

## **Session 2**

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### **Opportunity Design: Generative Affordances and Trauma Mitigation**

Built environments play an important role the mental health and well-being of their users. Well-designed buildings can ameliorate stress, facilitate healing, and provide valuable harm-avoidance functions. This is particularly so for persons who have experienced significant traumas. Trauma-informed design (TID) recognizes the altered mental, emotional, and physical states that trauma can inflict and takes purposeful steps to mitigate these negative effects, offering survivors the support needed to reestablish a sense of control and empowerment. Although recent research informed by behavioral psychology and grounded in architectural practice offers several complimentary frameworks for designing trauma-informed buildings and interiors, meaningful discussion of mechanisms that tie trauma survivors' perceptions and interactions with the built environment is missing. This paper proposes to fill this gap by using James J. Gibson's holistic ecological model of perception to reexamine and systematize trauma-informed design frameworks from a theory of affordances perspective. One TID principle aims to empower individuals to take control over their environment, social engagements, and behaviors. The author will discuss generative affordances, as termed by Sarah Robinson, as they relate to three organizing approaches for designing spaces that instill dignity –mediated sensory stimuli, layered functional areas and opportunities, and features that allow spaces to be personalized, relatable, and supportive of place attachment. Affordances are, by definition, opportunities for action. By exploring the specific sets of affordances that constitute “niches” in the design of built environments for persons who have experienced trauma, we can fine-tune our approach to designing spaces that foster mental and physical health for individuals and communities – including permanent supportive housing, homeless shelters, and community clinics.