

The Call to Courage: Lessons and Practices on Institutional Courage & Accountability

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Today

1. Betrayal Trauma & Betrayal Blindness
2. Institutional Betrayal
3. Lessons from Campus
4. Response to Disclosure & DARVO
5. Institutional Courage

1. Betrayal Trauma & Betrayal Blindness

Memory & Trauma – Consider Frank Fitzpatrick

Frank Fitzpatrick... began remembering having been sexually molested by a parish priest at age 12. ... Mr. Fitzpatrick's retrieval of the repressed memories began, he said, when "I was feeling a great mental pain..."

Mr. Fitzpatrick... slowly realized that the mental pain was due to a "**betrayal** of some kind," and remembered the sound of heavy breathing. "Then I realized I had been sexually abused by someone I loved," said Mr. Fitzpatrick.

But it was not until two weeks later that he suddenly remembered the priest, the Rev. James R. Porter.

The New York Times, 21 July 1992

I started with a question in 1991

- Why would individuals remain unaware of (or even forget) traumas they had experienced?
 - And, related to this, why are some traumas especially likely to be unseen and forgotten?
- Proposed answer: Betrayal Trauma theory

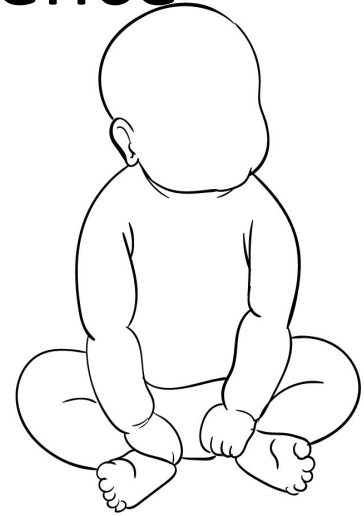
Betrayal Trauma Theory:

Consider our Sensitivity to Betrayal

- Ability to evaluate trustworthiness is highly important to our survival
 - We depend on social contracts
 - We are harmed by cheating and betrayal
- When empowered, we have exquisite sensitivity to cheating and betrayal
 - Response is adaptive: confrontation or withdrawal

Betrayal Trauma Theory: Consider Human Dependence

- Humans are profoundly dependent on others
- Attachment system protects dependent person
- Baby has a “job” to engage (to love and be lovable)
- *Motivates approach and positive engagement*



With varying degrees, dependence and attachment continue throughout life, including in family, school, workplace, community, nation.

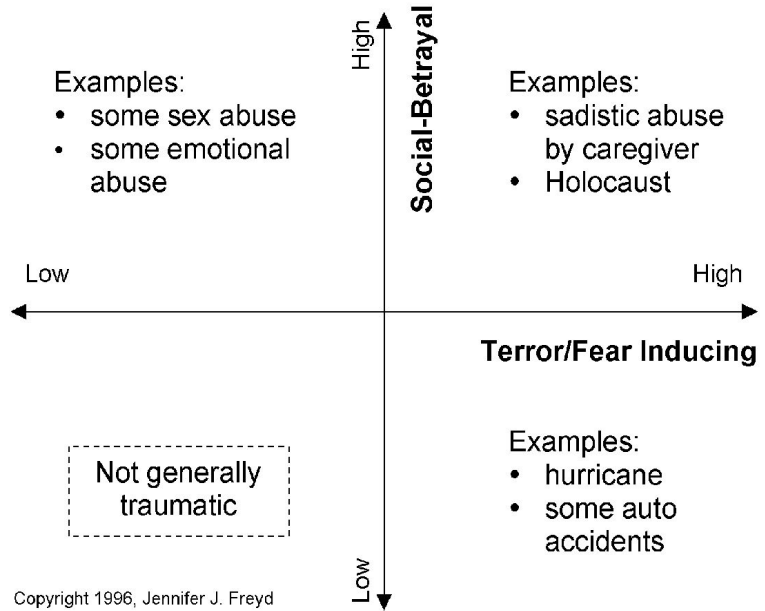


Betrayal Trauma Theory:

Betrayal Blindness as a Survival Mechanism

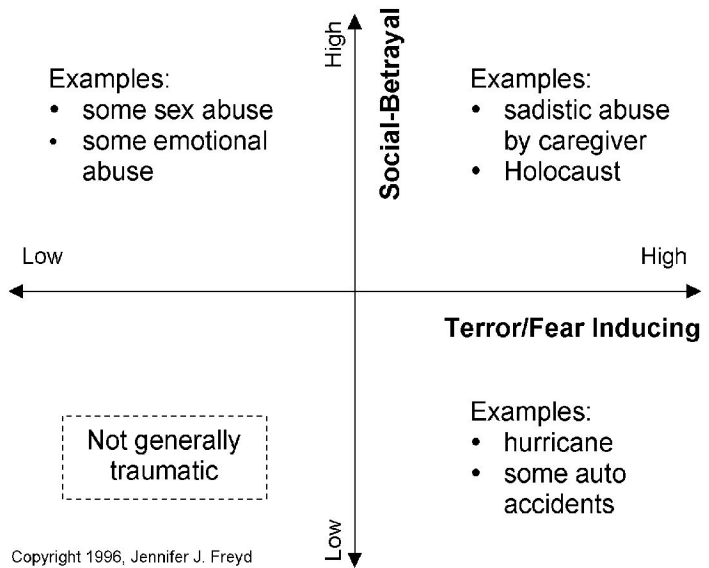
- What does a dependent person do when betrayed?
 - child abused by caregiver (or employee mistreated by boss) risks further mistreatment if awareness motivates withdrawal or confrontation
 - conflicts with needs of attachment (approach & engage)
- Betrayal blindness is advantageous when awareness would threaten necessary (or apparently necessary) relationships
- Unawareness and forgetting are sometimes an adaptive response to betrayal
 - Short run survival; long run cost

Betrayal Trauma Theory Suggests Two Primary Dimensions of Traumatic Events



- Physically threatening and terrorizing (fear inducing)
- Social-betrayal (betrayal trauma)
- Would rates of forgetting and symptoms of distress depend on these dimensions?

Summary of 20+ Years of Research: Betrayal is also Toxic & *Gendered*



•High Betrayal is associated with increases in symptoms of

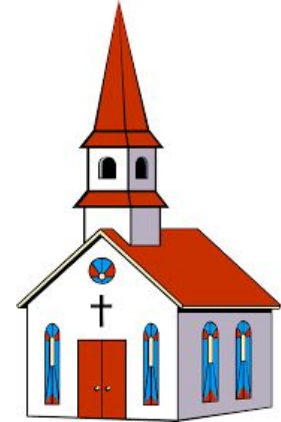
- Forgetting, unawareness, not telling
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Shame
- PTSD, Dissociation
- Physical illness
- Hallucinations
- Self harm
- Problematic substance use
- Revictimization

•*Women/girls at higher risk than men/boys of high betrayal exposure*

2. Institutional Betrayal

What about Institutional Betrayal?

- We can depend on, trust, & love institutions
- Can institutions betray?
- If so, is it harmful?
- Betrayal blindness?



Defining Institutional Betrayal

- Institutions harming those dependent on the institution
- Includes the failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings within the institution when there is a reasonable expectation of protection.

Dangerous Safe Havens

(Smith & Freyd, JTS, 2013)

- First empirical focus: educational institutions
- Sample: undergraduate women
- Measured
 - Sexual Assault Experiences
 - Trauma Symptoms
 - Institutional Betrayal

Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ, Smith & Freyd, 2013)

1. Not taking proactive steps to prevent this type of experience?
2. Creating an environment in which this type of experience/s seemed common or like no big deal?
3. Creating an environment in which this experience seemed more likely to occur?
4. Making it difficult to report the experience/s?
5. Responding inadequately to the experience/s, if reported?
6. Covering up the experience/s?
7. Punishing you in some way for this experience (e.g., loss of privileges or status)?

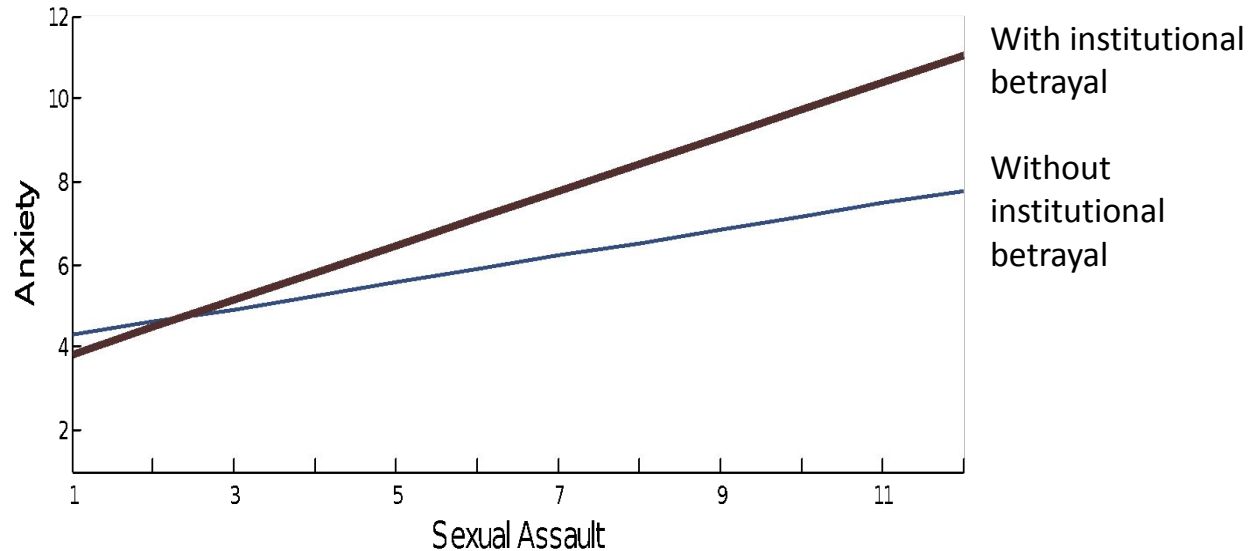
46%

of female students with unwanted sexual experiences
reported experiencing institutional betrayal

(Smith & Freyd, 2013)

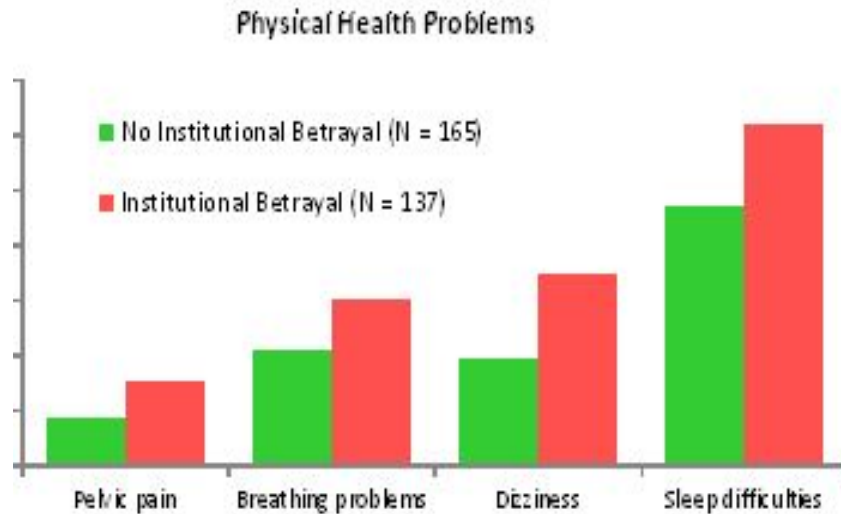
Institutional Betrayal Exacerbates Trauma Symptoms (Smith & Freyd, 2013)

- Exacerbates **Anxiety**, Dissociation, Sexual Problems, and Sexual-abuse related symptoms



Physical Health Costs of Institutional Betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2017)

- Institutional betrayal is also associated with physical health problems, even when controlling for betrayal trauma



Perceptions of Institutional Betrayal Predict Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Among Veterans Exposed to Military Sexual Trauma

Lindsey L. Monteith,^{1,2} Nazanin H. Bahraini,^{1,2} Bridget B. Matarazzo,^{1,2}
Kelly A. Soberay,¹ and Carly Parnitzke Smith³

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Findings with US Veterans (Monteith et al 2016)

- MST survivors experiences of institutional betrayal associated with:
 - PTSD symptoms
 - Depression
 - **Higher odds of attempting suicide**

Institutional betrayal blindness (Smith & Freyd, 2017)

- Institutional betrayal exposure and then staying in the institution is also associated with dissociative symptoms (unawareness, forgetting) even when controlling for betrayal trauma exposure

Not just about sexual violence

- Institutional betrayal in health care, judicial system, governments, etc.
- Institutional betrayal associated with inequality and oppression including racism, homophobia, etc.
- Even institutional management of covid?

Covid-related Institutional Betrayal

Adams-Clark & Freyd (2021)

- More than 50% of undergrads reported experiencing at least 1 type of COVID-19 related institutional betrayal at large public university
- Covid-related institutional betrayal was associated with trauma symptoms, even when controlling for gender, prior trauma history, and COVID-19 infection (both among self and close other).

Institutional betrayal also costly for institutions

- Disengagement from the system
- Illness, absenteeism, turn-over
- Loss of potential talent
- Internal rot, corruption, eventual collapse
- Reputational cost? (depending on societal context, whisper networks, PR disasters)

A thought about our vulnerability



The harm of institutional betrayal

- Institutional betrayal harms individuals in at least two distinct ways:
 - *pragmatic*
 - *psychological*

3. Lessons from Campus

2014 at the UO - A Campus in Crisis



In Summer 2014 at the UO

- Making institutional changes (finally) became a priority
- We needed to gather local data on campus victimization and institutional behavior
- I had the tools (years of measuring campus sexual violence as it related to childhood betrayal trauma)
- This quickly led to my lab's first campus sexual violence survey at the UO in August 2014



Sexual violence campus survey, UO 2015 (Smith, Rosenthal, Gómez, Smidt, Freyd)



Random selection of undergrads and grad students recruited

Survey instruments & findings at:

<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/campus/>

2015 Rates of Victimization for Undergraduate Students While at UO

Victimization Type	Male Undergraduates	Female Undergraduates
Completed penetration without consent	1%	13%***
Any attempted or completed sexual contact without consent	6%	27%***
Stalking	19%	26%*
Dating violence (battering)	6%	14%**
Sexual or gender-based harassment-related event– by other student	46%	68%***
Sexual or gender-based Harassment-related event – by faculty/staff	21%	28%*

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, higher rate for females compared to males

2015 Rates of Victimization for Graduate Students While At UO

Victimization Type	Male Graduate Students	Female Graduate Students
Completed penetration without consent	<1%	4%*
Any attempted or completed sexual contact without consent	4%	10%*
Stalking	12%	25%***
Dating violence (battering)	6%	11%
Sexual or gender-based harassment-related event– by other student	39%	58%***
Sexual or gender-based Harassment-related event – by faculty/staff	23%	38%***

*p<.05, ***p<.001,
higher rate for
females compared
to males

2015 Rates of Victimization for Female Students: Undergrad vs Grad

- Power and Opportunity

****p<.01, ***p<.001, higher rate for undergrads compared to grads**
**** p<.01, higher rate for grads compared to undergrads**

Victimization Type	Undergraduates	Graduate Students
Completed penetration without consent	13%***	4%
Attempted and completed vaginal, oral, or anal contact without consent	20%***	8%
Any attempted or completed sexual contact without consent	27%***	10%
Stalking	26%	25%
Dating violence (battering)	14%	11%
Sexual or gender-based harassment-related event– by other student	68%**	58%
Sexual or gender-based Harassment-related event – by faculty/staff	28%	38%**

Sexual harassment of graduate students by faculty/staff (Rosenthal, Smidt, & Freyd 2016)

- Controlling for other forms of victimization, harassment by faculty and staff is associated with
 - Feeling unsafe
 - Trauma symptoms
 - Experiences of additional institutional betrayal
- Perhaps sexual harassment by faculty and staff is itself a kind of overt institutional betrayal

4. Response to Disclosure & DARVO

Response to disclosure matters greatly

- Not reporting sexual violence & harassment is currently the norm
 - E.g.: only 6% of sexually harassed grad students reported the harassment to university sources (Rosenthal, Smidt, & Freyd 2016)
- Why? Because reporting is truly risky
 - Reporting can lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on social & institutional response

Impact of Social Response to Disclosure (Ullman, 2000)

- Negative social reactions:
 - Blaming, not believing, treating you differently, distraction, egocentric behavior
 - *Particularly damaging*: controlling the survivor's decisions (e.g., “told others about your experience without your permission”)

Listening Skills Tip Sheet

Based on research on how to teach helpful responses to disclosure (e.g.: Foynes & Freyd, 2011)

Tip Sheet at:

<https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/disclosure/goodlistener.html>

A particularly pernicious response: DARVO (Freyd, 1997)

- Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender
 - **D**eny “It never happened”
 - **A**ttack: “You’re a liar”
 - **R**everse **V**ictim & **O**ffender: “I’m the real victim”

DARVO seems to work



Harsey, Zurbriggen, & Freyd, 2017

- DARVO parts hang together empirically
- DARVO is *gendered* – women more likely to be DARVO-ed
- DARVO by perpetrator is associated with victim *self-blame*

Rosenthal & Freyd (2022)

- We explored the experiences of 89 women who were sexually assaulted during college
- Most of the women experienced some contact with their perpetrator after their assault, usually considered it harmful, and nearly half indicated experiencing DARVO tactics from their perpetrator.

Harsey & Freyd (2022)

- Undergraduate participants who used more DARVO also reported greater:
 - Belief in rape myths
 - Hostile sexism
 - Objectification of women
 - *Perpetration of sexual harassment*
- DARVO may play a role in perpetuating sexual violence

Harsey & Freyd, 2020

- For 3rd parties, DARVO results in *more doubt about the victim's credibility*
- Education about DARVO reduces its power to discredit the victim's credibility suggesting that *DARVO must be recognized and identified in order to defang it*

Institutional DARVO

- **Institutional DARVO** occurs when the DARVO is committed by an institution (or with institutional complicity)
- Institutional DARVO is a form of institutional betrayal.

“It’s called DARVO” (Nov 2019)



- <https://southpark.cc.com/clips/gfwbrf/its-called-darvo>

5. Institutional Courage

Can we repair and prevent
institutional betrayal &
institutional DARVO?

Institutional Courage

- An institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost.
- A pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution.
- A compass oriented to the common good of individuals, institutions, and the world.
- A force that transforms institutions into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone.

11 Steps to Promote Institutional Courage (Freyd, 2018; updated 2022)

1. Comply with civil rights laws *and* go beyond mere compliance; beware risk management
2. Educate the institutional community (especially leadership)
3. Add checks and balances to power structure and diffuse highly dependent relationships
4. Respond well to victim disclosures (& create a trauma-informed reporting policy)
5. Bear witness, be accountable, apologize
6. Cherish the whistleblowers; cherish the truth tellers
7. Conduct scientifically-sound anonymous surveys
8. Regularly engage in self-study
9. Be transparent about data and policy
10. Use the organization to address the societal problem
11. Commit on-going resources to 1-9

New Research on Institutional Courage

(Smidt, Adams-Clark, & Freyd, Under Review)

- We created the Institutional Courage Questionnaire (ICQ)
- Participants ~800 employees around the country in various industries
- Results: Institutional courage buffers against sexual violence & institutional betrayal for employees

Institutional Courage Impact on Students (Adams-Clark, et al., in prep)

- Survey of 481 undergraduates
- Institutional courage buffers against institutional betrayal for students experiencing assault and/or sexual harassment

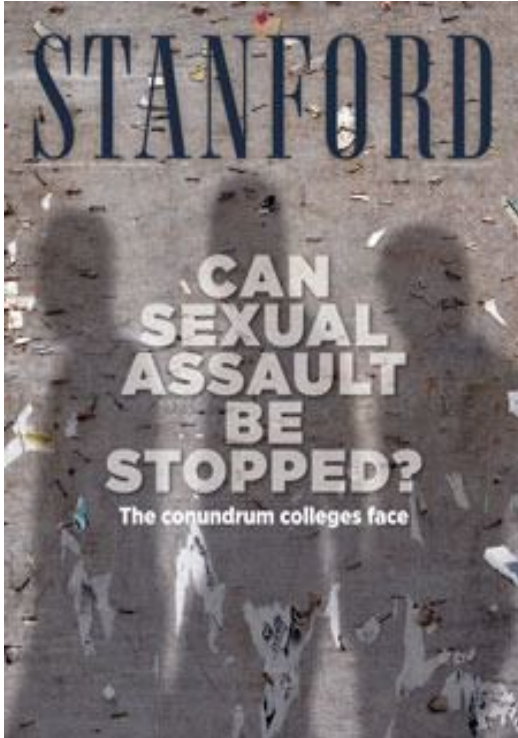
Case Study: What Does Institutional Courage Look Like?

What Institutional Courage Looks Like: Brenda Tracy and Oregon State U*

- 1998: Tracy reported to police that she had been gang raped at a party. Two of the accused assailants were OSU football players.
- Prosecutors led her to believe the case was weaker than it was; rape kits destroyed; the 2 football players had one game suspension and community service; no one from OSU talked to Tracy

*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/oregon-state-university-sexual-assault_us_56f426c3e4b02c402f66c3b9

Flash Forward to 2014



2014

- Tracy became curious what OSU had done and called OSU.
- At first OSU was evasive but then Brenda Tracy met and talked to John Canzano, a sports columnist at the *Oregonian*.
- Canzano wrote a column about the case
- President of OSU Ed Ray read the column and ordered an investigation
- Three weeks later he met with Tracy and shared the results of the investigation

The University President Apologized for Past Institutional Betrayal

*Dear Brenda,
Oregon State officials are very grateful that you took time to meet with us. We are so sorry for what you experienced in 1998 and have lived with since. What we have learned recently of your suffering is heart breaking, and your bravery inspires us.*



Office of the President
Oregon State University, 600 Ken Administration Building, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-2128
Phone 541-737-4133 | Fax 541-737-3033

December 10, 2014

Dear Brenda,

Oregon State officials are very grateful that you took time to meet with us. We are so sorry for what you experienced in 1998 and have lived with since. What we have learned recently of your suffering is heart-breaking, and your bravery inspires us.

We are also grateful to you for raising the public dialogue about the consequences of sexual violence in our society and for raising a discussion of how society can better assist survivors of such violence. While we cannot undo this nightmare, we apologize to you for any failure on Oregon State University's part to better assist you in 1998.

From the apology letter

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From the apology letter

As promised a few weeks ago, we conducted an exhaustive review of the facts of how OSU handled this matter 16 years ago. This review was completed this past Friday, and we want to share the results of that review with you.

Follow-up Courage

- After Ed Ray apologized to Brenda Tracy, he **hired her** to be a consultant to address improving institutional response.
- That led to many important innovations and changes at OSU.

What Institutional Courage Looks Like

- Investigation & transparency
- Acknowledge & apologize
- Cherish the whistleblower-partnership
- Increasing resources and awareness on campus
- Reach beyond - support legislation
- Continuing efforts



OSU President Ed Ray and Brenda Tracy

Institutional Courage

- Its possible
- Its needed
- It works
- But its relatively rare
- More research is needed
- What to do about that?



We Must Nurture Institutional Courage

The Center for Institutional Courage is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) institution dedicated to scientific research, wide-reaching education, and data-driven action promoting institutional courage.

<https://www.institutionalcourage.org/>



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