created from their trauma histories. Through the Internet portal, they have an opportunity to communicate their experience and have their story heard through the language of the nervous system. At the same time, clients can also feel connected to a community of thousands of trauma survivors taking part in this project. Their participation is an important contribution to the body of knowledge about trauma and a valuable source of information about both the long-term effects of trauma and the development of resilience. Their courage to participate in this project, and to identify themselves as part of a worldwide group of survivors, will provide data that ultimately will lead to more effective treatment.

We estimate that it will take at least an hour for each of your clients to go through the surveys and measurements. The research design requires that once clients start the process, they complete it without logging out. Most initial studies will require filling out questionnaires. However, we will be developing a few affiliate laboratories in which physiological measures will be obtained. As our technologies develop additional laboratories will be engaged as remote sites

for physiological monitoring.

Clients will be asked to reflect on their trauma histories and the impact to their daily living experiences. We recognize this is a challenging request and are relying on your clinical skills and the therapeutic relationships you have built with your clients to make participation a positive experience as their journey is witnessed. Some clients may be comfortable working on their own, accessing the Internet portal independently. Other clients may need support to be successful. For these clients, you might choose to schedule a session or have a space available in your office setting to offer a safe and supportive environment for them to complete the process.

A second objective of the research project is focused on learning more about clinicians who choose to work with trauma. As a participating clinician, you will be asked to complete many of the same questionnaires found in the client section, along with surveys specific to the experience of engaging in clinical work with trauma survivors. The reflective process may touch vulnerabilities and the self-care surveys may bring uncomfortable awareness to your work-life balance. We encourage you to set aside time and find the support you need to feel comfortable in the process.

The research will respect the sensitive nature of the information we are collecting and no identifying features of the participants (i.e., clients and therapists) will be collected. Thus, all participants will be anonymous in our research database.

If you are interested in joining the Traumatic Stress Research Consortium as a participating clinician and becoming a part of this important research project, please email trauma@indiana.edu.

Once you contact the Consortium via email, our Consortium coordinator, Deb Dana, will contact you and provide additional instructions.

I am looking forward to a fruitful collaboration with you as we work together to optimize the experiences of the heroic survivors of trauma.

Best regards,



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