

The deepest work is usually the darkest. . . So do not be afraid to investigate the worst. . . . It is in this psychic kind of land development that Wild Woman [Divine Feminine] shines. She is not afraid of the deepest dark, in fact she can see in the dark. She is not afraid of offal, refuse, decay, stink, blood, cold bones, dying girls, or murderous husbands. She can see it, she can take it, she can help. (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 55)

The hidden core of posttrauma survival is the deepest dark. That is where the Divine Feminine called me, to research my theory. I made the descent via the five cycles of Intuitive Inquiry, a feminist research method which, by design can also become a sacred passageway to personal transformation (Anderson, 1998). Within that crucible Dark Goddess gave me the light to see and the courage to take the deepest dark within myself and the deepest dark in stories of the 12 survivors I interviewed. I made myself vulnerable to her and she changed me. I see trusted vulnerability as the essence of Divine Feminine in humankind. Vulnerability is the heart of my research.

This research challenges the assumption that the capacity to choose vulnerability in relationships with self and others, including the Divine in transpersonal realms, remains intact and accessible to survivors of trauma. I make that challenge because in the survival structure proposed, the psychological foundation of security dependent upon a dynamic of interpersonal trust (Baier, 1993; Erikson, 1956; Maslow, 1954) is destroyed. It is replaced by a foundation of security dependent upon a dynamic of interpersonal control.

My research introduces a new theory. The theory makes a primary claim: that irrational self-blame specific to a traumatic event is an act of violence against an innocent self. My results linked irrational self-blame specific to a traumatic event with “shame’s momentary lethal impact on the self” (H.B. Lewis, 1987, p. 1). While irrational self-blame that occurs in reaction to traumatic experiences is a well-established phenomenon

in trauma literature (e.g., Herman 1992/1997; Hindman, 1983, 1985, 1989, 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1992), the premise that it is a moment of self-inflicted violence that serves a survival function is novel. Based upon that premise my theory makes three innovative claims.

First, there is a *deep structure* to trauma survival. This deep structure is an ego defense mechanism that makes security needs dependent upon being guilty. Second, shame is both a traumatic experience and an inevitable consequence of severe trauma. Third, shame fused with guilt forms an emotional *trauma bond* at the core of this survival construct. Irrational self-blame as an act of unconscious violence against one's innocent self is at the core of the deep structure of survival this study explores because it is the cognitive glue that fuses shame with guilt to form that trauma bond.

A trauma bond is a relationship based on an attachment to an "other" that vacillates between being a source of nurturance and a source of hurt (Herman, 1992/1997; Hindman, 1991; B. James, 1994). The dynamic of any trauma bond is nurturance at the price of violence. Maladaptive guilt, the product of the trauma bond of shame fused with guilt, works like this: Guilt nurtures the ego by keeping it safe from the experience of powerlessness and intolerable fear in shame. Guilt hurts the ego by maintaining that safety on the basis of being chronically at fault. My research reveals this trauma bond of shame fused with guilt to be a learned functional neurosis (Dollard & Miller, 1950) driving cycles of violence in the deep structure of survival.

When shame fuses with guilt, it compromises the function of guilt to act as a moral compass. A functional neurosis that prevents guilt from acting as a moral guide creates serious problems in both psychological and spiritual development. Unraveling

this extremely subtle trauma bond at the core of survival is critical because problem ownership is the bedrock of successful therapeutic interventions. There can be no problem ownership without guilt acting as a moral guide. Problem ownership requires knowing the difference between right and wrong. While that may differ from culture to culture, the ability to discern the difference is a critical skill in spiritual development, especially at the point of transcending the ego. Shame at the core of this functional neurosis is deadly to religious beliefs (i.e., interpretations) and to spiritual behaviors (i.e., spiritual practice). Looking at this issue in terms of Ken Wilber's (1993b) *pre/trans fallacy*, when this psychological structure of survival in the *Personal* is projected onto the *Transpersonal*, the *Transpersonal* becomes a shame-based fallacy.

Psychologically, this research attempts to set guilt free from the silent oppression of shame in the power relationship I see between these two emotions. Accomplishing that task gives voice to the wordless oppression of shame and makes it a feminist (e.g., Braud & Anderson, 1998; Mertens, 1998) effort to seek out an unnamed and silent power schema that is timeless, cross-cultural, and cross-gendered. As humankind struggles to emerge from old ego-centered, separatist paradigms into an earth community consciousness, I hope to contribute insight into what drives chronic separation from self and others, including the Divine Feminine. We are living the worst case scenario of religious violence that judges, hurts, and kills people in the name of God, and I feel a compelling need to share my theory as a piece to the puzzle of accurate interventions, prevention, and healing. I want to join my voice with the global voice of hope.

No matter how wounded or weak or imprisoned you may be and no matter how difficult and hopeless your image of trouble may seem to you to be, there are enduring realities that come to your side and give you a chance to succeed in your struggle. (Moore, 2003, p. 42)