

Proposal
 Pew Summer Research Program
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The Anatomy of Trauma and Faith

Project Description and Scholarship Review

Currently undergoing the peer review process for the journal Social Work and Christianity is an article entitled *The Anatomy of Trauma and Faith: A Post-mortem Reflection* (accepted for peer review, August, 2005). This article addresses the impact of human-perpetrated violence from the lens of the author's tripartite role as a social work clinician, trauma researcher, and survivor of homicide. Intended as the first in a series, the article chronicles a personal story of homicide, delineates the biopsychosocial and spiritual impact on survivors of such crimes, and suggests pathways of healing and recovery through meaning-making therapy models and faith traditions.

This seminal article *introduces* the content on trauma processes proposed for development through the support of the Pew Summer Research Grant. The following excerpt from the foundational article exemplifies preliminary treatment of material proposed for development:

Disturbance in homeostasis and schema. For those impacted by severe trauma, *homeostasis*, or one's steady state, is globally disrupted, often switching normal developmental and psychological processes into states of hyper alertness and arousal (Rothschild, 2000); these states are aimed at survival, and are sustained long after threat of harm has past. Not only have the circumstances of one's life been critically affected, one's schema, or worldview has been shattered (Janoff-Bulman, 1995). The totality of the experience overwhelms human coping capacities – mind, body, and spirit; the genesis of posttraumatic stress processes.

Psychophysiological fallout: Everly (1995) referenced Selye's description of posttraumatic processes as "wear and tear" (p. 35) on the human organism. Research has established the evidence of neurobiological (van der Kolk, 1994; Southwick, Krystal, Johnson, & Charney, 1995) and psychophysiological (Rothchild, 2000; Friedman, 1995) dysregulation to the human system under significant traumatic stress. Major disruptions in sleep, affect regulation, memory, concentration, anxiety (van der Hart, Steele, & Ford, 2001), coupled with increased vigilance that constantly scans the environment for signs of threat (Miller, 2005), significantly impacts survivor's ability to perform at previous levels of basic functioning. Everyday enterprises such as school, work, grocery shopping, cleaning, paying bills, planning and cooking meals - all insurmountable tasks; the intolerable demand of going through the motions of life at the end of the world.

Posttraumatic symptoms and factors affecting coping. Trauma of great personal magnitude potentiates the ripping apart of a person's foundational worldview, the meaning of life, one's place in the world, and one's sense of safety in it (Everly, 1995). The shock and horror of the murder act is played and replayed in the mind of surviving loved ones (Henry-Jenkins, 1997; Ross, 2003), entering unbidden (Rothchild, 2000) and center stage on the screen of the mind; a most unwelcome re-run. Emotional numbing, sleep disturbances, flashbacks, along with a sense of foreshortened future for self and surviving loved ones persist for years (Allen, 1995; Herman, 1997; Wright, 2003). Lerner (2004) described this highly sensory-charged stimuli as the "imprint of horror" (p. 3), overwhelming the survivor's coping capabilities and facilitating a course to complicated posttraumatic stress processes.

The plan for the proposed article develops more fully the posttraumatic symptom profile following human-perpetrated violence. Human survival mechanisms, specifically, the *flight, fight, and freeze* responses to imminent threat to life, will be a major focus for discussion as seen through biopsychosocial models. This area of inquiry is of interest to multiple applied disciplines of study, including traumatology, social work, criminology, sociology, and forensic psychology, as terrorism, homicide, and other crimes against persons increases globally.

Theoretical Framework

The biopsychosocial theoretical framework (Zide & Gray, 2001) will provide the major underpinning for this proposed study on the treatment of human responses to imminent danger. The biopsychosocial framework takes a triune-factored approach to the person-in-situation, considering the combined impact of biological, psychological, and social influences. Although not traditionally discussed in the literature, I assert the framework is not complete without the consideration of the spiritual aspect to the human experience, and thus will explore this assertion in the proposed study.

Judith Herman's classical theories on trauma processes (Herman, 1997), especially in recovery and healing processes, will also inform the study. Herman's exploration of the impact of human-perpetrated trauma on the individual includes kidnapping, hostage situations, rape, homicide, child abuse, partner abuse, and terrorist acts.

On the Integration of Faith and Research

The foundational article addresses meaning-making and spirituality as coping strategies for persons impacted by human-perpetrated trauma. The following excerpt is an example of how I have woven faith and trauma processes together:

My primary coping mechanism throughout this terrible ordeal was, and continues to be, my relationship with God, a faith-bound relationship that has long been nourished and cherished; the central, organizing factor that

has given meaning and direction to my life. In writing about spirituality in posttraumatic therapy, Ochberg (1995) speculated that "...a victim's sense of spirit may be acutely dimmed for a period after victimization..." (p. 253); after a time of healing, however, spiritual growth may exceed those who have not encountered their own mortality so graphically. Herman (1997) noted how post-mortem changes to the survivor's worldview can be shaped out of the realization of the fragility and temporariness of life. "Her view of life may be tragic, but for that very reason she has learned to cherish laughter. She has a clear sense of what is important and what is not. Having encountered evil, she knows how to cling to that which is good" (p. 213); this statement resonates strongly with my post-mortem worldview.

Integrating my own lived experience of trauma with the current state-of-the-art thinking on traumagenic processes provides opportunity for me to explore issues of faith within the human experience within the critical incident and during the post-crisis period. The proposed article on specific trauma processes, therefore, will be informed by my own experiences of faith through the initial coping and subsequent recovery periods.

I cannot separate who I am as a person of faith in the living God from who I am as a social work clinician, social science researcher, educator, and presenter. Whether or not I am speaking or writing specifically on spiritual influences and factors, I believe who I am in Christ washes over all that I do, yielding signs hope, grace, and peace; the fingerprints of God on my life.

References and Additional Bibliography

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Time Frame and Budget

In preparation for this writing project, I have collected a number of significant research materials as evidenced by the References and Additional Bibliography section of this proposal. My thinking in this area of inquiry is actively being developed as I have had several invitations to make presentations to the Tennessee Department of Corrections conferences since August, 2005 on the topic "*Fight! Flight! Freeze! The Drive to Survive*" (see Curriculum Vitae). Because my research in this area is actively on-going, I believe I will have sufficient time to write the second in the series of articles on the *Anatomy of Trauma and Faith* over the summer of 2006 should I be awarded the Pew Research Grant.

Funds from the Pew Summer Research Grant will allow me to focus solely on my research and writing, providing me the designated time and funds to forsake other projects that are also worthy and profitable. I anticipate utilizing the total amount (\$4,500) of funds offered by this grant as follows:

- Funds for attendance on at least one major conference on traumatology conference, depending upon if appropriate conferences are being offered within the time frame of the grant. Alternately, personal consultation or advanced workshop with a nationally recognized traumatologist (\$500 - estimated)
- Purchase of books and journals for research (\$500 – estimated)
- Support of designated time for research and writing (\$4000 – estimated)

Dissemination of Research

For this second in the series of writings on *The Anatomy of Trauma and Faith*, I will consider submission of the completed article to professional journals such as Social Work or other academic journals dedicated to mental health, trauma, or interpersonal violence. I also plan to develop my research for use at further professional and academic conferences such as those sponsored by the National Association of Social Workers and the North American Christians in Social Work (NACSW).

A review of my Curriculum Vitae demonstrates my active involvement in presenting at professional and academic conferences in the areas of trauma and faith processes, along with other topics appropriate and useful to my profession. For example, I have already presented the first article in the series to the C. S. Lewis Foundation Conference in Oxford in July, 2005. I will be presenting the paper again at the (NACSW) conference in Grand Rapids in October, 2005. Should I be awarded the Pew Summer Research Grant, my intent is to submit abstracts of my research to appropriate professional and academic conferences at the state and national levels.

Curriculum Vitae

See Attached

Letters of Reference

Forthcoming from:

- Prof. Sally E. Dodds, Ph.D., LCSW, University of Miami School of Medicine and Barry University School of Social Work
- Mary Anne Poe, MSSW, MDiv., Director of Social Work Program, Union University