Trauma-Informed Care: Integrating Evidence-Based Culture and Creativity



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Opening Reflection

“

My hands laid stones for the foundation of the world. I have merited my bread.

”

António Agostinho Neto



António Agostinho Neto’s words root this workshop in labor, dignity, and inheritance — the same ground on which the authors ahead build their work on healing.

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This Course Emphasizes



The use of storytelling, film, and narrative to reframe traumatic experiences.



The importance of culturally relevant materials in fostering trust and connection.



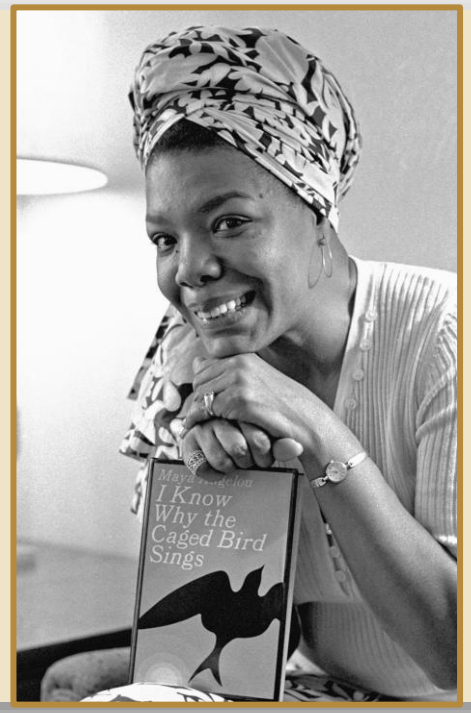
The role of music and poetry in emotional regulation and expression.



The integration of historical and intergenerational context into evidence-based trauma work.

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Maya Angelou: Voice and Story



Maya Angelou with a copy of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Los Angeles, November 3, 1971. Wikimedia Commons.

1. **Breaking Silence Is the Beginning of Healing**
2. **Telling Your Story Restores Power and Identity**
3. **Resilience Must Include Softness, Not Just Strength**

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Maya Angelou: Dignity and Repair



Maya Angelou by John Mathew Smith. Wikimedia Commons.

4. **Love, Community, and Chosen Family Are Central**
5. **Dignity Is an Act of Resistance and Healing**
6. **Accountability and Growth Are Part of Healing**

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Maya Angelou: Implications for Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice

Maya Angelou teaches that healing African American family trauma is a process of **finding voice, reclaiming story, embracing vulnerability, and rebuilding connection with dignity.** Her work shows that while trauma may shape a family's past, it does not have to define its future—especially when truth, love, and expression are allowed to take root.



Maya Angelou, c. 1955. Wikimedia Commons.

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Maya Angelou: Selected Works

- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Random House; 1969
- *Gather Together in My Name*. Random House; 1974
- *And Still I Rise*. Random House; 1978
- *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*. Random House; 1993

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bell hooks: Main Themes

The work of **bell hooks** sits at the intersection of race, gender, love, and liberation—and it is especially powerful when thinking about healing African American trauma because she refuses to separate personal pain from larger systems of oppression.



bell hooks, 2009. Wikimedia Commons.

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bell hooks: Key Themes

1. **Naming the Wound: Oppression and Internalized Harm**
2. **Love as a Radical Healing Practice**
3. **Breaking Cycles of Trauma in African American Families**
4. **Education Not Simply as an Intellectual Exercise**
5. **Centering African American Humanity and Wholeness**



bell hooks, October 2014. Wikimedia Commons.

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bell hooks: Implications for Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice

bell hooks' work is important because she reframes healing as both personal and political:

Personal	Political
Confronting pain, learning to love, rebuilding relationships	Understanding and resisting the systems that created the trauma

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bell hooks: Selected Works — Foundations

- *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press; 1981.
- *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press; 1984.
- *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press; 1989.
- *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. South End Press; 1990.

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bell hooks: Selected Works — Teaching and Love

- *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge; 1994.
- *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. Henry Holt and Company; 1995.
- *All About Love: New Visions*. William Morrow; 2000.
- *Salvation: Black People and Love*. William Morrow; 2001.

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bell hooks: Selected Works — Later Writings

- *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. William Morrow; 2002.
- *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Washington Square Press; 2004.
- *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. Routledge; 2009.

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Toni Morrison: Memory and Inheritance



Toni Morrison, 1998, by John Mathew Smith. Wikimedia Commons.

Toni Morrison's fiction offers a through-line about healing that grows out of memory, community, and the power of language.

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Toni Morrison: Collective Wounds, Shared Healing

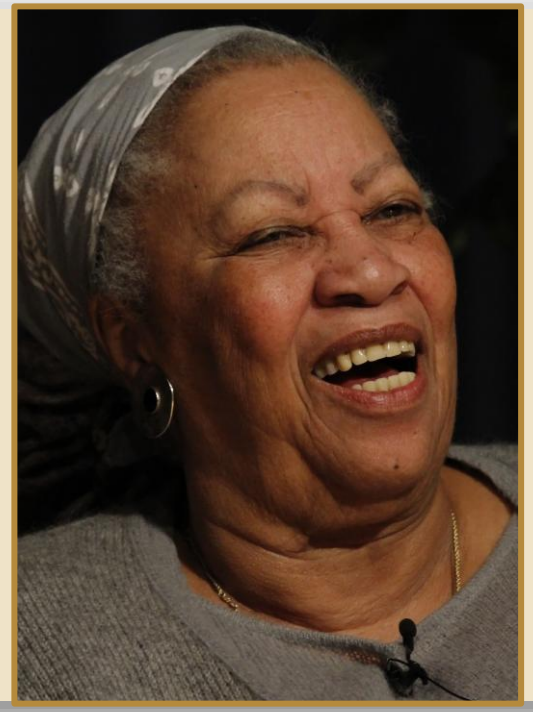


Toni Morrison, author portrait for The Bluest Eye, 1970. Wikimedia Commons.

Her books show that trauma is not just an individual wound but a collective inheritance shaped by history, race, gender, and class; and that healing happens most fully when people gather to witness, name, and rewrite that history together.

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Toni Morrison: Language and Witness



Toni Morrison lecturing at West Point, 2013. Wikimedia Commons.

1. **Trauma Is Historical and Contemporary**
2. **Memory and Storytelling Are Healing Acts**
3. **Healing Is Intrinsically Communal, Not Just Personal**

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Toni Morrison: Body, Beauty, and Moral Complexity



Toni Morrison at her New York home. Gotfryd, Bernard, photographer.Wikimedia Commons.

4 **Our Bodies Are Critically Important Sites of Memory and Resilience**

5 **Moral Complexity and Forgiveness Matter**

6 **Healing Through Beauty, Art, and Spiritual Imagination**

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Toni Morrison: Implications for Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice

Acknowledge history	Value voices	Support storytelling
Honor the historical dimension of trauma narratives and the ways memory is preserved or recovered.	Listening to marginalized voices helps reframe trauma as a shared human experience and builds communal pathways to healing.	Encourage safe sharing and ethical witnessing. Be mindful of re-traumatization and provide space and time for integration.

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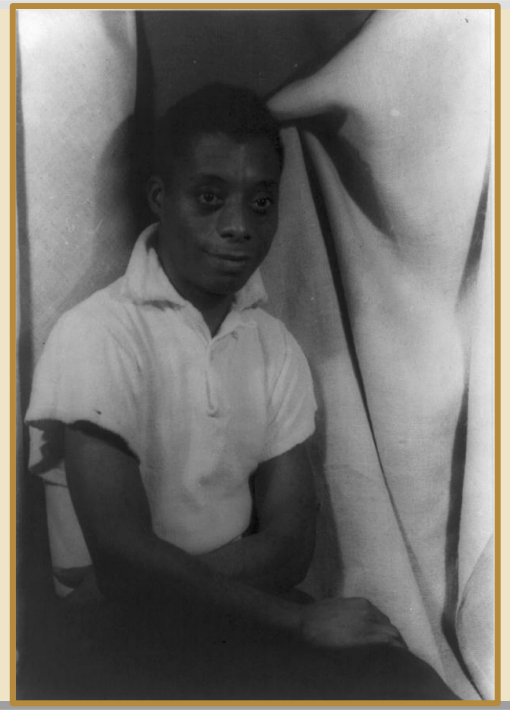
Toni Morrison: Selected Works

- *The Bluest Eye*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 1970.
- *Sula*. Alfred A. Knopf; 1973.
- *Song of Solomon*. Alfred A. Knopf; 1977.
- *Tar Baby*. Alfred A. Knopf; 1981.
- *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf; 1987.

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James Baldwin: Witness and Truth-Telling

James Baldwin offers a profound, emotionally honest roadmap for understanding and healing trauma in African American families.

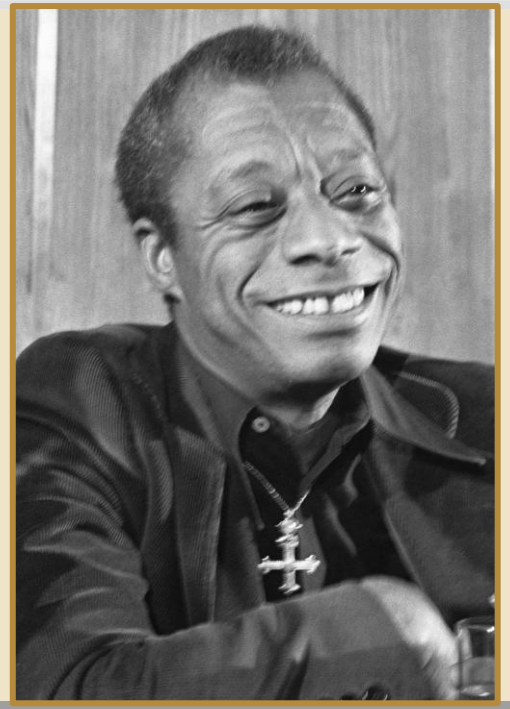


Portrait of James Baldwin, 1955, by Carl Van Vechten. Library of Congress.

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James Baldwin: Confronting Pain, Restoring Relationship

Baldwin doesn't present "clinical techniques." What he does offer is arguably just as powerful: a deep psychological and spiritual framework for confronting pain, restoring relationships, and reclaiming humanity.



James Baldwin, 1970s, by Rob Croes / Anefo. Wikimedia Commons.

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James Baldwin: Naming What Is Real

1. Facing the Truth Without Illusion
2. Understanding and Embracing the Truth of Intergenerational Trauma
3. Breaking the Silence in African American Families
4. Love as Both Challenge and Healing Force

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James Baldwin: Identity, Hope, and Emotional Complexity

5

Reclaiming Identity in the Face of Dehumanization

6

Holding Hope and Pain at the Same Time

7

Honoring Emotional Complexity, Especially for African American Men

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James Baldwin: Implications for Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice

Baldwin's work suggests that healing African American family trauma requires:



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James Baldwin: Selected Works

- *Notes of a Native Son*. Beacon Press; 1955.
- *The Fire Next Time*. Dial Press; 1963.
- *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Dial Press; 1974.

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Lucille Clifton: Plain Speech, Deep Truth



Lucille Clifton reading her poem “homage to my hips.” Ria, via Wikimedia Commons.

The power of **Lucille Clifton** in family healing isn’t abstract. It’s deeply practical.

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Lucille Clifton: Family, Silence, and Generational Grief



Lucille Clifton reading her poem "homage to my hips." Wikimedia Commons.

Her poetry creates emotional and relational conditions that make healing possible, especially in families shaped by silence, generational pain, or unspoken grief.

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Lucille Clifton: Celebration and Survival



Lucille Clifton reading her poem "homage to my hips." Wikimedia Commons.

1. **Giving Language to the Unspeakable**
2. **Interrupting Cycles of Shame**
3. **Honoring the Body as a Site of Memory and Survival**
4. **Reframing Ancestry and Generational Trauma**

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Lucille Clifton: Emotional Economy and Ritual



5. **Modeling Emotional Economy (Saying More With Less)**
6. **Centering Survival Without Denying Pain**
7. **Creating Rituals of Reflection**

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Lucille Clifton: Implications for Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice

> Lucille Clifton's work doesn't heal families by offering solutions. It heals by changing the emotional environment. She makes truth-telling safer, shame lighter, memory more complex, and survival more visible. In doing so, she creates the conditions under which families can begin to repair themselves.

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Lucille Clifton: Selected Works — Early Collections

- *Good Times*. Random House; 1969.
- *Good News About the Earth*. Random House; 1972.
- *An Ordinary Woman*. Random House; 1974.
- *Two-Headed Woman*. University of Massachusetts Press; 1980.

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Lucille Clifton: Selected Works — Later Collections

- *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969–1980*. BOA Editions; 1987.
- *Quilting: Poems 1987–1990*. BOA Editions; 1991.
- *The Book of Light*. Copper Canyon Press; 1993.
- *The Terrible Stories*. BOA Editions; 1996.

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Nikki Giovanni: Main Themes

Nikki Giovanni's poetry, rooted in African American womanhood, memory, and social justice, offers clinicians a compact map for working through trauma with dignity and clarity.

Her poems remind us that trauma is not merely a private event, but a lived archive braided with history, kinship, and community.

From this vantage, healing emerges not through thin optimism but through careful acknowledgment of pain and power.



Nikki Giovanni. Goose Green Photography, Wikimedia Commons.

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Nikki Giovanni: Voice and Defiance

1. **Poetry as a Map for Dignity and Clarity**
2. **Trauma as a Lived Archive of History and Kinship**
3. **Black Womanhood, Memory, and Social Justice**



Nikki Giovanni speaking at Emory University, 2008. Brett Weinstein, Wikimedia Commons.

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Nikki Giovanni: Anger, Realism, and Kinship

4 **Anger as Legitimate Testimony**

5 **Healing Beyond Thin Optimism**

6 **Community and Kinship as Ground for Healing**



Nikki Giovanni at the 2023 Hyde Park Jazz Festival. Wikimedia Commons.

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Nikki Giovanni: Presence and Language

1. **Honor context**
   Trauma is inseparable from race, gender, class, and violence. Clinicians should attend to structural stressors and social isolation as part of the client's story, not as afterthoughts.

2. **Invite narrative and voice**
   Giovanni treats language as a tool for reclaiming self. Encouraging clients to tell their stories—at their pace, in their own words—can begin the untying of immobilizing silence.

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Nikki Giovanni: Emotion, Metaphor, and Kinship

3 **Validate emotion, including rage**
Her work refuses to bury anger; clinicians can mirror that by naming emotions without pathologizing them, offering a safe space where fury can move toward action or relief.

4 **Lean on metaphor and imagination**
Giovanni shows how metaphor can reframe pain, making it survivable and intelligible.

5 **Emphasize community and kinship**
Healing is collective; referrals to support networks, group work, and family involvement can strengthen resilience.

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Nikki Giovanni: Selected Works

- *Black Feeling, Black Talk*. William Morrow; 1968.
- *Black Judgement*. William Morrow; 1968.
- *Re: Creation*. Broadside Press; 1970.
- *My House*. William Morrow; 1972.
- *The Women and the Men*. William Morrow; 1975.

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Self-Reflection Questions 1–3

1. How has this workshop influenced your understanding of what constitutes a therapeutic intervention beyond traditional evidence-based techniques?

2. What unique strengths do African American literature, poetry, and music offer that may not always be captured through conventional clinical approaches?

3. Which author, poet, or musical artist discussed today resonated most with you, and why do you believe their work has therapeutic value?

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Self-Reflection Questions 4–6

4. In what ways can culturally meaningful artistic expression enhance client engagement, trust, and the therapeutic alliance?

5. How might poetry or storytelling help clients articulate traumatic experiences that are difficult to express through ordinary conversation?

6. What ethical and cultural considerations should clinicians keep in mind when incorporating literature, poetry, or music into treatment?

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Self-Reflection Questions 7–9

7. How can clinicians integrate culturally responsive creative interventions while remaining grounded in evidence-based practice?

8. What barriers currently exist within behavioral health systems that may discourage the use of culturally informed creative interventions?

9. How can African American literary voices deepen our understanding of historical trauma, resilience, identity, and healing?

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Self-Reflection Questions 10–12

10. Describe one practical way you intend to incorporate literature, poetry, or music into your clinical work within the next month.

11. How might creative therapeutic approaches benefit clients experiencing trauma, grief, depression, anxiety, or affect dysregulation?

12. What role does clinician cultural humility play when selecting and discussing culturally significant literary or artistic works with clients?

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Self-Reflection Questions 13–15

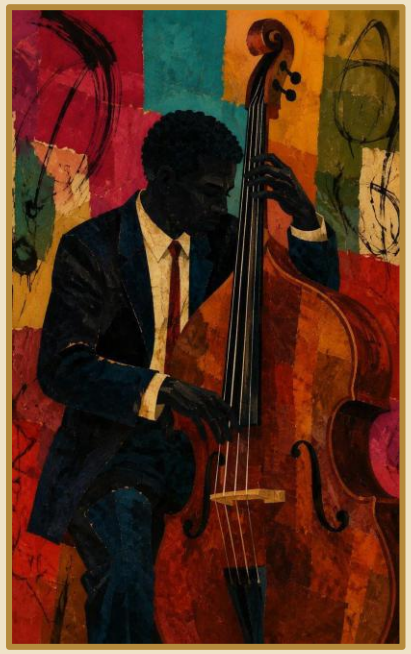
13. How can clinicians determine whether a particular poem, story, or musical selection is therapeutically appropriate for an individual client?

14. Reflecting on today's presentation, what assumptions or beliefs about clinical practice were challenged or expanded?

15. If you could redesign behavioral health training programs, what role should culturally responsive creative interventions, including African American literature, poetry, and music, play in preparing future clinicians?

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Workshop Conclusion: Why This Matters



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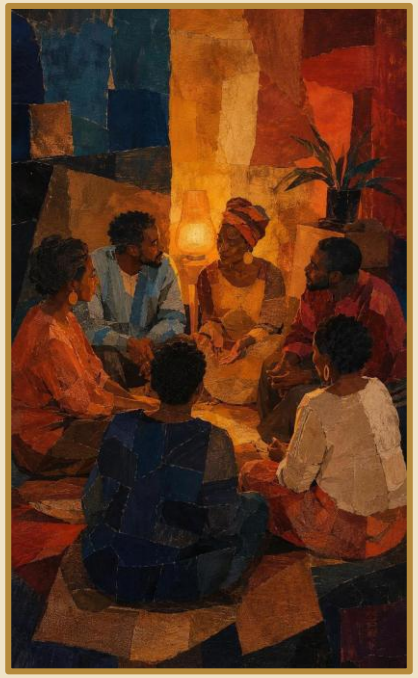
As we conclude this workshop, we are reminded that effective trauma-informed care is both evidence-based and deeply human.

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Workshop Conclusion: Creativity as Clinical Practice

Integrating Culture and Creativity in Trauma-Informed Clinical Practice invites us to move beyond symptom reduction and toward meaningful healing that honors each client's lived experience, strengths, identity, and story.

Literature, poetry, music, visual arts, and other culturally relevant forms of expression can complement established clinical interventions by fostering connection, resilience, self-reflection, and hope.



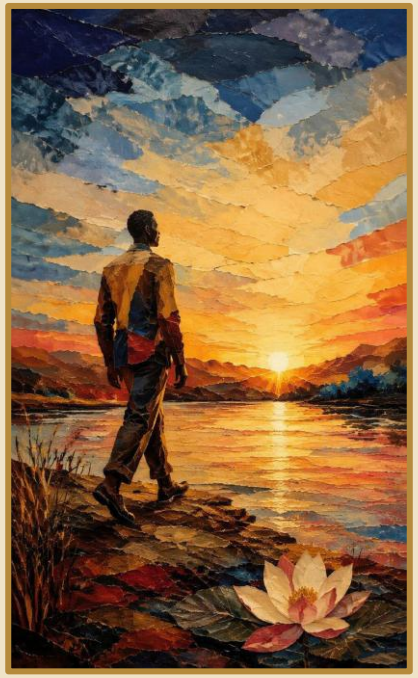
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Workshop Conclusion: An Invitation Forward

As clinicians, we are challenged to remain curious, culturally responsive, and open to innovative approaches that expand our therapeutic toolbox while remaining grounded in ethical, evidence-informed practice. By embracing creativity alongside clinical expertise, we create opportunities for deeper engagement and more authentic healing relationships.

May today's workshop inspire you to continue exploring culturally affirming practices that empower clients, strengthen communities, and advance equity in behavioral health.



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You have completed the course:

Trauma-Informed Care: Integrating Evidence-Based Culture and Creativity

Thank you!

Oliver J. Johnson, Ph.D., LCSW, LCAS, CCS

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