

# Dynamic News from the Freyd Lab

Research on child abuse, interpersonal violence, betrayal trauma, and oppression  
at the University of Oregon Dynamics Lab, Jennifer J. Freyd, Director

Fall 2005

## Child abuse policy recommendations published in *Science* magazine

By Melody Ward Leslie, UO Media Relations

For the first time last spring, the journal *Science* published (April 22) major policy recommendations regarding child sexual abuse.

The lead author of “The Science of Child Sexual Abuse” is University of Oregon psychology professor Jennifer Freyd, an authority on trauma. She and six colleagues, who together represent the fields of medicine, law, political science, psychiatry, and psychology, call for action on three fronts:

1. stepped up research aimed at determining the prevalence of child sex abuse and identifying its causes, consequences, prevention and treatment
2. expansion of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, a federally funded coalition of 54 centers providing community based treatment to children and their families, to address the enormous public health consequences of child trauma
3. creation of an Institute of Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence within the National Institutes of Health

David Spiegel, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine, said publication of this policy article in the nation's leading general science journal

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Jennifer J. Freyd, Ph.D.

Director of the Dynamics Lab

Professor of Psychology, University of Oregon

Editor, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*

## *Science* article attracts attention and inspires change

The publication of the April 22 *Science* article attracted substantial press interest. Freyd gave interviews to TV and print journalists, and appeared on OPB's *Oregon Considered* (April 21) and NPR's *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday* (May 13). In addition, *Science* (August 19) published letters and a response to the article.

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***“[Child sexual abuse] is a topic that makes people extremely uneasy,” Freyd said. “It makes me uneasy. It's not that I like to talk about it. It's that we need to. The silence is part of what allows it to keep happening.”***

From the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, April 26, 2005

Freyd's next step? Work with colleagues and organizations to implement change in federal policy. The ultimate goal? Help society see an end to child abuse and violence.

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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“is a tremendous opportunity to shed light on an important and neglected problem.”

“Science is most needed where passion overshadows reason,” Spiegel said. “Jennifer Freyd has applied the tools of science to this contentious area, helping us understand the effects of trauma in the family and the disruption of cognition and memory that can occur during and after childhood abuse.”

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**“Their outstanding work on traumatic memory employs state-of-the-art empirical approaches derived from the cognitive neurosciences,” Keane said.**

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Freyd, a University of Oregon psychology professor whose theory of betrayal trauma explains why some people do not recall their abuse until later in life, has conducted studies that show abuse perpetrated by a caregiver increases the likelihood of memory failure.

“Unfortunately, many factors silence victims of abuse,” Freyd said. “Myths about the nature of child sexual abuse wrongly cloud the credibility of abuse victims in the eyes of the media and the public.”

Freyd and her former students, Anne DePrince and Kathy Becker-Blease, have investigated the cognitive mechanisms involved in the forgetting of abuse. Terry Keane, associate chief of staff for research and development for the VA Boston Healthcare System and a professor of psychiatry at Boston School of Medicine, said Freyd and DePrince “have produced the best work to date” to reveal the true nature of memory for traumatic events.

“Their outstanding work on traumatic memory employs state-of-the-art empirical approaches derived from the cognitive neurosciences,” Keane said.

The April 22 Policy Perspective article cites the body of research on child sexual abuse, which shows:

1. child sexual abuse is associated with serious mental and physical health problems, substance abuse, victimization and criminality in adulthood
2. under-reporting (including memory failure) leads to underestimation of the extent of abuse, which currently is reported by 20 percent of women

and 5 to 10 percent of men worldwide

3. although official reports of child sex abuse have declined somewhat in the U.S. during the last 10 years, close to 90 percent of sexual abuse cases are never reported to authorities
4. most child sex abuse is committed by family members and individuals close to the child, which increases the likelihood of delayed disclosure and possible memory failure while increasing the potential for unsupportive reactions by caregivers and lack of intervention
5. a number of factors undermine the credibility of abuse reports, despite evidence that when adults recall abuse, the truth of their memories is not correlated with when they regained awareness of a past incident
6. cognitive and neurological mechanisms that may underlie the forgetting of abuse have been scientifically identified

Freyd’s co-authors for the *Science* article include Frank Putnam, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center; Thomas Lyon, University of Southern California Law School; Kathryn Becker-Blease, University of New Hampshire; Ross Cheit, Brown University; Nancy Siegel of NBS Associates, Maryland; and Kathy Pezdek, Claremont Graduate University.

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Freyd’s groundbreaking book *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Harvard University Press, 1996) was released in paperback in 1998. A Spanish edition appeared in 2003.

Recently named editor of the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, Freyd directs an active laboratory investigating the psychology of trauma, with a focus on memory and awareness for trauma, and on the physical and mental health consequences of betrayal trauma.

## Recent publications

For more information about the Dynamics Lab, visit our web site at <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu>.

### SELECTED RECENT JOURNAL ARTICLES

\* Becker-Blease, K.A., Deater-Deckard, K., Eiley, T, Freyd, J.J., Stevenson, J., & Plomin, R. (2004). A genetic analysis of individual differences in dissociative behaviors in childhood and adolescence. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45, 522-532.

DePrince, A.P., Allard, C.B., Oh, H., & Freyd, J.J. (2004). What's in a name for memory errors? Implications and ethical issues arising from the use of the label "false memory" for errors in memory for details. *Ethics & Behavior*, 14, 201-233.

Goldsmith, R.E., Barlow, M.R., & Freyd, J.J. (2004). Knowing and not knowing about trauma: Implications for therapy. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 41, 448-463.

Becker-Blease, K.A., & Freyd, J.J. (2005). Beyond PTSD: An evolving relationship between trauma theory and family violence research. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20, 403-411.

Freyd, J.J., Putnam, F.W., Lyon, T.D., Becker-Blease, K. A., Cheit, R.E., Siegel, N.B., & Pezdek, K. (2005). The science of child sexual abuse. *Science*, 308, 501.

Response to Letters published in *Science*, 309, 1183-1185.

Freyd, J.J., Klest, B., & Allard, C.B. (2005). Betrayal trauma: Relationship to physical health, psychological distress, and a written disclosure intervention. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 6(3), 83-104.

Goldsmith, R., & Freyd, J.J. (2005). Awareness for emotional abuse. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 5(1), 95-123.

All articles are available online at <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/traumapapers.html>.

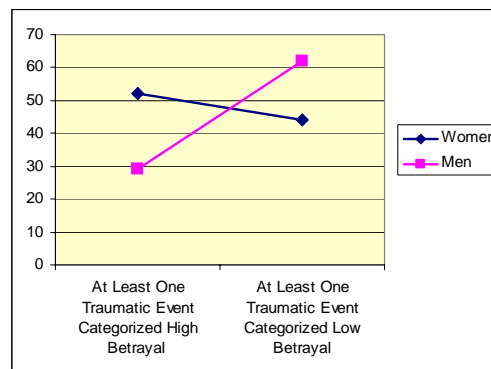
### RECENT AWARDS

\* Winner of the 2005 ISSD Pierre Janet Writing Award.

**Carolyn Allard** received the 2005 ISSD David Caul Award and the University of Oregon Sundberg Award for her dissertation project, assessing the validity and applicability of betrayal trauma theory in Japan.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Each year lab members make dozens of conference presentations, often the first place we present new research. For example, here is a graph from "Gender and Betrayal" (Freyd & Goldberg, 2004). The full presentation is available on the lab web site.



Percentage of Men and Women in the Eugene-Springfield Sample who experienced at least one high betrayal trauma event (e.g. child abuse or rape by a close other) or at least one trauma of low betrayal (e.g. accident or natural disaster).

## Meet the graduate students

**Carolyn Allard**, M.A., M.S., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology, researching the impact of writing on psychological and physical symptoms associated with betrayal trauma.

**Rose Barlow**, M.S., is a doctoral student in cognitive psychology, studying memory function in Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID).

**Annmarië Cholankeril**, M.Ed., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology interested in developmental traumatology.

**Lisa DeMarni Cromer**, M.S., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology, researching believability biases for memories of abuse, and attachment to pets and objects.

**Melissa Foyne** is a doctoral student in clinical psychology examining facilitators of and barriers to disclosure for all types of abuse.

**Daniel Friend** is a master's student studying undergraduate perpetration potential.

**Bridget Klest**, M.S., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology studying narrative coherence in the effectiveness of writing interventions with trauma survivors.

**Sharon Tang**, M.S., is a doctoral student in clinical psychology researching the impact of gender and culture on trauma.



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Fund for Research on Trauma and Oppression

Did you know that most research in the area of trauma and oppression is supported by private sources? Your donations help purchase needed equipment, pay undergraduate research assistants to work and learn in the lab, and cover the costs of recruiting participants in our studies.

HOW TO DONATE

Giving to the Fund for Research on Trauma and Oppression is easy.

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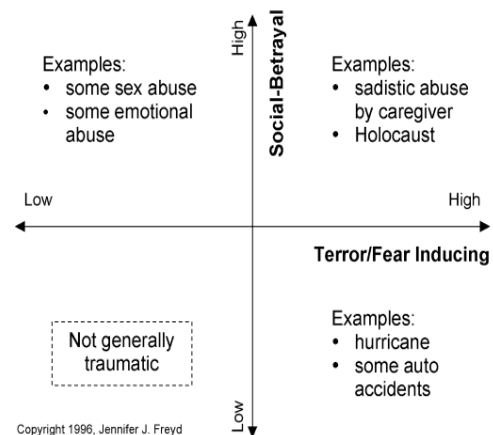
- Alternatively, checks can be made payable to "UO Foundation/Freyd Lab" and mailed to:

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Planned gifts can reduce your taxes and increase your income while supporting our research. For details, contact the Office of Gift Planning, (541) 346-1756. That office can also help you include the Fund for Research on Trauma and Oppression in your will.

FREYD'S TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODEL FOR TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Dr. Freyd's book, Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse, has been highly influential in the trauma field. Betrayal Trauma Theory distinguishes two dimensions as primary for events that cause long lasting harm to people: life-threat and social betrayal.



Freyd's Two-Dimensional Model for Traumatic Events

Thank you!

Our research depends on the collaboration and support of many people, including our generous donors. Thank you!