

EDITORIAL

Preventing Betrayal

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As editor of the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation (JTD)*, I have assumed that it is my responsibility and privilege to contribute one editorial each year. By tradition, I have used the last issue of each volume for this purpose. In this editorial, I follow another tradition: first discussing something on my mind and then concluding with some thoughts about the status of the journal.

MARATHON LESSONS

On April 17, 2013, I arrived in Boston, 2 days after the Boston Marathon bombings on a trip built around my research on betrayal and trauma. I had planned to give a lecture at Harvard University, attend a conference at the Yale University Medical School, and participate in meetings with research collaborators at the Boston VA Medical Center. I spent Thursday, April 18, at Harvard, visiting my daughter, a sophomore, and meeting with colleagues. That evening my daughter and I retreated to downtown Boston, where I had reserved a rental house.

Early Friday, as I sipped coffee and listened to National Public Radio, I learned about the previous night's events—a suspect dead and another at large after an evening of violence. I learned that police had shut down Boston's subway system and that Harvard had canceled classes.

The landline rang. An automated alert told us to stay inside, doors locked. As the hours indoors accumulated, my daughter and I craved the simple right to leave our house. We understood the rationale, but it felt like house arrest. We sought fresh air on our rooftop terrace. We heard sirens

Received 9 July 2013.

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and the steady hum of helicopters, but the city looked innocent and nearby birds sang, apparently unaffected by the unrest.

It was a relief when the lockdown ended. At dusk, Boston was largely empty, many stores shut tight. We walked through Boston Commons and Downtown Crossing and Government Center and down Cambridge Street. Police blockades and armed officers stood at intersections and government buildings, creating the eerie impression of a postapocalyptic police state.

Barely 30 min after we returned to the rental house, the capture of the second suspect was announced. Cheers were heard. Boston was ebullient.

Friday's events resembled an over-the-top thriller with remarkable acts of cooperation and heroism, but the underlying tragedy and likely long-term impacts are sobering. I had time to think about the roles of violence and social betrayal.

Betrayal trauma is a term I introduced 20 years ago. It most often used in reference to my work and that of my collaborators. To my surprise, a psychiatrist was quoted using the term *betrayal trauma* for the Boston Marathon bombings in a media story about mental health impacts of the bombings (Mohney, 2013).

Betrayal traumas are events and patterns of events that involve profound social betrayal. Examples include emotional or sexual abuse by a parent, marital rape, or government mistreatment of citizens. Betrayal trauma theory (Freyd, 1996) is an approach to conceptualizing trauma that points to the importance of social relationships in understanding posttraumatic outcomes, including reduced recall. Betrayal trauma theory emphasizes the importance of human relationships in both the harm of trauma and the potential for healing (Freyd & Birrell, 2013). Although historically the diagnosis and treatment of trauma has emphasized psychological responses to the *fear*-inducing aspects of traumas, new research suggests that *betrayal* is just as important—*maybe even more important*—in predicting response to interpersonal atrocities and severe relational violations (DePrince et al., 2012; Kelley, Weathers, Mason, & Pruneau, 2012). Betrayal blindness is the unawareness, not knowing, and forgetting exhibited by people toward betrayal (Freyd & Birrell, 2013). This blindness may extend to betrayals that are traditionally left out of the description of trauma, such as adultery and inequities in the workplace and society. Victims, perpetrators, and witnesses may display betrayal blindness in order to preserve relationships, institutions, and social systems upon which they depend.

Public events such as the Boston Marathon bombing have not been the focus in my laboratory. We have emphasized more hidden traumas, such as sexual assault committed by a close other, in which awareness of the underlying betrayal is often buried. In our approach, traumas by humans on humans are designated as either medium betrayal or high betrayal, depending on whether perpetrators were trusted and depended upon. Our studies show that traumas of both levels of betrayal are associated with mental and

physical distress above and beyond that associated with traumas with little betrayal. Furthermore, we find that people often are partially or completely blind to betrayals, a blindness that protects a trusted relationship with a person or institution.

At first analysis of the Boston Marathon bombings, it seemed that the initial degree of betrayal for most people was at most medium, with two largely unknown perpetrators. However, because the bombings involved two Bostonians, the violation of trust by a fellow resident may have increased the level of betrayal. Of course, those who knew the suspects may have felt deeply betrayed, and there may have been extreme betrayal among some of the individuals involved in the aftermath of the bombings. However, for the average Bostonian, this seemed to be a public event with which they were only peripherally associated and not obviously a prototypical betrayal trauma.

Upon further reflection, I realized that the potential for betrayal in the aftermath of the bombings was high. A harmful response to trauma or betrayal can itself constitute a new and enormous betrayal. Our research suggests that institutional context can add to or guard against additional betrayal. A trauma that starts with little betrayal, such as a hurricane, can become a medium or high betrayal trauma depending on societal and institutional response to the disaster.

The term *institutional betrayal* refers to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g., sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution. Carly Smith, who currently serves as editorial assistant for *JTD*, is a doctoral student in my laboratory and my primary collaborator on institutional betrayal. Our research suggests that institutional betrayal can exacerbate the impact of interpersonal traumas (Smith & Freyd, 2013).

In Boston, early institutional response was exemplary. However, I suspect there is also the potential for societal betrayal in at least two ways. We may be too quick to forget the immediate terror and lasting pain visited upon Boston in April 2013. Although this forgetting may be one of our most protective coping mechanisms, it may invalidate the experience of thousands of Bostonians and those who traveled to the city to be a part of a beloved marathon tradition. Or we may generalize the actions of the suspects to a larger group defined by ethnicity or national origin. This generalization of blame might be a powerful insidious betrayal.

Although the generalization of blame based on social category creates insidious betrayal, analyzing the role of socialization influences, including how we teach boys about masculinity, may be important to understanding and addressing the underlying roots of violence. The pattern of gender across perpetrators of terrorism trends heavily male. This fact deserves intellectual analysis, but most would agree it would be unjust to suspect all males of

violence. The generalization of blame based on ethnicity or national origin is just as counterproductive. Yet that same gut response is largely quiet when it comes to generalizations of terrorists based on race, perhaps because in one case we would generalize to the powerful and in the other to the already scorned.

My colleagues and I suspect that when institutions respond well, an initial betrayal can be partially ameliorated (Freyd & Birrell, 2013). I look at Boston and see that potential for reparation and prevention as the city and those affected continue to be supported and remembered. I hope that with time we can avoid generalizing blame in ways that betray.

The potential for betrayal—and the opportunity to prevent betrayal—is also ever present in our own field and profession. One of the many ways we can betray is by pathologizing victims and survivors of trauma and mistreatment. This betrayal can take many forms, but of particular relevance for *JTD* is the way language itself can pathologize. When trauma is described as an illness, it pathologizes individuals, placing the problem in the victim rather than the event, undermining the strength and dignity of individuals. For instance, illness words such as *comorbidity*, when used to include exposure to trauma, pathologize victims. Having experienced a trauma is not equivalent to having a disease. When one is speaking of exposure to events, a nonpathologizing word is *co-occurrence*. It is important to understand that we can participate in insidious betrayal even with the language we use.

This nuanced view of trauma is apparent in diverse settings. The power of betrayal to create deep psychological harm was recently the focus of a conference held in Leipzig, Germany, June 13–16, 2013. The conference was organized by Ralph Vogt, Irina Vogt, and Winja Lutz. Presenters included a number of *JTD* board members and reviewers, including myself, Ellert Nijenhuis, Eli Somers, and Francis Waters.

JOURNAL STATUS

JTD has had another productive year. We are receiving superb submissions and publishing the very best of those. Our quality has received recognition. As this issue goes to press, we have just received our third Journal Impact Factor (JIF) from the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). The most recent JIF reflects the number of 2012 citations in ISI-indexed journals of *JTD* articles published in 2010 and 2011. We once again saw an increase in our impact factor: from 0.78 in 2010, to 1.23 in 2011, to 1.72 for 2012. This impact factor news is good for *JTD*, but as before, I caution against the misuse of this metric (Freyd, 2009, 2011, 2012). It is particularly important to understand that the JIF should not be used to evaluate individual articles or authors (see Alberts, 2013).

It is also very good news that for the third year in a row, we were able to give an award for a particularly outstanding publication in *JTD*. This award includes a cash prize made possible by Taylor & Francis. Bethany Brand kindly agreed to be the chair of the Awards Committee that reviewed the nominations for 2012. However, because an article Brand coauthored was nominated for the award, Brand recused herself and submissions were instead scored by the other members of the Awards Committee (Rose Barlow and Julian Ford).

The Richard P. Kluft Award for *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 2012 Best Article went to Bethany L. Brand, Ruth Lanius, Eric Vermetten, Richard J. Loewenstein, and David Spiegel for their article “Where Are We Going? An Update on Assessment, Treatment, and Neurobiological Research in Dissociative Disorders as We Move Toward the *DSM-5*” (2012). The Award Committee noted that this article provides a thorough and incisive summary of dissociation research that will guide the field for the coming years. An excellent overview of recent developments in the literature on dissociation, it addresses timely and significant issues affecting both researchers and clinicians. The article also highlights issues to be considered in conjunction with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*. Although not an empirical article, it elucidates important clinical and research issues to be addressed by the field of trauma and dissociation.

These winners will be receiving a cash prize from Taylor & Francis. In addition, the Awards Committee selected four papers for Honorable Mention: Anders, Shallcross, and Frazier (2012), Kluft (2012), Laddis and Dell (2012), and Sledjeski and Delahanty (2012).

Welcome to new editorial board members for Volume 15 (to be published in 2014): Farina Benedetto, Melanie Hetzel-Riggin, and Anka Vujanovik. Thank you to rotating-off-for-now members Lisa Cromer and Suzette Boon, who have provided years of very helpful reviewing. A big thank you is also due to Melissa Platt, who was our superb *JTD* editorial assistant for a number of very busy and productive years, and to Carly Smith, who has taken up these substantial duties.

Please send *JTD* your best work; I so look forward to reading your submissions.

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