

Religious Trauma

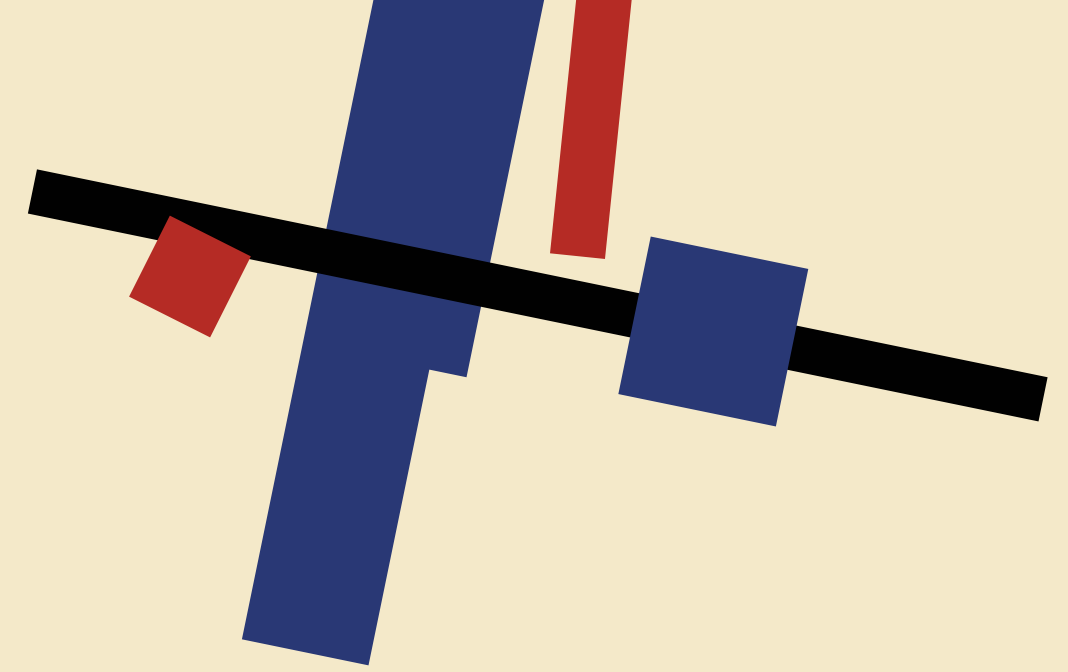
“A look into the research on religious trauma, and pathways to creating healthy and safe religious communities.”



Harbor 2023
Chais DiMaggio, M.A.C.M.

Religious Trauma

Crossing a "Bridge to uncomfortable feelings"



"Ruins, for me, are the beginning. With the debris, you can construct new ideas. They are symbols of a beginning."

~ **Anselm Kiefer**

(Lala, 2010)



Religious Trauma

Stories from members and
ex-members of faith
communities



Defining Religious Trauma

A person centered definition

Questions:



- Who decides what religious trauma is?
- Who decides if a person's distress meets the criteria of traumatic?
- Are there barriers to accepting the idea of religious trauma?

(Peterson, 2022)

Defining Religious Trauma

A person centered definition

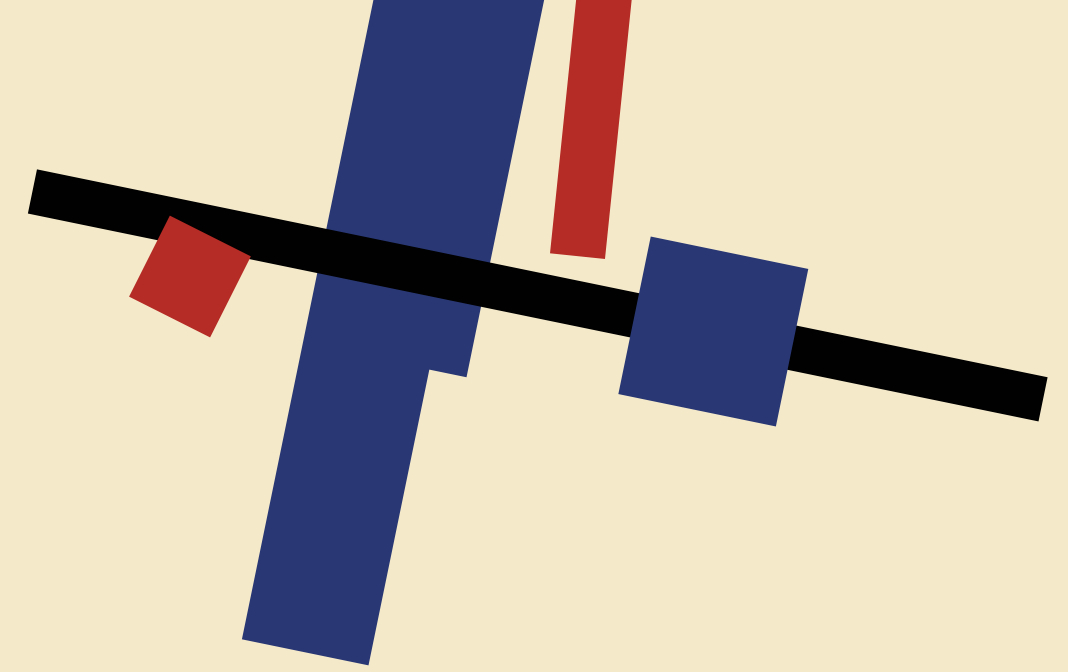
Marlene Winell's definition of Religious Trauma Syndrome

"Religious Trauma Syndrome is the condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination."

(Winell, n.d.)

Defining Religious Trauma

A person centered definition



North American Committee on Religious Trauma (NACRTR) funded by the Global Center For Religious Research

"Religious trauma results from an event, series of events, relationships, or circumstances within or connected to religious beliefs, practices, or structures that is experienced by an individual as overwhelming or disruptive and has lasting adverse effects on a person's physical, mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

(Slade, et. al., 2023, p.7)

Defining Religious Trauma

A person centered definition



Alyson Stone, in her article, article *Thou Shalt Not*: defines religious trauma as:

"...pervasive psychological damage resulting from religious messages, beliefs, and experiences."

(Stone, 2013, p.324)



Defining Religious Trauma

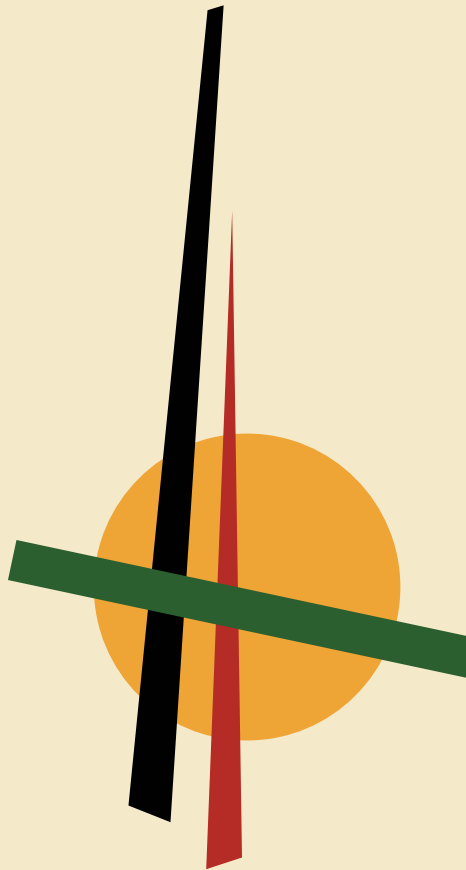
A person centered definition
Considerations:

- Depathologize the idea of trauma as you listen to a person(s) distress
- Center the person and their experience, rather than the symptoms
- Frequently it is not just a single event or story
- Trauma is not synonymous with abuse
- The same experiences may be traumatic for one person and not traumatic for someone else.



(Peterson, 2022)

(Brown, 1991)



Adverse Religious Experiences

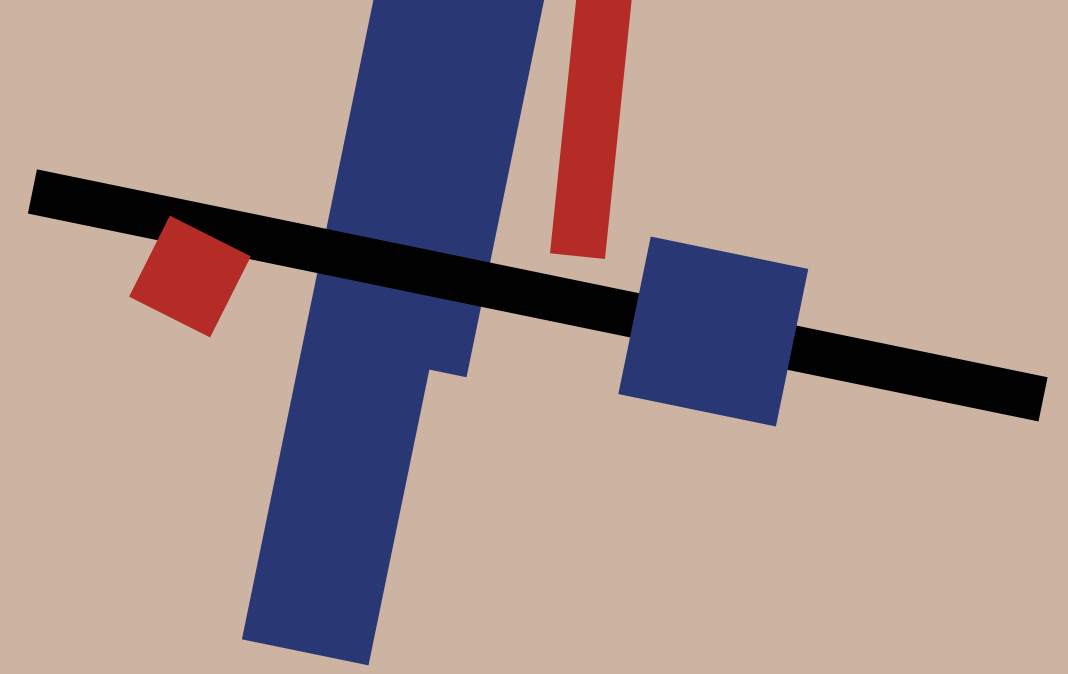
"Any experience of a religious belief, practice, or structure that undermines an individual's sense of safety or autonomy and/or negatively impacts their physical, social, emotional, relational, sexual, or psychological well being."

(Slade, et. al., 2023, p. 8).



A Look at the Research

Experiencing Religious Trauma in the U.S.



"...one third (27-33%) of U.S. adults (conservatively) have experienced religious trauma at some point in their life." According to a study by the North American Committee on Religious Trauma (NACRTR) in cooperation with Springtide Research Institute's Custom Research Division.

Conservative estimates from the same study suggest that **"10-15% of U.S. adults currently suffer from religious trauma."**

(Slade, et. al., 2023, p.)

A Look at the Research

Experiencing Religious Trauma in the U.K.

In a study of the prevalence of religious trauma and abuse in the U.K. in 2014, **"70% of survey participants [members of churches] reported feeling manipulated at church."**

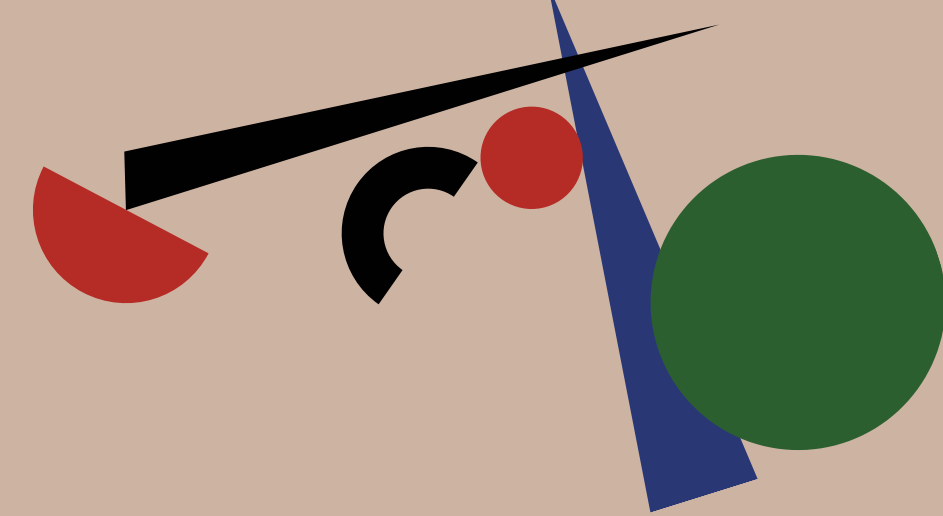
"56% claimed they didn't trust their church, but only 15% claimed they no longer trusted God."

"66% of participants expressed not knowing where to get help if they ever experienced religious trauma."

(Oakley & Kinmold, 2014)

A Look at the Research

Highlighting Populations



More research is necessary to understand intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and ability with religious trauma.

- **Indigenous children (adopted or in Foster Care)**
- **LGBTQIA+ community**
- **Nondominant racial and ethnic groups**
- **Disabled people**

- **Church members**
- **Ex-church members**
- **Pastors**
- **Clinicians (secondary exposure)**

(Landers, et. al., 2021)

(Simmons, 2017)

(Gubi & Jacobs, 2009)

A Look at the Research

Frequent Self-Identified Symptoms



**The North American
Committee on
Religious Trauma
identified 6 frequent
and chronic
symptoms.**

(Slade, et. al., 2023)

Identifying Healthy and Toxic Traits of Leadership

- Leadership Recognizes, and is sensitive to, power issues.
- Leadership accepts the individual due to intrinsic human worth
- seeks to incorporate a healthy bio/psycho/spiritual integration
- Encourages a spirituality that can be expressed uniquely by each member within the same group.
- Leadership recognizes and acknowledges their own flaws and limitations.
- Awareness of power issues but dismissed due to narcissistic rewards through symbolic authority.
- Acceptance by leadership dependent upon performance.
- A Spiritual lens that takes priority to the detriment of the other facets of our humanity.
- Spiritual needs exploited to satisfy the narcissistic needs of the leadership.
- Spirituality is narrowly built around the self-centered perspective of the leadership.
- Leadership with poor self-awareness and self-evaluation; the group becomes an extension of the leadership's narcissistic ego.

(Ward, 2011, p. 909)

Identifying Healthy and Toxic Traits of Leadership

Healthy leadership understands the immeasurable value of individuals, by supporting autonomy, encouraging curiosity, adjusting for differentials in power, and encouraging oversight.

Toxic leadership orients the life of the membership around the the leadership's needs and protects itself from oversight or negative evaluation.

(Ward, 2011, p. 909)

Questions Moving Forward

What emotional and ideological barriers exist to showing compassion to those who've experienced trauma?

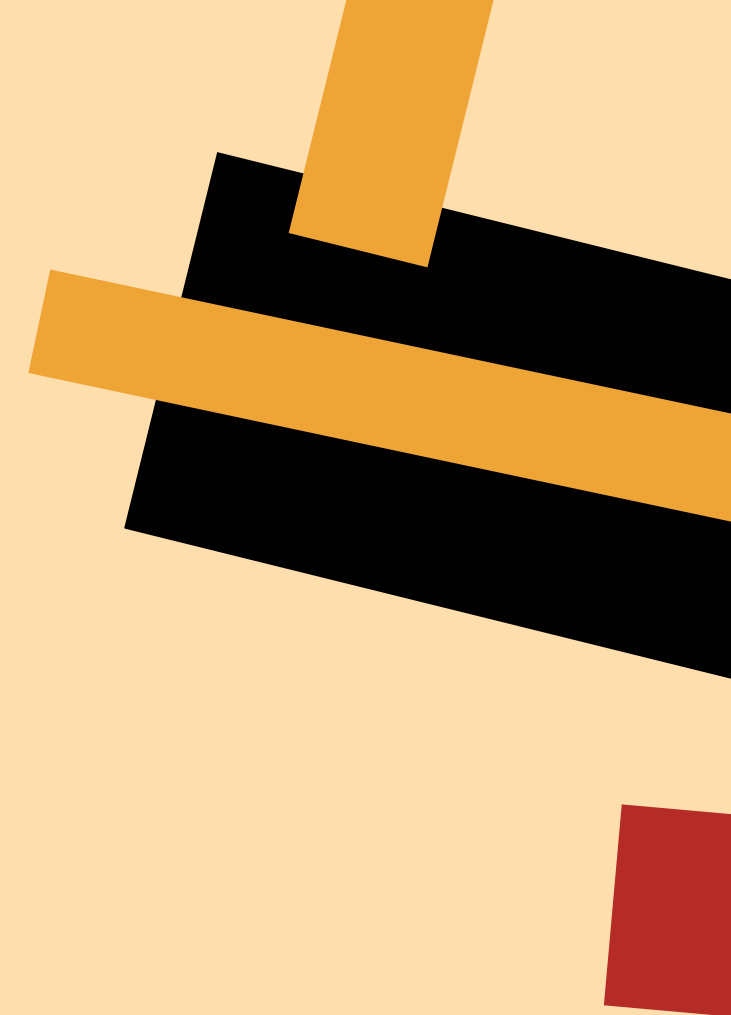
Who is vulnerable to abuse in or on the peripheral of my community?

How can I provide ongoing psychoeducation to my leadership?

What pathways are available for supporting people in distress or experiencing trauma?

Where do people go to report a situation?

What are you nurturing? (check out a Church Called Tov by Scot McKnight)



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