Campus Sexual Assault and Institutional Betrayal
A Summary of Research

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Freyd Lab at the University of Oregon

http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/

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Institutional Betrayal Web Page

http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/
Betrayal Trauma Theory: Betrayal Blindness as a Survival Mechanism¹

- When empowered, humans are highly sensitive to cheating and betrayal
  - Betrayal detection is a survival mechanism
  - It leads to confrontation (fight) or withdrawal (flight) from the betrayer
- Humans are also exceedingly dependent on caregivers. To ensure caregiving, humans rely on an attachment system
  - The attachment works through engagement and reciprocal approach (love)

![Image of a child and caregiver](image)

- However, a child abused by a caregiver would risk further mistreatment if awareness caused withdrawal or conflict
  - Conflict between sensitivity to betrayal and needs of attachment
- Betrayal blindness occurs when awareness would threaten necessary (or apparently necessary) relationships
  - Thus unawareness and forgetting are sometimes an adaptive response to betrayal

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¹ E.g.: Freyd (1996); Freyd & Birrell (2013)
Betrayal Trauma Theory Suggests Two Primary Dimensions of Traumatic Events²

- Life threatening (physically terrorizing and fear inducing)
- Social betrayal (“Betrayal Trauma”)

Summary of 20 Years of Research: Betrayal Trauma is Toxic on Individuals*  
High Betrayal (controlling for low betrayal trauma) is associated with increases in:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Dissociation
- Shame
- PTSD
- Physical illness
- BPD features
- Hallucinations
- Self-harm
- Revictimization

² E.g.: Freyd (1996); Freyd & Birrell (2013)
Concept: Betrayal Blindness\(^3\)
- Betrayal blindness is the unawareness, not-knowing, and forgetting exhibited by people towards betrayal.
- This blindness may extend to betrayals by institutions
- Victims, perpetrators, and witnesses may display betrayal blindness in order to preserve relationships, institutions, and social systems upon which they depend.

Concept: Institutional Betrayal\(^4\)
- Wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution.
- Includes failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution.

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\(^3\) E.g.: Freyd (1996); Freyd & Birrell (2013)

\(^4\) Also see Smith, C. P. & Freyd, J.J. (under review). Institutional Betrayal
Research Findings: Smith & Freyd (2013) – Institutions as Betrayers

Institutions may be trusted and depended-upon

- “University community” or “Military family”
- What happens when experiencing or reporting sexual assault within an institution?
- Will we find institutional betrayal?
- If so, what impact will it have?

Carly P. Smith, doctoral student at the University of Oregon

Methodology (Smith & Freyd, 2013)

- College student sample (346 women)
- Measured
  - Sexual Assault: Sexual Experiences Scale (Koss & Oros, 1982)
  - Trauma Symptoms: Trauma Symptom Checklist (Briere & Runtz, 1989)
  - Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ – Smith & Freyd)

Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ, Smith & Freyd)

- Example Items:
  - Creating an environment in which this type of experience seemed common or like no big deal?
  - Making it difficult to report the experience?
  - Covering up the experience?
  - Punishing you in some way for this experience (e.g., loss of privileges or status)?
Research Findings: Smith & Freyd (2013) – Institutions as Betrayers, continued

- We found high rate of sexual assault experienced by college women

![Pie chart showing types of sexual assault and institutional betrayal.]

- Trauma symptoms were related to sexual assault
- 40% of those reporting sexual assault did also indicate institutional betrayal.
- Trauma symptoms were related to institutional betrayal
- Institutional betrayal exacerbates the impact of sexual assault: anxiety, dissociation, sexual problems, and sexual-abuse related symptoms

![Graph showing anxiety levels for no institutional betrayal and institutional betrayal.]

Cumulative Types of Unwanted Sexual Assault Experiences
Research Finding: Cunningham, Smith, & Freyd (under review) – LGBT students show increased exposure to both sexual assault and institutional betrayal

Discrimination within a university as institutional betrayal:

- ...responding differently to the situation based on your sexual orientation
- ...creating an environment in which you felt discriminated against based on your sexual orientation
- ...expressing a biased or negative attitude toward you and/or the situation based on your sexual orientation

Sarah Cunningham, UO honors student ('13), Teach for America (Los Angeles)

- LGBT students victimized at higher rates than heterosexual peers (3 times more likely to experience sexual harassment; 4 times as likely for sexual assault) as well as Institutional Betrayal (see figure below)
- Institutional betrayal predicted elevated depression and PTSD for LGBT students
Research Finding: Smith & Freyd (in preparation) – institutional betrayal leads to health problems; dissociation is associated with continued institutional involvement

- Trauma has been shown to be associated with both physical health problems as well as dissociation; will the same hold for institutional betrayal?

![Physical Health Problems Graph]

- Institutional betrayal is associated with health problems and dissociation, even when controlling for betrayal trauma
- Maintaining membership is costly: dissociation is high for students who report still being a member of institutions (e.g., university, fraternity/sorority, club, etc.)

![Dissociation by Membership Status Graph]
Research Findings: Smith, Bhuptani & Freyd, under review – Typical university assault email alerts contribute to belief in rape myths

Clery Act mandated crime alerts (i.e., “Timely Warnings”)
- Typically released only following only stranger-perpetrated assaults
- Contain tips such as “Walk with a trusted other”, “Don’t talk to strangers”, and “Carry a cellphone”
- Some of these features of the emails appeared aligned with certain rape myths (e.g., sexual assault is a violent crime perpetrated by strangers, victims are responsible for being assaulted; Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billing, 2013).
  - This is of particular concern as endorsement of rape myths predicts perpetration of sexual violence (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006).
- Experimental manipulation: Typical, Alternative, Control Emails

- Effect of emails on campus climate: Rape myths, institutional betrayal
  - Emails describing an acquaintance assault (our “Alternative” condition) led to a decrease in the endorsement of rape myths by male students as compared to males in the other conditions.

- Students who had experienced acquaintance sexual assault since coming to college reported the highest overall institutional betrayal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Betrayal trauma history while in university</th>
<th>Mean Institutional Betrayal Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prachi Bhuptani, University of Oregon undergraduate student
Preliminary Research Findings: Rosenthal, Smith, & Freyd (in progress)

Employees receive many disclosures and are ill-equipped to deal

Institutional Betrayal often occurs when students disclose to university sources.

What do these employees know…
- about sexual violence?
- about Title IX?

What are their experiences with disclosure from students?

Methodology

- University faculty, staff, and graduate student sample (N=557); follow-up survey planned
- Measured: Title IX Knowledge and Adherence Questionnaire (Rosenthal, Smith, & Freyd)

What did we find? (Rosenthal, Smith, & Freyd, in preparation)

- 16% of university employees have received a disclosure regarding sexual violence from a student
- 37% of the employees who have received a disclosure regarding sexual violence from a student wished they had more information to provide
- On average, university employees were able to identify only 60% of Title IX rights
- Despite a lack of clarity regarding what rights are guaranteed by Title IX, employees rated IX rights as highly important
Preliminary Research Findings: Rosenthal & Freyd (in progress) Sexual assault perpetrators on campus

Methodology
- College student sample (62 men have participated to date and are represented in preliminary analysis; data collection is on-going)

Types of perpetration measured:
- Unwanted sexual contact without penetration
- Attempted & completed coercion to achieve oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Attempted & completed rape (oral, vaginal, or anal)

What did we find? (Rosenthal & Freyd, in preparation)
- 8% of college men report one perpetration
- 11% of college men report more than one perpetration
- Interestingly, students who reported perpetration also reported fewer episodes of drunkenness
Recommendations

- Educate institutions (particularly administrators) about the potential to cause serious harm through institutional betrayal
- Require institutions be accountable for institutional betrayal

Require conduct self-study based on institutional betrayal items

- Are you taking proactive steps to prevent this type of experience?
- Are you creating an environment in which this type of experience seems like no big deal?
- Are you creating an environment in which this experience seems likely to occur?
- Are you making it difficult for people to report the experience?
- Are you responding adequately to the experience, if reported?
- Are you covering up the experience?
- Are you punishing victims for reporting this experience (e.g., with loss of privileges or status)?

Encourage institutions to cherish the whistle blower.

- Help institutions to effectively educate students and employees about Title IX rights
- Require institutions to fix email crime alerts such that they are truthful about the reality of sexual assault (e.g. acquaintance based) and do not blame the victim
- Fund research on campus sexual assault and institutional betrayal
References


Smith & Freyd (in preparation) – institutional betrayal leads to health problems & dissociation is associated with continued institutional involvement


Web resource on Institutional Betrayal:  
[http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/](http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/)