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ABSTRACT

This life history constitutes a phenomenological analysis of trauma as it has occurred over one woman's lifetime. My subject's life was somewhat atypical. At 21 years of age she had to deal with facial disfigurement after losing an eye in an accident with a pair of scissors. When she was 35, her mother whom she had nursed for several years died from cancer after a long illness. The death of her father when she was 61 was more traumatic; they had had a salient and positive relationship and she had been his caregiver for almost thirty years. At 66 she was critically injured in a car accident in which her husband was killed, and began living alone for the first time in her life. At 78 she was raped, and her brother killed in the aggravated burglary of his home and surgery. She described this most recent event as the most traumatic experience of her life.

I have used the life history method(s) of in-depth interviews, and participant observer techniques to record her narrative. It was apparent that our close familial relationship and her phenomenological attitude influenced her disclosure during the interviewing process. The issue of truth was exacerbated because I was unable to triangulate the early years of her narrative with another person who had known her during this period. There has also been distortion of her narrative when I have intruded with my idiographic propositions which explained how some of these traumatic experiences and her successive recoveries became significant turning points, facilitating subsequent changes in the biological, cultural, social and psychosocial dimensions of her life.

As her socio-cultural context was changed by these experiences, so too was her disposition toward subsequent trauma. She seemed to develop a degree of crisis competence and stoicism which appeared to reflect the socio-cultural context in which she had matured and the cumulative experience of trauma which had been such a feature of her life. It was also apparent that her Christian faith facilitated a fatalistic disposition toward recovery from trauma, bolstering her self-confidence and determination to survive adversity.
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