

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### **Do You Know...How to Bounce Back From Writing-Induced Traumas: Plump Up Your Resilience**

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"Every time I pick up my dissertation, I hear my advisors screaming." This is the memory that stopped a new-doc from turning her findings into a publication. At the time, I had no idea she might be suffering from *post-traumatic scholarly disruption* (PTSD). Twenty five years later, now that I know what to look for, I meet nurse authors suffering the aftershocks of this stealer of scholarly joy everywhere my consulting takes me. This column, the third in a series on delicate dilemmas nurse authors find difficult to discuss, opens with the composite story of a would-be author's experiences with PTSD and offers 3 bounce-back strategies to plump up your scholarly resilience.

### **Writing-Induced Trauma Stunts a Nurse Author's Scholarly Progress**

Early in coursework, Sharon (names and details changed) began assisting a doctoral professor with his research. After this professor became her dissertation chair, Sharon resigned her assistantship to concentrate on her own research. In retaliation, he delayed several months before returning chapters that dripped with nit-picky critiques and required countless changes. After 2 years of this, Sharon asked my advice. I encouraged her to meet with her professor's boss about his *scholarly hazing*. Within a week of that meeting, Sharon was assigned a new and supportive chair. Nine months afterwards, a jubilant email announced she'd defended her dissertation.

Several years later, Sharon contacted me for help with a scholarly dilemma. Although she loved teaching and her faculty colleagues were supportive, she spent research days in her office twiddling her thumbs instead of writing. When I asked how Sharon was processing her experience with her dissertation advisor, she said she wasn't. Then she mentioned the bad dreams that kept her awake. These sleepless nights left her so exhausted, she'd stopped going to the gym and gained 10 pounds.

### **PTSD and Scholarly Resilience Intensives**

Suspecting that Sharon's symptoms were related to her dissertation difficulties, I explained how *scholarly joy-stealing* can rob nurse authors of productivity along with their zest, clarity, feelings of worth, and desire for more connection (Heinrich, 2013). And that *Post-Traumatic Scholarly Disruption* is a response to sustained joy-stealing in the form of scholarly hazing and/or harassment. Symptoms can include anxiety, inability to control the fear response, flashbacks, avoidance, depressive symptoms, and hyper-arousal (Heinrich 2013). *Hazing* refers to disruptions that occur during students' initiation into the scholarly role, while *harassment* connotes disruptions that accompany post-graduation pursuits like promotion and tenure.

Glad to have names for what she'd been going through, Sharon was scared that the damage done was irreversible. When I explained how coaching helped me overcome my own scholarly disruptions, she was comforted to hear that traumatized scholars – like those who experience war-related trauma (Renden 2012) – can bounce back when they get help with making sense of what happened to them. For this purpose, we agreed to enter into a mentorship called a *Scholarly Resilience Intensive* (SRI). These Intensives are tutorials with a coaching approach that offer mentees the support, skills, and

self-confidence needed to meet a desired scholarly goal as they work through the fear-drenched memories triggered in the process.

### **Sharon Plumps Up Her Scholarly Resilience**

Sharon's desired scholarly goal for her SRI was a ready-to-submit manuscript. Our semester of weekly, 90 minute sessions started with a *check in* about experiences that raised or lowered Sharon's scholarly spirits. During one check in, Sharon admitted to taking to the couch the previous weekend when she'd not heard back from a journal editor about reviewing her manuscript. That Monday, when Sharon got the editor's yes, she was elated. As we talked more, Sharon realized that her feelings of helplessness about her dissertation advisor's tardy, chapter turnarounds got triggered when this journal editor failed to respond within 24 hours to her email query.

This insight led Sharon to share other *trigger situations* that plunged her back into PTSD fears during our check-ins. As her understanding of her triggers deepened, the time it took Sharon to *bounce back* lessened. For example, Sharon was devastated when the editor requested revisions on the manuscript she'd submitted. Only this time, instead of taking to the couch, she emailed me to ask for help with the revision process. And, as an avid reader who turns to literature for inspiration in times of trouble, Sharon found solace in a book containing the rejection letters of a famous author.

### **How to Plump Up Your Scholarly Resilience**

*Resilience* is the ability to bounce back from situations that traumatize (Zolli & Healy 2013). During our semester-long Intensive, Sharon plumped up her scholarly resilience with her willingness to explore emotional responses in the present that revived past traumas. If you suspect that your scholarly joy has been stolen or you're suffering from PTSD, here's 3 ways to plump up your scholarly resilience:

**Ask for Help.** Sharon had to break the silence that kept her scholarly hazing a secret. When you're ready to break your silence, look for a scholar-mentor. Preferably, one who has experienced joy stealing, scholarly hazing, and/or harassment who also has an established track record of helping nurse authors bounce back.

**Wake Up To Trauma Triggers.** Sharon responding to the editor's request for revision as if it were a flat-out rejection was the tip off: this response triggered her trauma response. As you become more aware of your trauma triggers, you'll develop your own repertoire of bounce back strategies.

**Share Your Story:** Sharon has started sharing her dissertation story with faculty colleagues whom she suspects of "being broken" by PTSD. You'll know you've bounced back when you tell your PTSD story with insight into, rather than blame, for those who stole your joy.

### **Sharon's Post-Traumatic Growth Spurt**

You'll be glad to hear that Sharon is a published author at work on her second manuscript. That's the good news about PTSD. Take the time to make sense of what you've been through and you'll bounce back better than before. Researchers call this *post-traumatic growth* (Renden 2012) to which I added *spurt*. If you suspect that your thumb twiddling avoidance of writing is related to scholarly joy stealing, then you've got a choice. Suffer in silence and stay stuck. Or plump up your scholarly resilience by reaching out for help.

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