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Trauma and Disclosure: Cultural Considerations

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Abstract

According to Freyd's Betrayal Trauma Theory (BTT) (Freyd, 1996), betrayal traumas (BTs) are those perpetrated by someone whom the survivor cares for, depends on, or trusts. Prior research suggests traumatic disclosure is influenced by level of betrayal. For instance, a study conducted with a European American sample indicated that high BTs were associated with a greater likelihood of first disclosure years following abuse, if disclosure ever occurred (Foynes, Freyd, Deprince, under review). Using the BTT framework, an online study was conducted with Asian Americans and European Americans (N=301) to examine the relationship between BT and nondisclosure. Results suggest that Asian Values significantly predict nondisclosure of high, but not low, betrayal traumas. By examining the impact of cultural values on this relationship, we hope to contribute to the creation of culturally sensitive trauma interventions.

Introduction

Background

- ◆ Disclosure of trauma facilitates receipt of emotional, legal, or financial aid (e.g. Hemenover, 2003)
- ◆ Nondisclosure of high betrayal traumas (HiBTs) (see Freyd, 1996) may allow the survivor to maintain a necessary attachment to the perpetrator (see Foynes, Freyd, & Deprince, under review).
- ◆ Most research on disclosure has investigated individual differences in individualistic cultures
 - Independent cultures (e.g. European American) → disclosure as important and adaptive (Rime, 1995)
 - Interdependent cultures (e.g. Asian American) → possible expectation to handle trauma without disclosure

Current Study

- ◆ The purpose of the current study was to determine how adherence to certain values influences the experience of high betrayal traumas, psychological symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety), and traumatic disclosure in both Asian Americans (AAs) and European Americans (EAs)

Method

Participants

- ◆ 52.6% Asian American, 37.7% European American, 9.6% African American
- ◆ 70.9% female; 25.6% male; 3.3% other
- ◆ Ages ranged from 18 to 68, (M=29.63, SD=9.72)
- ◆ Approximately 63% reported receiving at least a four-year college degree

Examples of Variables Measured

- ◆ Suicidal ideation (PANSI; Osman et al. 1998)
- ◆ Depression (CESD; Radloff, 1997)
- ◆ Social anxiety (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)
- ◆ Social support (SRQ; Ullman, 2000)
- ◆ Asian Values (AVS; Kim & Hong, 2004)
- ◆ Trauma (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006)

AVS Sample Items:

- One should have sufficient inner resources to resolve emotional problems
- One should not deviate from familial and social norms
- One need not control one's expression of emotions
- One should consider the needs of others before considering one's own needs

Procedure

- ◆ After giving informed consent, measures were administered online in a randomized order
- ◆ Participants were recruited from cities with a high proportion of Asian-Americans (e.g. New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Honolulu, Chicago, Seattle)
- ◆ The first 100 participants of each ethnic group received monetary compensation; the next 50 participants of each group were entered into a drawing for monetary compensation

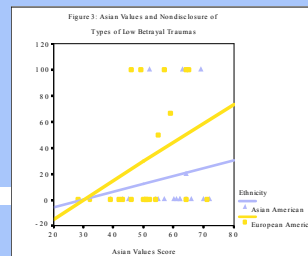
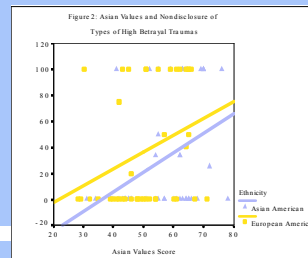
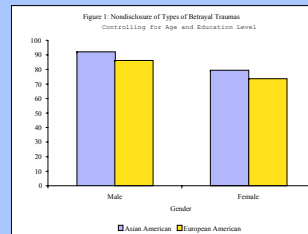
Results

Descriptives

- ◆ Approximately 69% reported experiencing one or more instances of trauma
- ◆ AAs: 18.8% physical abuse, 16.9% sexual abuse, 21.4% emotional abuse
- ◆ EAs: 20.5% physical abuse, 26.8% sexual abuse, 31.3% emotional abuse
- ◆ 31.5% of AAs and 36.9% of EAs experienced at least one high betrayal trauma
- ◆ EAs significantly older and AAs significantly more educated, $p < .05$

Statistical Analyses

- ◆ High betrayal trauma significantly correlated with depression ($r = +.127$), suicidal ideation ($r = +.128$), reasons for living ($r = -.227$), and Asian Values ($r = -.153$), $p < .05$
- ◆ Low betrayal trauma significantly correlated with rumination ($r = +.165$), reasons for living ($r = -.122$), anxiety ($r = +.140$), and suicidal ideation ($r = +.204$)
- ◆ ANCOVA controlling for age and level of education revealed a significant main effect of gender, $F(1, 199) = 7.236, p < .01$ (See Figure 1).
- ◆ Number of betrayal traumas negatively correlated with nondisclosure, ($r = -.441$), $p < .01$
- ◆ Asian Values significantly predicted nondisclosure of high betrayal trauma ($\beta = .323$, $p < .01$) (see Figure 2) but not low betrayal trauma (see Figure 3)
- ◆ When controlling for Asian values, number of high and low betrayal traumas did not predict nondisclosure



Discussion

Conceptual & Methodological Considerations

- ◆ Although the rates of interpersonal trauma were slightly lower in AAs, such estimates are potentially confounded by lower self-reported rates of prior disclosures.
- ◆ If participants report high rates of nondisclosure, it is quite likely that they are not disclosing everything in our surveys either.
- ◆ Nondisclosure of high betrayal traumas may be more heavily motivated by desires to protect family units and preserve important social relationships.
- ◆ Given differences in nondisclosure of HiBTs and LoBTs in Asian Americans, Asian Values may exert a greater influence on nondisclosure of HiBTs in this ethnic group

Future Directions & Clinical Implications

- ◆ Other factors that may both vary as a function of ethnicity and impact the effects of disclosure, such as disclosure latency, recipients of disclosure, barriers to disclosure and the way in which trauma is disclosed (Tang, Freyd, & Wang, in press) must be assessed.
- ◆ In order to ensure ethical service delivery, we must first determine how to respond to traumatic disclosure in a culturally-sensitive manner.

Conclusions

- ◆ Ethnic group differences in disclosure patterns are likely influenced by particular cultural values rather than ethnic group membership.
- ◆ Given that strong adherence to Asian Values is related to increased nondisclosure of trauma, as well as the importance of disclosure, we must identify how to encourage disclosure in a way that is both beneficial and respectful of cultural values.

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