

**Informed Mutual Support:
Options on Violence and Trauma from the Perspective of the Journalist**

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ABSTRACT

The paper questions three ideologically bound components: that traumatic stress and post traumatic stress disorder can be addressed as if they are identical; that ‘assignment stress injury’ victims are composed largely of foreign correspondents; and that therapeutic intervention must be conducted by clinicians. An alternative modality of supporting some of the victims of assignment stress injury is suggested by applying lessons from the supportive environment of the now largely out-of-favor press club on the premise that journalists themselves are uniquely able to address the stresses of their colleagues. Journalists themselves need to be part of the healing process.

While journalists report on the victims of violence and trauma as part of their news coverage diet, neither they, nor their managers, spend much time assessing the impact of how these events are digested, stored and relived as well as how they ultimately change the lives of these producers of social capital.

Journalists know that some of the best stories come from the heart. Engaging in dialogue with a subject for an interview requires compassion and understanding to build a level of trust that results in expressions which are meaningful, personal, and frequently, emotional. The reporting affects not only those who are reported on, but also those who compose the report. It is the very nature of the journalist’s job to extend himself or herself to others that can have potentially damaging psychological consequences. No news person is unaffected by the content of his or her reports. This theme is pivotal to our understanding of the impact of traumatic stress on the news craft.

The purpose of this paper is to challenge conventional wisdom surrounding trauma and journalism on three levels. First, that traumatic stress and post traumatic stress disorder are one and the same. Second, we underscore that it is not necessary to be a foreign correspondent to be traumatized: victims of traumatic stress include local journalists and other news people. Third, we emphasize that a realistic examination of intervention shows that, in most cases, it need not be conducted by interveners who are certified clinical therapists but, rather, it can be undertaken by supportive members of the journalist's world.

The terms 'traumatic stress' and 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD) have become so interchangeable in the nomenclature that they are treated as synonymous. They are not. Traumatic stress is the cause, not the effect. Though traumatic stress can induce post-traumatic stress disorder as well as substance abuse and clinical depression, most of the time it does not. Furthermore, these medical diagnoses are at the extreme end of a continuous spectrum of possible reactions to traumatic stress.

PTSD can take many forms. It is best known for producing powerful and intrusive recollections or feelings, leading some of its victims to relive their experiences as vividly as if they were recurring. It can also produce an exaggerated startle reaction. For example, a news person who hears a loud bang might spontaneously dive to the ground for cover. This split-second lifesaving reaction is highly adaptive for a news person being shot at in a conflict zone, but highly maladaptive if it continues, after returning home, in response to the sound of, say, a car backfiring. Another PTSD symptom, numbing and desensitization, can profoundly affect how news is reported. This protection blunts the

ability of horrible memories to injure, but at a terrible cost, for it numbs emotions indiscriminately, robbing its victims of the ability to feel joy.ⁱ

Traumatic stress is pervasive and affects our colleagues. But it would be a mistake to suggest that it is uniquely the result of witnessing major disasters or war experience. The overwhelming majority of news people whose lives and careers are touched by traumatic stress are not covering brutal wars, horrendous cruelty or human suffering in the wake of natural disasters in distant lands. They are right here among us. Some have witnessed car accidents, murder scenes, riots, and plane crashes, and many more have been traumatized simply through interviewing the traumatized victims of such carnage.

This is not to downplay the important work of war correspondents such as Ian Stewartⁱⁱ and groundbreaking findings by Anthony Feinsteinⁱⁱⁱ, who brilliantly initiated the first series of clinical trauma studies of war correspondents. Nor is it to quarrel with the findings that war correspondents are a resilient bunch who nonetheless—due to the nature of their work—tend to experience the aftershocks of traumatic stress frequently and profoundly. They are eminently worthy of our compassion and support.

Dwelling mainly on war correspondents, however, has distorted our understanding of traumatic stress and journalism, leading us to neglect other news gatherers equally deserving of our support, and to misallocate our energy and resources. For every journalist covering military deaths in Iraq or Afghanistan, for example, there are many more locally based reporters who provide accounts of human suffering and for whom the traumatic cost is no less real.

In February 2008, Canada's first conference on the impact of traumatic stress on news people focused upon the subject of war correspondents and research into the impact

of traumatic stress on war correspondents.¹ Fascination with the few news people who cover the most egregious forms of violence has blinded many clinicians and academics to the aftermath of covering less compelling fare. Consequently, less scientific research has been conducted into the impact of workplace traumatic stress on tens of thousands of local journalists. Yet a survey by Elana Newman and David Handschuh^{iv} is telling. The most frequently cited incident by American photojournalists as having produced traumatic stress is one of the most banal: the car crash. We will return to methods of addressing local traumatized reporters after a brief review of how we got to where we are today.

It is safe to say that, during the 1990s, some clinicians thought that they had found a workable solution to traumatic stress: namely, debriefing in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident. It was based on the notion that the brain was an emotional pressure-cooker.^v Bottling up emotions was thought to cause traumatic stress reactions, so people were encouraged to vent their feelings during structured group meetings with a trained moderator. There was ample anecdotal evidence that it helped. In particular, many participants reported that they felt better afterward. However, by 2004 evidence had mounted which showed that there was no scientific proof that these debriefings helped. Richard McNally concluded that in the long term they did more harm than good, producing a worse psychological outcome than when there was no intervention at all.^{vi}

The alternative was equally unpalatable. Abiding purely by cold science poses a moral and ethical dilemma. As Jonathan Bisson, the senior lecturer in psychiatry at Cardiff University explained at the 2000 International Society for Traumatic Stress

¹ The Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, February 9-10, 2008 (<http://journalismforum.fims.uwo.ca/default.aspx>)

Studies (ISTSS) World Conference in San Antonio, Texas, it is morally and ethically unacceptable for clinicians to simply do nothing and wait passively until traumatized journalists present themselves at the clinician's door to seek help.

Ten years ago, traumatic stress injury was simply not on the radar of the news craft. News people were considered to be dispassionate observers who were thought to be unaffected by what they witnessed. Scientific study of journalism and traumatic stress was almost non-existent. When traumatic stress produced psychological injuries, it was seen as a character flaw. Reporters who acknowledged their vulnerability risked losing their jobs, being transferred to another beat or branded as malingerers who were simply not cut out for this line of work. Journalism was one of the last occupations to acknowledge that traumatic stress was real. Thus, only lately have they begun to come to grips with it formally. By contrast, soldiers and police, for example, had begun the process more than a decade earlier.

In the late 1990s, journalists' denial of the impact on themselves of what they witnessed began to be challenged as outdated and probably dangerous. The signal point for the principal author of this paper was the 1998 coverage of the Swissair 111 crash, off the coast of Nova Scotia. It appeared that the notion that objectivity rendered news people impervious to traumatic stress^{vii} was a myth. The aircraft crashed into pitch-black seas near midnight. Almost no one witnessed anything ghastly, yet journalists were traumatized nonetheless. As facts emerged, they pieced together a mental picture of what had happened during the final minutes aboard the doomed aircraft, and talked at length with the distraught relatives of the victims. They also constituted the only professional group involved for whom no psychological support was offered. Still, to this observer,

one group seemed to fare better than most during the week following the crash. They were the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalists who arranged informally to get together each night to blow off steam over a beer. To those in whom they confided, it seemed that journalists who sought one another's companionship and moral comfort as they struggled to report the story of the crash and its aftermath learned by sharing their distress. The anecdotal evidence seemed to indicate that, in sharing their grief, these reporters discovered that their reaction to what they had experienced was a normal one.^{viii}

A year later, the topic of journalists and trauma resurfaced as journalists discussed their experience covering the student massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado. Rocky Mountain News photo editor Janet Reeves wrestled with the morality of the newspaper's visual coverage.^{ix} Evidence began to accumulate that traumatic stress was having an undetected but profound impact, draining the craft of experience.² Covering Columbine prompted a number of news people to quit and seek other occupations.^x Court reporters covering cases of horrific cruelty such as the Bernardo, Hilton and Pickton trials in Canada,³ acknowledged the toll that their work was taking.⁴ Losing talented journalists

² The principal author visited Colorado in June and July 1999. He interviewed reporters and photojournalists who had covered the Columbine massacre. Some found it hard to knock on another door or to lift the camera to take another photo. The tragedy prompted others to leave the craft.

³ Paul Kenneth Bernardo was convicted in 1995 for a series of rapes and murders of escalating sexual violence against young women, including the rape and murder of the younger sister his wife Karla Homolka, who was also convicted of lesser charges. Reporters covering the trial were shown videotapes that Karla Homolka recorded of the crimes and also learned the details of how the pair dismembered their victims to dispose of the remains. (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/bernardo/>).

In 2001, former world boxing champion Dave Hilton Jr. was convicted of sexually assaulting his two daughters from the age of 12 onwards. Several journalists who covered the trial confided to Robert M. Frank, how reporting on it had produced assignment stress injury. They explained that, in addition to having to absorb graphic details of three years of incest, a court-imposed publication ban worsened their traumatization, because it prevented them from disclosing to their readers, viewers and listeners that the victims were Hilton's daughters. The daughters waived confidentiality in 2004.

In 2006, Port Coquitlam, British Columbia pig farmer Robert Pickton was charged with murdering 27 women. One of the charges was thrown out of court and he was convicted of six of the murders in 2007. At this writing, those convictions remain under appeal. A trial for the remaining 20 murder allegations is pending.

to this invisible injury saps the strength of news organizations and ultimately proves costly to a society expecting reports from journalists whose work has met the test of time. Yet, even as anecdotal evidence mounted as to the toll these traumatic events were having, the advocates for traumatized news people grappled with skepticism; from other reporters, managers and occasionally even family members.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, abruptly and profoundly shifted those fundamental attitudes in a way that is rarely, if ever, seen in the course of a lifetime. Suddenly, everyone seemed to understand that traumatic stress could affect news people. Leading journalists wept openly on television. A new age had dawned. Research by Ross Perigoe^{xi} suggests that journalists were just as traumatized by the 9/11 attacks as their readers. Phrases in *The Gazette* newspaper in Montreal, such as “I can't seem to focus on any other work; everything else seems so unimportant”^{xii} by columnist Donna Nebenzahl and “I see three men, one of them wearing a turban. I start to shake”^{xiii} by columnist Elizabeth Bromstein humanized reporters to their readers by sharing their intimate fears and naturalized the inclination of those readers that fear of ‘the other’ was an acceptable form of behavior. This sharing of fears and trauma proved to be a mixed blessing. It served to identify the problem, but it neglected to provide any clarity on how to address it. Instead, a dangerous new attitude – suspicion of ‘the other’—took root.

One of the ways to begin looking at traumatic stress anew is to adopt new vocabulary. Patrice Keats, Assistant Professor in the Counseling Psychology Program at Simon Fraser University, notes that the Canadian Forces have helped to shape a new

⁴ Robert M. Frank conducted informal interviews June 2000 – March 2009, with more than two dozen reporters who covered the Bernardo, Hilton, and Pickton trials.

lexicon to describe the impact of traumatic stress, coining the term ‘operational stress injury’. She points out that this is a much more accurate way to describe what has occurred, and advocates adopting a similar term ‘assignment stress injury’^{xiv} for news people. Her innovation reflects a welcome distinction of effect from cause.

In an informal discussion during the 1999 ISTSS world conference in Miami, then CNN International president Chris Cramer asserted that post-traumatic stress disorder haunted all his hardened war correspondents. Pressed as to whether at least some of CNN’s war correspondents might have proved resilient, he paused for a beat and replied “I’ve got a couple—and they all have strong families.” Clearly, a supportive family helps. There is ample evidence that social support—the love and care of family, friends and colleagues—is extremely beneficial. Frank Ochberg observes, for instance, that a strong, monogamous conjugal relationship is extremely effective at offsetting traumatic stress but that, paradoxically, the after-effects of assignment stress injury can work to subvert that trusting relationship.⁵

We all owe a debt to modern psychiatry in its clinical approach to the treatment of stress disorders. But we believe that a reliance on clinical approaches is restrictive, since it hinges on qualified clinicians, rather than training and empowering the people closest at hand to intervene effectively. The case for emotional support is strong, but the requirement for a psychologist to provide the support is not as clear. Jonathan Shay, after decades treating Vietnam War veterans, concluded that those who fared best either found or created their own groups of trustworthy listeners.^{xv} In his experience, the degree of clinical qualification was not as accurate a predictor of success for traumatized victims as

⁵ Ochberg made this comment during the 1999 International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies World Conference in Miami.

was the degree of active listening and the extent of engagement of the intervener. It may be that spontaneous initiatives, like the informal get-togethers organized by news people such as the CBC reporters who covered the Swissair 111 crash can provide the necessary catharsis in a timely fashion.

There are other ways to attenuate assignment stress injury. For example, news managers can provide a vital link. In September 2001, *Ottawa Citizen* managing editor Lynn McAuley not only followed closely how her reporters in New York were coping, she also gave their colleagues and family members regular updates. McAuley also introduced the concept of rotating reporters through harrowing assignments, rather than leaving them to stay in place until the story ran its course.^{xvi} In proposing a therapeutic environment quite dissimilar to the psychiatrist's couch or the team-led therapy group, we feel it is important to begin with two principles. First is availability: no institution can anticipate how many counselors will be needed, how frequently they will be needed, or for how long. Second is flexibility: a variety of support options should be available depending on the degree of assignment stress injury and the support mechanism that works best for the individual. For this reason, we suggest a look back to a method that served reporters who experienced assignment stress injury during the Second World War.

The Montreal Press Club was created in 1948 by a group of reporters who had returned from covering World War II and needed opportunities to socialize with comrades *à hui clos*. They initially went to great length to exclude those who had not shared their experiences—and the aftershocks.⁶ Whether deliberately or not, they built

⁶ Robert M. Frank, co-author of this paper, served on the board of directors of the Montreal Press Club from 1996-1999.

their own groups of trustworthy listeners that extended beyond organizational boundaries, excluded those from outside the craft, and liberally self-medicated with alcohol.

Today, of course, we know that alcohol does more long-term harm than good. As a central nervous system depressant, it tends to worsen the after-effects of trauma. However, it is remarkable that these witnesses to death, horror and destruction intuitively wove together a model largely supported by trauma science. This model needs to be rediscovered and adapted to the 21st century.

Before condemning the press club founders as ill-informed because their ‘self-medication’ of alcohol had little lasting value to soothe the pain, it is worth recalling that they took their initiative 32 years before PTSD was recognized as a diagnosable ailment and more than a half-century before the first modern drug (a selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitor hitherto used to alleviate depression) was authorized to treat it. Though alcohol might have done more harm than good, the press club served as a vital stopgap. Profound societal changes—the two-income family, the flight to the suburbs, severe penalties for those caught driving while intoxicated, and greater emphasis on drinking in moderation—have made obsolete behavioral models that depend on liquor. Few of the press clubs that thrived during the second half of the 20th century survive today, and the handful that remain are under duress. Formed by returning war correspondents, it is fair to say that their purpose, among others, was to share their common experience during the conflict.

Though the alcohol-soaked press clubs of the 20th century are mostly gone, news people still need a means for informal dialogue. Clearly you don’t have to be a war correspondent to suffer assignment stress injury. A press club is more than a stool and a

sympathetic bartender; it disposes of organizational boundaries and hierarchical reporting structures, making it easier to talk without constraints. Above all, it enables news people to seek help from sympathetic colleagues.

While at first blush the lessons learned from press clubs established after the war might seem far-fetched, the parallels with modern methods to address assignment stress injuries are noteworthy. Attendance was voluntary and discussions wide-ranging.

According to Montreal's *The Gazette* sports reporter Brodie Snyder,^{xvii} privacy was respected. Jobs (and an understanding of what was required to do the job) were similar and known among the patrons. The atmosphere was comfortable and inviting and the hours of operation were tailored to reporters' circadian rhythm. The last deadline at *The Gazette* was 2:30 a.m. but, as a private club exempt from closing time restrictions, the Montreal Press Club remained open as long as patrons needed, often throughout the night.^{xviii}

Today, the press club as an institution has fallen out of favor, war is perceived as more distant, is covered by proportionately fewer reporters, at least in the Canadian context and there is little opportunity to examine what lessons it could offer to current journalists. The example of war correspondents certainly illuminates how traumatic stress influences reporting and reporters. Yet efforts today to address the impact of traumatic stress which dwell exclusively on war correspondents are counterproductive, since they direct the lion's share of well-meaning energy and resources at a tiny elite. To promote

healing, we need to address the effect, not the cause.⁷ The problem will not be understood and addressed properly abroad if we fail to address widespread assignment stress injury at home. The outpouring of well-intentioned support for foreign correspondents has inadvertently spawned a mystique. It has characterized assignment stress injury as something that should not happen here.

All news people who experience assignment stress injury are worthy of our support and, for the minority for whom it is necessary, clinical treatment. Trauma is a great leveler. It respects no borders, no language and no culture. It does not discriminate between the freelance photojournalist for a suburban weekly and the flagship daily newspaper foreign correspondent (of whom there are precious few left). Neither should we.

The model for informed mutual support relies upon individual news gatherers as the healers of first instance—a solution based on the long-established and well-proven first-response principles, devised by St. John Ambulance in Quebec City in 1883, that

⁷ It is commonplace for those who experience assignment stress injury to become obsessed with the cause of the incident that provoked it. To understand this phenomenon, it's worth noting the brain's mechanism for coping with sudden threats of imminent death or grievous injury, which bypasses normal pathways. Instead, it relies heavily on the limbic system which is thought to have evolved earlier than other parts of the brain, and regulates the atavistic fight-or-flight reaction that enables animals to survive. In addition to dumping powerful hormones into the bloodstream that boost metabolism and muscle response, it also makes information available along shorter—hence much faster—pathways to allow you to analyze the threat in a flash and make split-second decisions that could help to save your life. In essence, when the threat of death suddenly presents itself, the brain ignores other chatter and very loudly and very rapidly asks itself the question: "Why?" The experiences recorded whenever this alternate pathway kicks into action also tend to imprint themselves indelibly in people's memory, because it uses the hippocampus—a part of the brain responsible for imprinting short-term recall in long-term memory. From an evolutionary standpoint, this makes sense, since recalling the cause of a threat might help to prevent or avoid a recurrence. Though this reflex has helped humans to survive for millennia, it is ill-suited to many modern situations. A common example is the automobile accident. If you are driving, there is no survival advantage in being pumped up to fight for your life or to flee, though the instant analysis of the cause might save you or prevent a reprise. Your mind might also chew on the conduct of the other drivers involved, long afterward. Another interesting outcome of the brain's much more rapid intake of detail, when threatened, is that the ensuing recollections of incidents that spanned mere seconds play out afterward in memory as though they occurred in slow motion over a much longer duration.

changed the world's approach to physical trauma. The volunteers serve as a powerful multiplier—trained surrogates who provide a ministry of presence—since it is impossible to anticipate how many clinicians could be called upon to stand by to address each contingency. News people help colleagues by serving as a trustworthy friend. Their ability to listen without offering judgment or advice is pivotal. So is their discretion in an otherwise gossipy and judgmental occupation. According to Shay, “Narrative heals personality changes only if the survivor finds or creates a trustworthy community of listeners for it.”^{xix}

Those who have experienced assignment stress injury appreciate discovering that they are not alone; reaching out to someone who has returned from a tough assignment helps. Often the help is initially rebuffed; sometimes it is accepted, later on. Volunteer peer supporters also set the incident in its larger context. They affirm their love for the craft and remind their colleagues that news coverage is important, painful as it might some times be to report it.

Witnessing the impact that reporting on the Swissair 111 disaster had on journalists spurred the principal author of this paper to form Newscoverage Unlimited, an organization designed to foster mutual support among news people. It provided a three-day seminar to impart skills that journalists need in order to serve as effective peer supports. The organization took the broad view of who a journalist-victim is—namely, all those injured in the process of gathering and reporting the news. A satellite television technician watching all the raw footage, was deemed just as worthy of support as the reporter who appeared on-screen with an account of what happened.

Newscoverage Unlimited's clinical director Frema Engel, a Canadian pioneer in the treatment of workplace traumatic stress injury, devised the curriculum. Classes could accommodate up to 18 participants and were initially held at professional gatherings such as Newscoverage Unlimited's initial seminar at the National Press Photographers' Association convention in Memphis, June 30-July 1, 2000. Participants included reporters, photojournalists and student journalists. All eight were volunteers who had traveled great distance at their own expense to participate.

The seminar's curriculum introduced participants to the role of volunteer supporters, provided an overview of trauma and reactions to it, provided opportunities to practice listening and support skills, and taught how to assess colleagues' needs, provide effective support and—if necessary, refer those at risk for clinical help. The sessions also addressed the need to overcome professional barriers to seeking and accepting help, as well as how to reach out effectively.

The response to trauma needs first to start with the basics: building a broad foundation to support news people who experience assignment stress injury. Second, once this broad base is established, there will obviously be support for the small but important coterie of war correspondents. Training news people in large number how to support colleagues who have experienced assignment stress injury ends isolation, spreads awareness and promotes understanding by creating a supportive news culture. It also helps to eliminate the stigma that hitherto discouraged the minority of news people at risk of developing full-blown PTSD, clinical depression or substance abuse from seeking clinical help.

We accept the criticism from clinicians who will point out that informed mutual support is not a panacea, particularly for the most extreme forms of assignment stress injury, but we believe that it could help many, and perhaps establish a climate for even the most grievously injured to benefit from the social support. It is easier for an individual to deal with unsettling aftershocks if he or she does not fear negative reactions by friends, family, colleagues and supervisors. Just knowing there is an acceptance of assignment stress injuries could be a source of relief to many news people.^{xx}

Newscoverage Unlimited's courses began to spread this understanding and support soon after its foundation. One journalist reported that the knowledge enabled him to seek help when a full-blown bout of PTSD emerged a year later. He said that he would otherwise have taken his own life. Another trained peer support volunteer journalist in Grand Junction, Colorado, encountered a colleague who had experienced traumatic stress injury after reporting on some particularly horrific family violence. The colleague thought that he should simply tough it out. When the peer support volunteer told him that his feelings were quite normal, his reaction was relief and he replied, "I guess you don't have to witness the twin towers to be affected." No, you don't.

In 2007, the newly formed Canadian Association of Journalists Educational Foundation agreed to revive and implement mutual support training for news people, as soon as sponsors could be identified to cover the cost of delivering the course. The seminar is considered professional development for news people, and the trainers will travel to wherever the course is needed. In the meantime, spurred on by news leaders such as Chris Cramer and former CBC Television chief news editor John Owen, great strides have been made in getting news organizations to provide training and equipment

for news people who are about to undertake particularly dangerous assignments. These broad-based courses, often taught by former commandos, teach valuable skills that can prevent injury or death. The danger with these courses is that they are often considered an ‘inoculation’ against trauma, yet there is no proof that learning about traumatic stress prevents assignment stress injury or lessens its impact. Nevertheless, by increasing awareness, the training makes it possible for a victim to understand and identify what has happened and seek help. This is where peer support is vital, and where a sympathetic workplace and the ability to confide in trustworthy, non-judgmental colleagues—some of whom might work for other news outlets—is pivotal.^{xxi}

While we acknowledge the potential and real trauma that reporters face, two principles cannot be denied: first, that their work is important. The public’s need to know is a crucial factor in what James Winter calls ‘democracy’s oxygen’^{xxii}; second, that there is an undeniable attraction to covering the unusual, the dangerous, and the extraordinary. Some journalists enjoy the thrill of journalism in dangerous locales. It is what Engel⁸ describes as a rather unhealthy tendency for traumatized journalists to return to danger zones like a moth to the flame. They recognize that ordinary life is safer, but soon grow restless, find day-to-day reporting banal and long to return to a life of dangerous assignments. Many believe that these assignments are more important than seemingly run-of-the-mill stories at home.

Writing this paper has proved to be something of a catharsis for the authors. It follows the principle that one cannot remain unaffected by what one has witnessed. No

⁸ Frema Engel, who lectures at McGill and Université de Montréal, was clinical director of Newscoverage Unlimited. She is frequently sought out by reporters for her expertise on the impact of workplace-related violence.

topic can be explored without personal impact—a personal reflection. By definition, anyone composing an account of the topic is generating his or her own narrative trauma or series of traumas.^{xxiii} But we are concerned that most approaches to the therapeutic process currently resemble a novice's first look through a telescope—from the wrong end. Instead of observing traumatic stresses at a distance and bringing it closer (the real function of the telescope) we observe the trauma which is in front of our noses and move the focal point further away, so as to make it seem distant—just as a telescope would, were it to be peered into from the opposite end that its designers intended. More research needs to be done on how journalists themselves can play a part in implementing methods to be part of the solution. While there is no denying the value of clinical intervention in the minority of cases in which a news person is at risk of a psychological disorder, journalists ought also to look to their own membership for informed mutual support, advocacy and leadership.

This is not about bricks and mortar. It is about strengthening the craft. News people need to come to grips—themselves—with the impact of traumatic stress on the craft, take ownership of the problem and take charge of implementing the solution, relying on clinicians and academics for treatment and scientific research, respectively. As Jonathan Shay put it:

“The best treatment restores control to the survivor and actively encourages communalization of the trauma. Healing is done *by* survivors, not *to* survivors.”^{xxiv}

Support, Treat, Study

There are many ways to intervene to help news people who have experienced assignment stress injury. The principal author has developed some commentaries about each constituency's potential strengths and weaknesses.⁹

Colleagues

Pro: Understand the unique demands of the craft.

Con: Gossipy. Judgmental. Inclined to offer advice, rather than adopting a supportive approach. Unacquainted with what helps relieve assignment stress injury.

Family

Pro: Closest personal relationships. Monogamous conjugal relationship beneficial.

Con: Don't understand unique demands of the craft or therapeutic approaches.

Friends

Pro: Close personal relationships.

Con: Don't understand unique demands of the craft or therapeutic approaches.

Clinicians

Pro: Benevolent strangers. Train, treat and medicate.

Con: Tendency to pathologize, monopolize treatment. Morbid fascination and a social agenda.

Academics

Pro: Build base of scientific knowledge, train and educate. Future orientation.

Con: Advocates a personal agenda. Self-seeking to gain academic merit. Morbid fascination.

Advocates

Pro: Raise awareness and resources.

Con: Narrow interests, pecuniary motivation. Morbid fascination.

Managers

Pro: Health care, workplace leadership, professional development, colleagues/family liaison.¹⁰

Con: Treating corporate interests as zero-sum game.

Sponsors

Pro: Support professional education initiatives for journalists to help colleagues.

Con: Use their donations subtly to influence news people at a time when they are vulnerable.

Channel resources away from areas of greatest need.

⁹ The principal author, Robert M. Frank developed these observations in the course of more than a decade of work advocating on behalf of news people who have experienced assignment stress injury.

¹⁰ Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that the news industry has a role to play in building public understanding of the importance of reporting to society. Consider the example of hospital emergency room staff. Their resilience to the carnage that they witness, for example, is bolstered not simply because they know that they are doing good, but by widespread public recognition by the public that their work is a social good. Were there greater recognition of the good that reporting does for society, a great deal more traumatic stress might be attenuated.

ENDNOTES

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- ^{ix} Janet Reeves, Remarks to the National Press Photographers' Association Conference, (Denver, CO., July 2, 1999).
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- ^{xv} Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 186.
- ^{xvi} Lynn McAuley, Remarks to the Canadian Association of Journalists national conference. (2002).
As managing editor of *The Citizen*, McAuley worked closely with *Ottawa Citizen* staff through the months immediately following September 11, 2001, coordinating coverage of both the news and feature sections, all the while seeing to the needs of frontline staff, their colleagues and family.
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- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 188-9.
"Several traits are required for the audience to be trustworthy. Some traits relate to strength. The listeners must be able to listen to the story without injury. Combat veterans will never trust a therapist whom they see to be 'freaked out' by what he or she hears. In a therapy group doing trauma-centered work, the other members of the group must be strong enough to cope with inevitable triggers to their own memories. The listeners must also be strong enough to hear the story without having to deny the reality of the experience or to blame the victim. We are so trained to deny the soldier's experience that the normal response to hearing an account of betrayal is to make all the power-holder's excuses: This is a figment of your fantasy; if you knew all the facts, you'd see it was for the best; you've got a hidden agenda in saying this; it never happened; you brought it on yourself; and anyway, it's twenty years ago, so forget it and don't create any more problems now. To be trustworthy, a listener must be ready to experience some of the terror, grief, and rage that the victim did. This is one meaning, after all, of the word *compassion*."
- ^{xx} Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 186.
"Restoration of trustworthy community to the survivor will have healthy biological effects, of comparable or greater magnitude than successful medications."
- ^{xxi} Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 189.
"To achieve trust, listeners must respect the narrator. The advice that veterans consistently give to trauma therapists is 'Listen! Just listen.' Respect, embodied in this kind of listening, is readiness to be changed by the narrator. The change may be small or large. It may be simply learning something not previously known, feeling something, seeing something from a new perspective, or it may be as

profound as redirection of the listener's way of being in the world. Respect also means refraining from judgment. Trauma narrative imparts knowledge to the community that listens *and* responds to it emotionally. Emotion carries essential cognitive elements; it is not separable from the knowledge. Something quite profound takes place when the trauma survivor sees enlightenment take hold. The narrator now speaks as his or her free self, not as captive of the perpetrator. The aloneness is broken in a manner that obliterates neither the narrator nor the listener in a reenactment."

^{xxii} James Winter, *Democracy's oxygen: How corporations control the news* (Montreal, QC: Black Rose Books, 1997).

^{xxiii} Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil* eds. Rolf-Peter Hostmann and Judith Morman. Trans. by Judith Norman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69.

"Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into the abyss, the abyss stares back into you."

^{xxiv} Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 187.

"The essential injuries in combat PTSD are moral and social, and the central treatment must be moral and social."

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