

Religion, Spirituality and Faith in the Care of Torture Survivors: Part I



Webinar Presentation
Captain John Tuskan
Refugee Mental Health Program
SAMHSA/CMHS-ORR

April 29, 2009

Definitions, Concepts and Research Concerning Religion, Spirituality and Faith

- Define religion, spirituality and faith.
- Identify major conclusions from the research on religion, health and mental health.
- Understand the role of religion, spirituality & faith in response to severe traumatic stress.



Spirituality

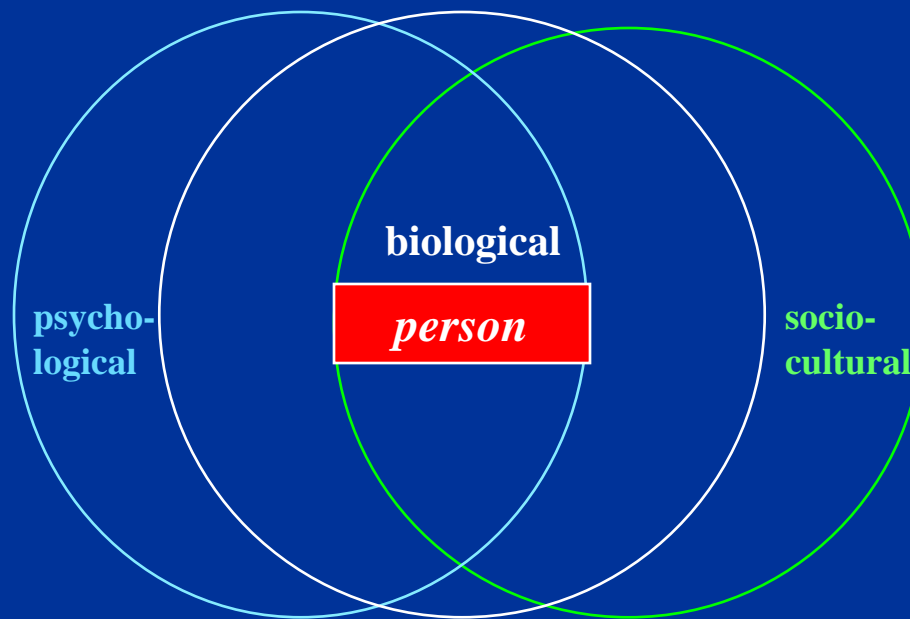
- Personal transcendence & supra-consciousness
- Positive & loftier side of experience
- Provides answers: purpose and meaning of life, suffering, sorrow, and death
- Grounded in the midst of history
- Embedded in all religions - experienced and expressed

The Dimensions of Human Existence

UNIVERSE

spirit

environment

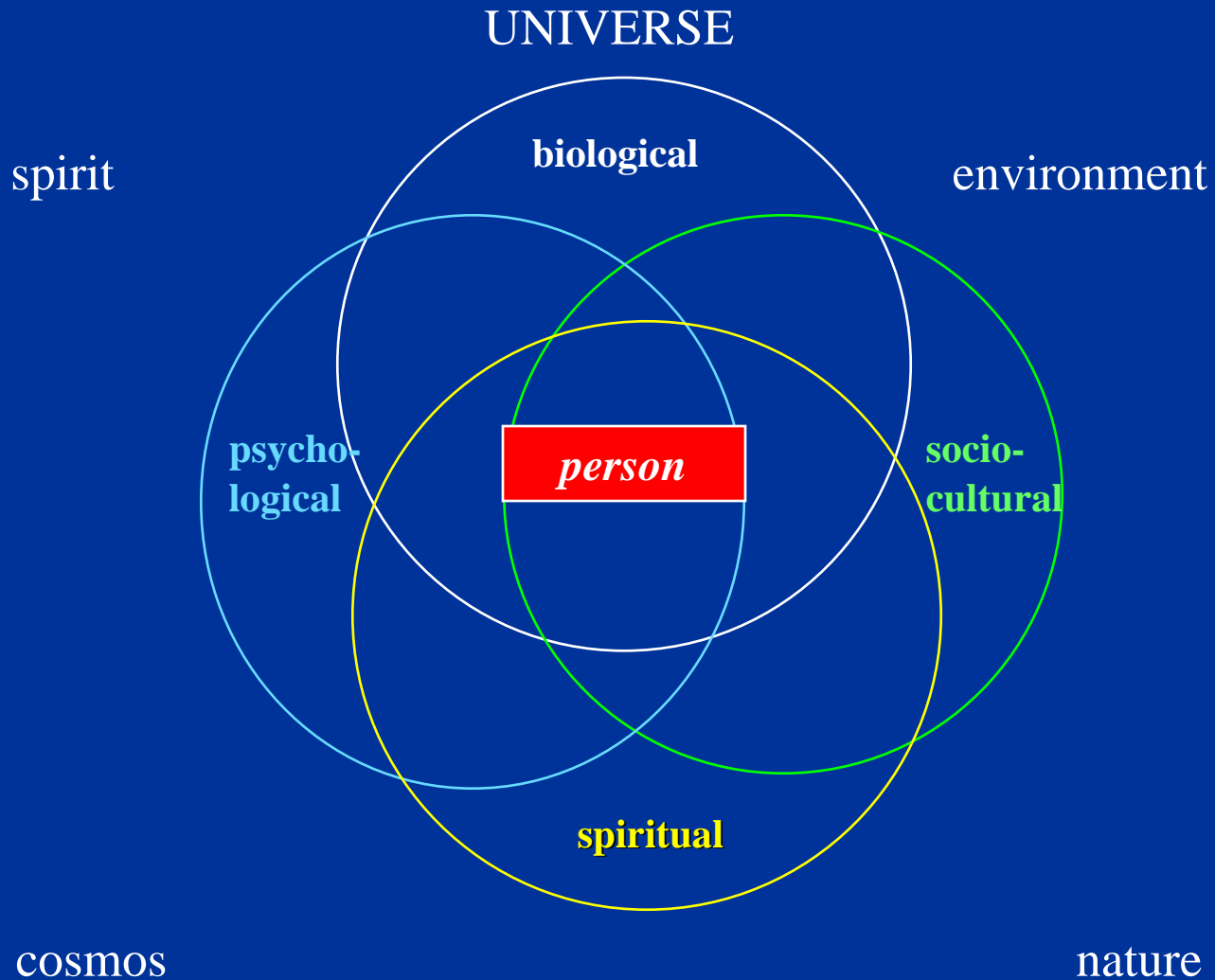


cosmos

nature

adapted from: Ponce, D.E. Cultural Epistemology and Value Orientations: Clinical Applications in Transcultural Psychiatry, in: Clinical Methods on Transcultural Psychiatry, Edited by Okpaku, S.O. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Press, 1998, pp69-87

The Dimensions of Human Existence



adapted from: Ponce, D.E. Cultural Epistemology and Value Orientations: Clinical Applications in Transcultural Psychiatry, in: Clinical Methods on Transcultural Psychiatry, Edited by Okpaku, S.O. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Press, 1998, pp69-87

Religion



- Secondary to spirituality
- Organized system of beliefs practices & rituals
- Promotes an understanding of one's relationship to others and responsibilities for others

Faith



- Interpretive element in the religious experience
- Commitment to religious beliefs
- Process of religious belief that allows one to see, feel and act in terms of a transcendent dimension

Spirituality, Religion & Faith in the Human Experience

- Key dimensions of individual experience
- Key dimensions of cultural reality
- Key ways of responding to ultimate questions



1

Research on Religion, Spirituality & Health

- Positively related to health
 - Findings hold across physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders
- Greater well-being, hope and optimism
- Greater sense of purpose and meaning in life

Research on Religion, Spirituality & Health (Examples) (Yates et al. 1981; Miller 1999; Larson et al. 1998; Koenig et al. 2001; Levin 2001)

- Lower rates of depression and anxiety
- Lower suicide rates
- Half the risk of dying from coronary-artery disease
- One of the predictors of survival with heart-surgery patients

Research on Religion, Spirituality & Health

- Protect from various forms of anxiety and stress, especially those related to tragedy, trauma, and end-of-life issues.
- Although not all available studies are in agreement, with surprising consistency these findings hold across physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders

4

Research on Religion, Spirituality & Health (Newburg 2009; Seybold 2007)

- Physiological explanations
 - Do not remove or “explain away” the effects of religion and spirituality
 - Provides an opportunity for empirical science to investigate the mechanisms whereby religiosity and spirituality are embodied in the human experience

5

Research on Religion, Spirituality & Health (Newburg 2009; Seybold 2007)

- Traditional spiritual practices can alter the neural connections of the brain, leading to long-lasting states of unity, peacefulness and love.
- Strong religious belief amplifies its effect on the brain and enhances social awareness and empathy while subduing destructive feelings and emotions.

The concept of suffering is central to understanding the spiritual dimensions of trauma healing.

“To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering.”

Gordon Allport

Suffering: To endure pain, anguish, sorrow, distress, anxiety



“a universal aspect of human experience in which individuals and groups have to undergo or bear certain burdens, troubles, and serious wounds to the body and the spirit”

(Kleinman 1995)

Torture as *Affliction*

(Weil 1951)

- Not mere “*suffering*”
- Physical pain
- Social degradation
- Humiliation
- Distress of soul
 - ultimate meaning, purpose, nature of reality
 - good & evil, God & man

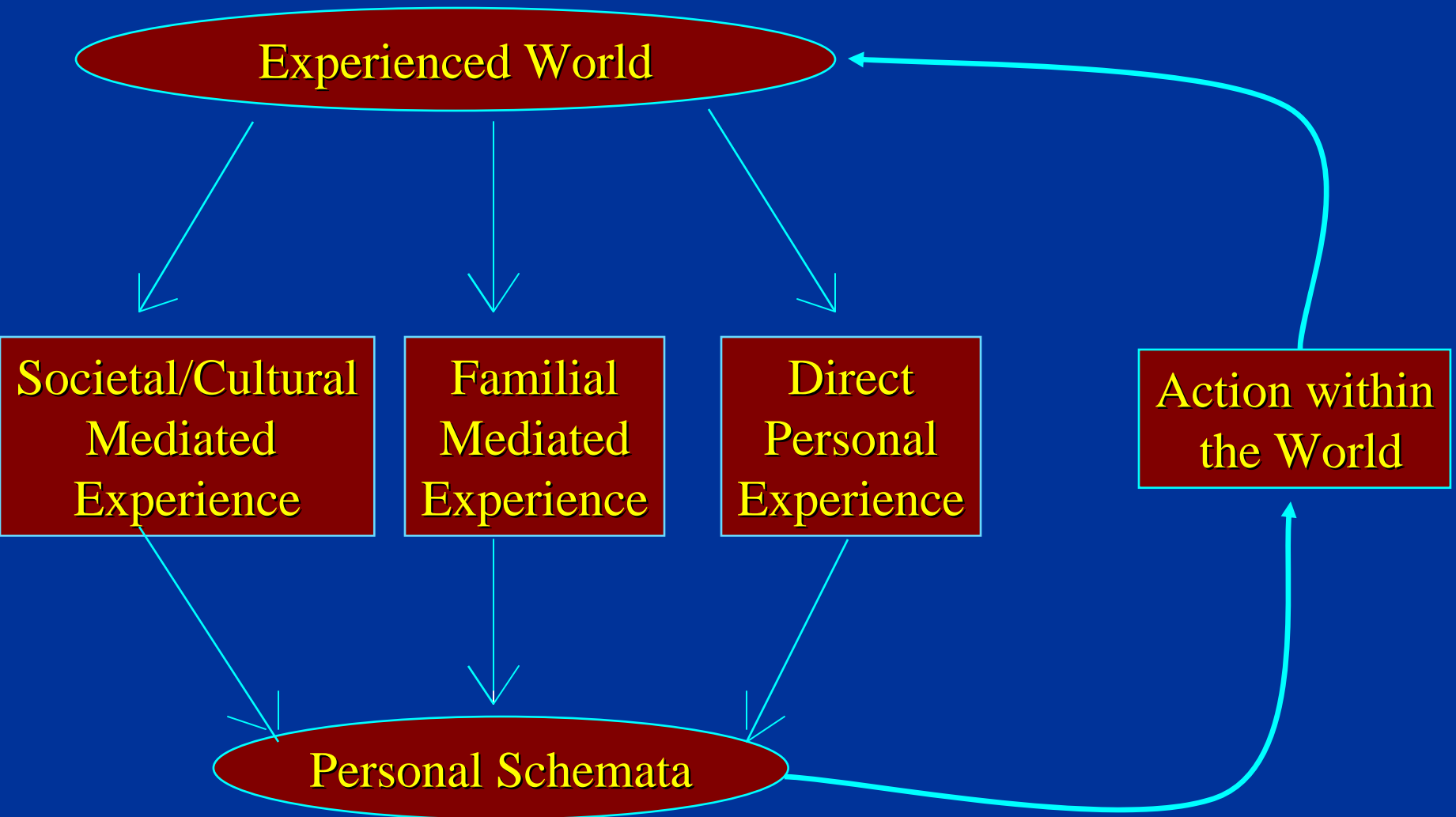
Trauma & Loss

- A grieving process occurs
- In extreme trauma, specific coping mechanisms/patterns are activated and psychopathological reactions may occur
- Culture routinely protect against the destructive processes
- The spiritual dimension transcends the earthly condition- it has preventive, mediating and healing qualities

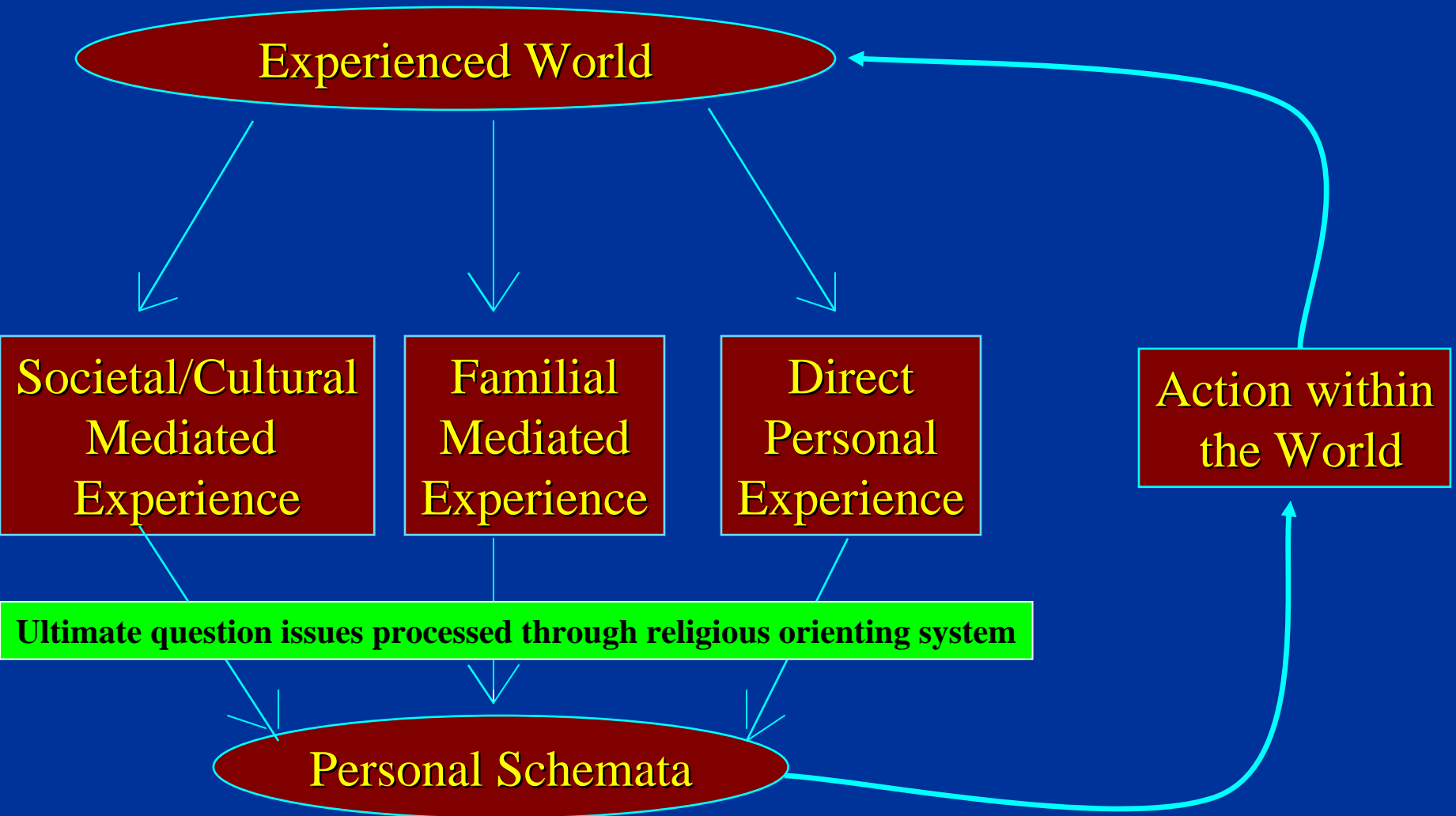
Religious Orienting System

- General way of perceiving and dealing with the world
 - Habits, values, generalized beliefs, relationships - culture & personality
 - Not only a frame of reference, but also a resource to be drawn upon in times of stress
 - Separate from specific coping mechanisms a person may use

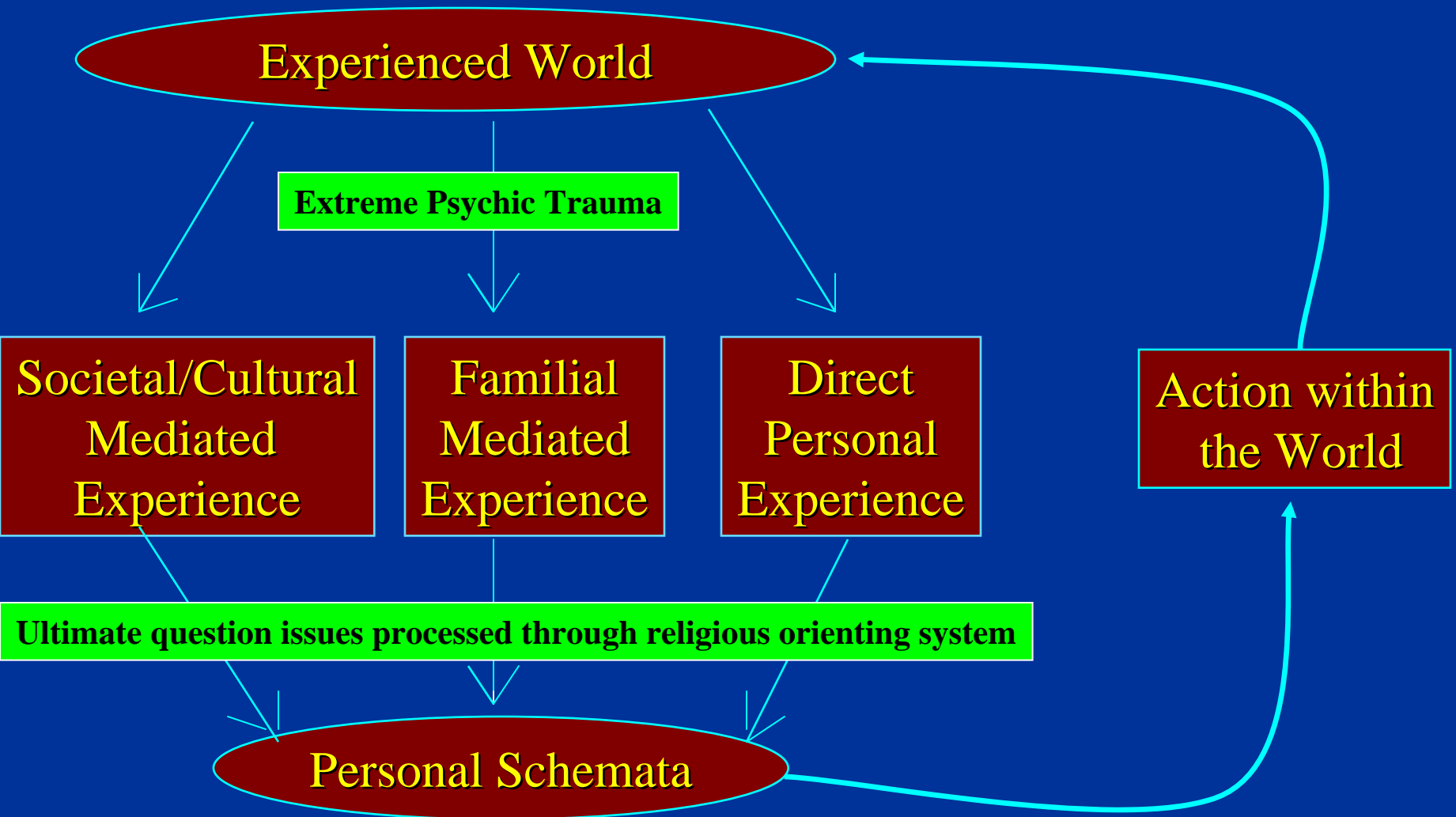
Influence of personal, familial and societal factors in shaping understandings and actions within the world



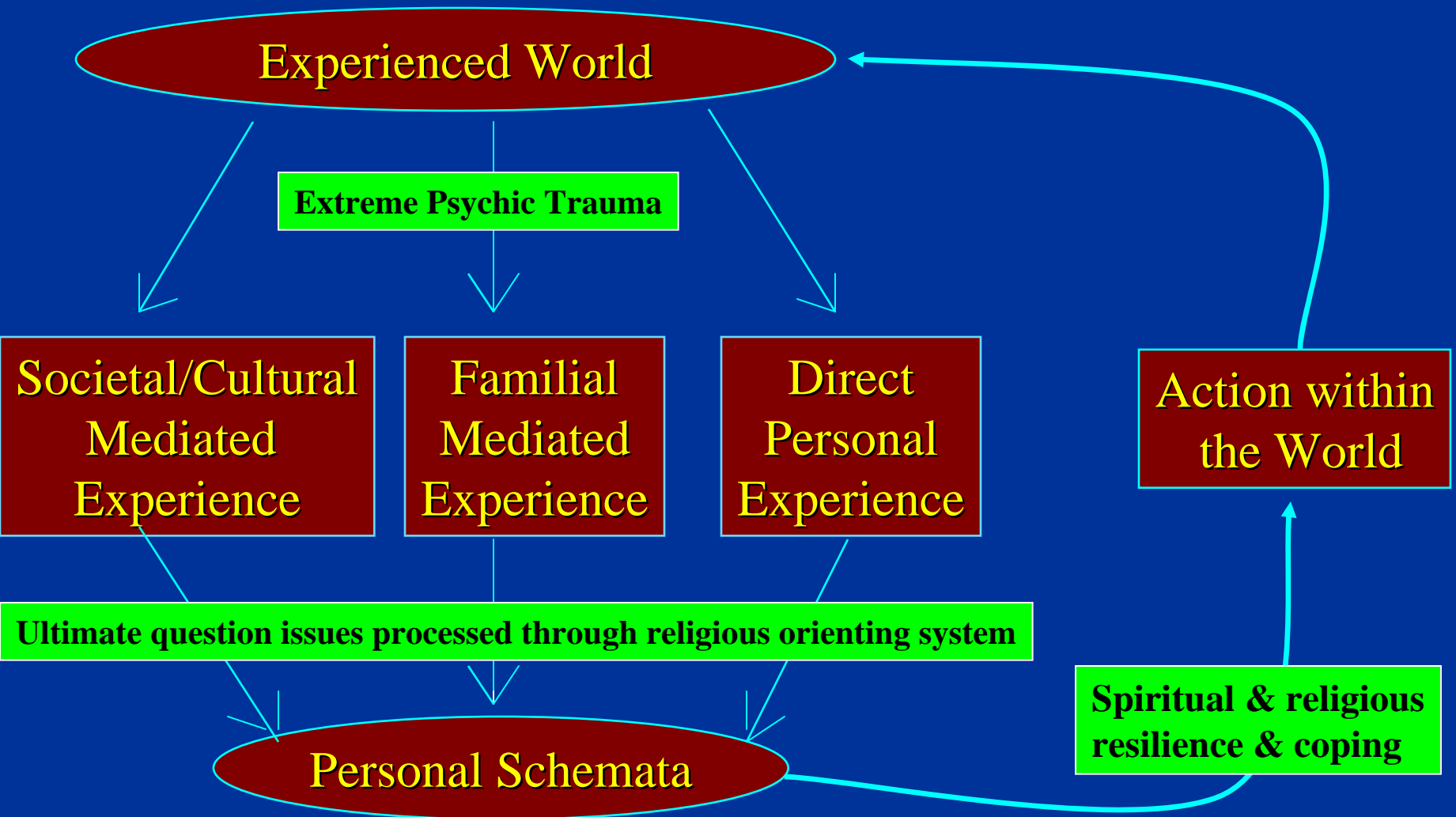
Influence of personal, familial and societal factors in shaping understandings and actions within the world



Influence of personal, familial and societal factors in shaping understandings and actions within the world



Influence of personal, familial and societal factors in shaping understandings and actions within the world



Some Examples of Religious Coping

- Spiritual Support & Collaborative Religious Coping
- Congregational Support
- Clerical Support
- Benevolent Religious Reframing
- Religious Rituals
- Self-Directing, Deferring and Pleading

Religion & Spirituality in Trauma Healing

- Positive Worldview
- Meaning and Purpose
- Psychological Processing
- Hope and Motivation
- Personal Empowerment
- Sense of Control
- Role Models for Suffering
- Guidance for Decision-making
- Forgiveness
- Altruism
- Answers to Ultimate Questions
- Social Support

Limitations of Western Behavioral Science

- No basic truth or fundamental law
- Grief, sorrow, tragedies, traumas, death, - cannot be explained:
“Rational thought has achieved astonishing success in the practical sphere, but it could make no sense of tragedy, it could not assuage pain or sorrow . . . Science could not answer questions about the ultimate value of human life.” (Armstrong 2000)

Recommendations

- ✓ Consider spirituality as an important mediating and resiliency factor
- ✓ Assess indigenous coping patterns, especially the religious and spiritual dimensions
- ✓ Gain understanding and appreciation of the client/patient's spiritual world

2

Recommendations

- ✓ Consider inclusion of spiritual assessment
- ✓ Develop services that are spiritually-focused, spiritually-informed and religiously-sensitive
- ✓ Consider the patient as a teacher - shift in the traditional understanding of the helper - patient relationship

3

Recommendations

- ✓ Recognize faith-leaders and clerics as formal partners in mental health care
- ✓ Incorporate issues of interfaith understanding

“The enemy is not religion, the enemy is anger, hostility, intolerance, separatism, extreme idealism, and prejudicial fear -- be it secular, religious, or political.”

Newburg & Waldman (2009)
How God Changes your Brain