**Final Project**

**The Impact of Trauma on the Individual and Society**

**Bethany Brand, Ph.D.**

**Towson University**

*Final Trauma Paper and Project Presented to Class*

Through this self-directed project, I want to provide you with an opportunity to further delve into some aspect of the impact trauma that interests you. You will write a final paper that summarizes your research as well as present a 7- 8 minute class presentation in which you will share what you explored and learned. This serves as the final for this class. Some students will chose to use slides for their presentations while others might use other forms of media (e.g., playing music or video clips). I will provide class time to meet with each of you to hear about the topic you would like to pursue and to determine if your topic is acceptable. I will provide approval for topics that are feasible in scope and that have educational merit to the individual student as well as the class. The following topics are some ideas:

* investigate the long-term individual or societal impact of a well-known trauma such as Hurricane Sandy, 911’s impact on people living in NYC, the impact of military combat (it may help focus your paper to choose a specific war), etc. Discuss how the individuals and/or the segment of society involved in this trauma attempt to recover from the trauma. Are there any efforts being made to prevent similar traumas in the future?
* analyze how trauma such as genocide has shaped a particular country or region of the world. What’s being done to help the traumatized individuals?
* Analyze how a well-known political figure, humanitarian, writer, artist, musician or other figure was impacted by trauma. Discuss how trauma shaped their work. What ramifications did their trauma exposure have on others? Give particular attention to symptoms/problems as well as any areas of resiliency/posttraumatic growth that may be related to their trauma. You might discuss any historical, cultural, and intrapersonal variables contributed to the person’s response over time to the trauma. Below are some ideas, but feel free to explore other people as well:

**Artists**

The great painter, Frances Bacon, was brought up in Ireland and was physically and mentally abused by his father. He paints bizarre paintings of fragmented humans. Their faces are tortured and scream of pain and anger.

A therapist who lives in Norway suggested the Norwegian painter, Håkon Bleken. His father was an alcoholic and physically abused the children in the family. Today Bleken paints beautiful pictures with lots of emotions and colour.

Frida Kahlo – Mexican painter who had a tumultuous marriage with Diego Rivera. She almost lost her life in a trolley car accident that left her with life-long pain and physically disfigured. Her surrealist paintings often portray physical and psychological pain. She died at 47; some wonder if she committed suicide.

Rene Magritte – Belgian surrealist. When he was 14, his mother drowned herself. He was present when her body was recovered. Her face was reportedly obscured by her floating dress. Several of his paintings show figures with their faces obscured.

Pablo Picasso (tragically lost his older sister to diphtheria when he was 4)

Possible traumatic influences:

Edvard Munch (poverty, loss of mother and sister in his early years, later struggled with mental illness and drinking)

Kathe Kollwitz was a German painter and sculptor whose art often portrayed traumatic grief including her own grief over the loss of a younger brother when she was a child and her son in World War I.

Louise Bourgeois, a French American artist and sculptor whose father was verbally abusive and explosive. Her art is known for being “confessional” and her means of coping with her father’s tyrannical control.

**Political/Cultural Figures**

Friedrich Nietzsche

Adolph Hitler

Joseph Stalin

Saddam Hussein

Franklin D. Roosevelt - early adult polio threatened his manhood and his political career

Eleanor Roosevelt - raised as a somewhat unwanted child, despised by her mother-in-law, and traumatized by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s affairs, yet she became famous as the powerful woman we regard as "Eleanor Roosevelt."

Winston Churchill - maternal neglect

**Actors**

Charlize Theron won an Academy Award for best actress for her role as a serial killer of men seeking prostitutes in the movie Monster. When Theron was 15, she witnessed her mother shoot and kill her physically abusive father. Because it was ruled self-defense, the police did not press charges against her mother. Theron denies that her decision to take on this role had any relationship to her own traumatic history.

Buster Keaton – famous vaudeville actor and filmmaker. Part of his family’s act involved his father throwing him against the scenery and off the stage into the audience; the audience laughed hilariously as the young boy kept his expression deadpan. Some people objected to this act, protesting that it was child abuse. Keaton developed a severe drinking problem that almost cost him his life.

**Song Writers/Songs**

Ani DiFranco writes songs about abuse in her early work.

When Lou Reed was a teenager, his parents took him electroshock therapy because he was exhibiting "homosexual tendencies." His song, "Kill Your Sons", is about this.

A well-loved piece of music reflecting childhood trauma and perhaps dissociation is Cosette's song from the Broadway Musical, Les Miserables.  The words start:
    There is a castle on a cloud; I like to go there in my sleep.

    Not any floors for me to sweep, Not in my castle on the cloud.

 There is a lady all in white, Holds me and sings a lullaby

 She's nice to see and she's soft to touch.

 She says, Cosette, I love you very much.

Tori Amos has a song about being raped, Me and a Gun.  As a means of supporting other people who had been sexually assaulted, she started RAINN, the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network.

**Books that Discuss Traumas in the Lives of Famous People**

Jerrold M. Post. (2003). *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*. University of Michigan Press. ISBN 0472098381

Alice Miller. (1990). *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness.* Anchor Books: New York. ISBN 0-385-26764-9 Miller examines the lives of Picasso, Buster Keaton, Nietzsche, Hitler and others, demonstrating how trauma affected their art and thinking.

Alice Miller. (1990). *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Miller reviews Hitler’s abusive childhood and its influence on the development of his extreme views and behavior.

Lenore Terr. (1990). *Too Afraid to Cry*. Basic Books: New York. ISBN 0-465-08644-6 Terr reviews famous people such as Stephen King whose lives have been greatly impacted by trauma.

Lenore Terr. *Unchained Memories*. Terr reviews the lives of famous figures including Virginia Woolf, Maya Angelou, and Steven King whose lives and work were strongly influenced by early trauma.

**Authors**

Maya Angelou was an America poet who was sexually abused at age 8 by her mother’s boyfriend. Four days later after this man was released from his single day of being jailed for his abuse, the man was found dead, likely killed by one of Maya Angelou’s relatives. Maya chose to become mute for almost five years after that because she believed her words had killed him and they could kill someone else. In addition to these traumas, she experienced a very difficult marriage between her parents and considerable racial discrimination.

Alfred Hitchcock - When he was young, his father took him to the local police station and had him locked up for no particular reason, just to teach him a lesson of what would happen to him if he was bad.  Some claim he never got over it. He explored the theme of wrongly accused men in much of his work.

Steven King – almost drowned and most of his movies are about near death and terror

J.M. Barrie, author of Peter Pan. Barrie’s childhood trauma clearly impacted his writing: "When Barrie was seven, his brother David died in a skating accident. David had been the mother's favorite child, and she fell into depression. Barrie tried to gain her affection by dressing up in the dead boy's clothes. The obsessive relationship that grew between mother and son was to mark the whole of his life." (From [http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jmbarrie.htm](https://outlook.towson.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=ed03523997aa44aaa619f9b223684c3c&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.kirjasto.sci.fi%2fjmbarrie.htm)) It was apparently because Barrie's mother adored to the boy who never grew up (because he didn't live to turn 8) that Barrie created Peter Pan. Barrie’s physical and sexual development were possibly thwarted; he is said to have suffered from “dwarfism”. The movie “Escape from Neverland” depicts some of this story, but with a much more positive spin. Barrie’s first versions of Peter Pan depicted a serial killer who murdered children but he was told to make it more child-friendly so that the theatre could bring in a larger audience. The slightly flirtatious, on again-off again relationship between Peter and Wendy is supposed to be a reflection of the relationship between Barrie and his mother. Some have suggested that Captain Hook symbolizes Barrie’s father, and the cutting off of his hand, Barrie’s wish to destroy his father.

James Ellroy’s bar-hopping mother was the victim of an unsolved murder when he was young.  It was never solved.  Ellroy later read *The Badge* by Jack Webb, a collection of true stories about Los Angeles Police Department cases, one of which was the notorious unsolved Black Dahlia case, about a murdered bar-hopping woman.  He latched onto it. After some years of petty burglary, speed and various other low life experience, he started writing crime novels, many of them set in the '50s and '60s.  One solved the Black Dahlia case.  He eventually wrote a true crime book where he and a hired investigator tried to solve his mother's long ago murder.

Anne Sexton - some of whose poems are directly about her abuse, and hint at her suicide-to-come

**Plays/Operas**

Tennesse Williams. (1947). *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The University of the South: Sewanee, Tennessee. Reissued by New Directions in 2004. ISBN: 0-8112-1620-0. In this play, suicide and rape lead the main character, Blanche DuBois, to become psychologically unstable. Some believe that this play is loosely based on Williams’ sister’s (Rose Williams) struggle with mental illness.

In *Tommy*, the rock opera by the Who, the main character, Tommy Walker, develops psychosomatic inability to see, hear or speak after witnessing his father murder his mother’s lover. Unable to protect himself or tell anyone about being what is going on, Tommy is abused by his uncle and cousin. Ultimately Tommy regains use of his senses and becomes a cultish type of spiritual leader, urging others to become spiritually awakened.

**Movies**

*Schindler’s List* – about the Holocaust

*Hotel Rwanda* – about the Rwandan genocide

Rene Clement's great, very disturbing film about erotism in childhood, made in 1952:  *Forbidden Games* ("Jeux Interdits").   It shows a dramatic traumatizing event in the life of a young girl.

*Mysterious Skin* is excellent. It portrays two boys who were sexually abused by a coach. One developed amnesia and the other became a prostitute. The find each other later in life and attempt to begin their process of healing.

“*Fearless*”, a film about a plane crash survivor and his subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder.

The movie, '*Monster*', portrays the female serial killer Eileen Wournos, who experienced childhood and adulthood sexual abuse.  She took her rage out on men by murdering her “johns”. Charlize Theron won an Academy Award for best actress for this role in Monster. When Theron was 15, she witnessed her mother shoot and kill her physically abusive father. Because it was ruled self-defense, the police did not press charges against her mother.

*The Wall* by Pink Floyd depicts the story of a character named “Pink” who loses his father as a child and is abused at school by teachers. Each of Pink’s traumas become "another brick in the wall", leading him to increasing depths of self-imposed isolation. Roger Waters, the bass player and songwriter for Pink Floyd, lost his own father in World War II.

*The War at Home* portrays a Vietnam Veteran who is unable to settle back into life in his small home town after the atrocities he’s faced.

*Metamorphosis* by the Israeli film maker Netalie Braun. Given an award by the International Society for the Study of Trauma & Dissociation.

"*Waltz with Bashir*" portrays an individual’s and societal dissociation. It tells the story of a man who has amnesia for what he did when he was a soldier in Israel’s war against Lebanon. The movie depicts his search to uncover what he did during the war.

*Deliver Us From Evil* on sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church

*The White Ribbon*, (2009) a postmodern German film, in black and white, won the 2010 foreign film Oscar, is about the psychological basis of Nazism as seen through social and familial relationships in a small village in pre-World War I Germany. It works on many levels and covers physical and sexual abuse of children, the transgenerational transmission of trauma, anti-Semitism, and class and group  prejudices, among other things. By the end it becomes somewhat of a thriller without a clear wrap up, so it would be great to spur discussion.

*Fast Runner* (2002)is the first feature film ever to be written, directed and acted entirely in Inuktitut, the language of Canada's  Inuit people. It won an award at Cannes. Set in the ancient past, the film starts slowly as it retells an Inuit legend passed down through oral tradition.  In a community already split by rivalry and lust for power, an evil shaman commits a murder and places a curse that plays out through the lives of the characters, until spiritual forces and human courage begin the process of healing and confrontation.  It provides an alternative to revenge that is inspiring.

*Two Women* is a movie for which Sophia Loren won an Oscar for her performance. Loren portrays a widow struggling to survive in battle-scarred Italy along with a teenage daughter. The film
begins with both women sharing romantic feelings toward a young man
(Jean-Paul Belmondo), a story line disrupted by the ravages of World War II and the horrifying rape of both mother and daughter in a church by Allied Moroccan soldiers. The aftermath of this atrocity finds both characters dealing with even more, varying shades of grief, as the war seems to sap all that they had treasured and leaves them struggline for their emotional and physical survival.

*Pan's Labyrinth*--about how a little girl manages the reality of an abusive step-father, a helpless mother, and the guilt of her disobedience as meaning risk for her unborn baby brother. Very poignant.

*The Magdalene*--about the reality of what was real life for pregnant teens in Ireland just a few many decades ago, where they were dropped off at convents where they were further abused by the nuns and priests(as a way of making them 'pay for their sins'--no matter how they might've gotten pregnant--by rape, incest or a boyfriend). The movie is powerful, and at times, disturbing.

*Fearless* is the story of how a near-death airplane crash’s impact on the lives of three people who survived.

*Ordinary People*

*Radio Flyer*

*The Fisher King* portrays a DJ whose off-hand comment triggers a tragedy, followed by his descent into despair as he interacts with a survivor of that tragedy.

*Antwone Fisher* is based on a true story of a young man dealing with his traumatic past which includes multiple placements in foster care, as well as physical abuse and sexual abuse.

*The Machinist* is a dark movie about a man has severe PTSD and amnesia and how he recovers his own memory. Excellent acting by Christian Bale.

*Waltz with Bashir* was written and directed by Ari Folman (Israeli). In a very clear way it depicts experiencing of a traumatized soldier, who suffers from PTSD and amnesia, and his way to healing.

*The Cemetery Club* is a fantastic documentary about a group of aging Holocaust survivors who meet monthly in a cemetery in Israel. It follows two women who reacted to the trauma in quite different ways: one profoundly narcissistic; the other depressed with many physical problems.

*Mother of Mine*: A movie based on the evacuation of 70,000 Finnish children to the safety of Sweden in WW II. In it, a boy grapples with his abandonment, and his foster mother grapples with a loss of her own that prevents her from attaching to the boy. The documentary of the actual events is "Sotalapset" and is available in Finnish.

**Documentaries Related to Trauma**

*You're Not Crazy and You're Not Alone: Inside the Inner World of
Dissociative Identity Disorder* was produced by Wendy Lemke. The DVD
features six individuals with DID, including Robert Oxnam. Order through Sidran Institute.

*Who Will Love Me: Four Stories of Mother-Daughter Incest* by Christine Hatchard, Ph.D. This is a courageous documentary that uses interviews with four women who were sexually abused by their mothers to describe the long-term impact of this type of abuse. Painful and articulate, these women describe the tremendous impact of mother-daughter incest, yet inspire the audiences with their courage and struggle to heal. Order on Amazon.