

IMPACT REPORT

From Betrayal Trauma to Institutional Courage

A Webinar Presented by

Dr. Jennifer Joy Freyd, PhD.

Professor Emerit · Founder & President

University of San Jose Recoletos · April 25, 2026



01 · WEBINAR OVERVIEW

On April 25, 2026, the 3rd year psychology students from University of San Jose Recoletos- a Filipino institution based in Cebu City, Philippines, hosted a webinar titled From Betrayal Trauma to Institutional Courage, featuring Dr. Jennifer Joy Freyd, one of the most respected voices in trauma psychology today. The event was held virtually, connecting participants from across the Philippines with Dr. Freyd in real time.

Topic Overview

The webinar covered Dr. Freyd's decades of groundbreaking research and how it applies to real-world institutions today. The discussion moved through four major themes:

- **Betrayal Trauma Theory & Betrayal Blindness** — Dr. Freyd explored why people sometimes do not recognize or remember abuse, particularly when it comes from someone they depend on. She explained that when a person is deeply dependent on another, whether a caregiver, an employer, or an institution, the mind can suppress awareness of betrayal to preserve that necessary relationship.
- **DARVO** — Dr. Freyd introduced this powerful acronym: Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender. She explained how this is a common response pattern used by those who are confronted about harmful behavior, and she emphasized that recognizing DARVO is the first step to reducing its power.
- **Institutional Betrayal** — Dr. Freyd defined institutional betrayal as the harm that occurs when an institution fails to prevent wrongdoing, makes it difficult to report, responds inadequately, or actively covers up harm, all while people trusted it to protect them.

- Institutional Courage — The antidote to institutional betrayal. Dr. Freyd outlined what it looks like when institutions choose accountability, transparency, and healing over self-protection. She shared practical examples of how organizations can build cultures of courage.

Why This Topic Matters

Trauma does not happen only to individuals. It also happens within and because of the systems we belong to. This webinar invited our community to look honestly at the role institutions play in either healing or deepening harm. Dr. Freyd's work challenges us to ask: What kind of institution do we want to be? And what actions does that require of us today?

For Filipino students and professionals, these questions are not abstract. The concepts Dr. Freyd introduced are not distant theories, they reflect realities that exist within our own institutions and communities. This webinar gave our community the language and the framework to begin addressing them.

02 · KEY LEARNINGS

The webinar left participants with meaningful insights that go beyond theory. Below are the most important takeaways from Dr. Freyd's session.

What We Learned

- Betrayal Blindness is not weakness, it is a survival mechanism. It is also like the simultaneous knowing and not knowing. Betrayal blindness often exists as a dual state where a person may have memories of a betrayal but cannot process or integrate them properly.
 - The concept of DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) explains how institutions or individuals may divert blame onto victims. Recognizing this pattern is crucial in identifying injustice and preventing further harm.
 - Harm is often multiplied when trusted organizations such as workplaces, universities, or religious institutions fail to support victims of misconduct or actively engage in cover-ups while institutional betrayal causes significant psychological and physical harm, institutional courage acts as an "antidote" by encouraging accountability, transparency, and support for victims.
 - Organizations often prioritize their reputation over victims, which significantly intensifies the original trauma through systemic neglect. Real reform requires proactively prioritizing transparency and survivor well-being over protecting the organization's image.
 - Silence often arises as a survival response when harm comes from trusted systems or institutions, because speaking up can feel unsafe or impossible. Another is that betrayal trauma is not always obvious, it can manifest in subtle ways like being dismissed, unheard, or unsupported, which gradually erodes trust and a sense of justice.
 - Healing from betrayal is not just individual process, but one that also requires institutions to act with courage rather than defensiveness. And that true recovery happens when those in power choose accountability and transparency, creating spaces where trust can be rebuilt and that people feel safe to speak and be heard.
 - Research and lived experience are not opposites. Dr. Freyd's work is rooted in both science and humanity, reminding us that the best scholarship is in service of real people.
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03 · PARTICIPANTS FEEDBACK

Participants shared their reactions and reflections after the webinar. The overall response was one of gratitude, inspiration, and a genuine desire to apply what they learned. Below is a sample of the feedback received.

“Dr. Freyd, thank you very much for that insightful talk. I was most struck by what you said in the middle: that our institutions are not made to love us, or to that effect.”

“The most impactful part of the webinar for me was the idea of shifting from betrayal trauma to institutional courage. It highlighted how institutions should not ignore or hide harm, but instead take responsibility, support victims, and promote transparency. This perspective is powerful because it shows that healing is not only an individual process but also requires accountability and courage from organizations to create a safe and trusting environment.”

“First, it was how the DARVO works. And it is just interesting for me especially when the speaker showed the graph it brought me flashbacks from our psych math subject but it a good way ofc. And how courage is a choice. It never really occurred to me that way but as a person whose shyness gets in the way first before I do something, the speaker planted some courage in me in some kind of way. Resist despair and nurture hope:))”

“The segment on The Power of the Apology stood out to me. Learning the difference between a "PR apology" and a "courageous apology". One that takes full ownership without excuses was incredibly powerful.”

“It is important to speak up despite being in the very institution you love.”

“The most meaningful part of the webinar for me was simply the opportunity to hear Dr. Freyd speak. She is widely known for her work on betrayal trauma theory, so being able to attend a webinar where she was the speaker felt like a rare opportunity. I think the organizers did an excellent job inviting her, and I am very grateful that I was able to attend.

I was also really impressed by how she answered the questions during the discussion. Even though she is a highly respected professional and a pioneer in trauma psychology, she explained her ideas in a thoughtful and accessible way. Her work on betrayal trauma theory has validated the experiences of many people who have been harmed by systems or institutions, and listening to her speak made me respect her even more as a professional.”

“Dr. Freyd has discussed such insightful yet heavy topic as much as Institutional can be, but I loved how she also discussed Institutional Courage and its importance and that there is hope just like the story of Brenda Tracy, this one had been impactful to me.”

“I learned about DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender), and I realized that the pattern has a name and a clear explanation. Before the webinar, I had seen similar behaviors discussed on social media, but I did not know that it was an established concept in trauma psychology. Learning the term helped me understand how perpetrators sometimes respond when they are confronted, and it gave me a clearer framework for recognizing these patterns.

The webinar also helped me better understand institutional harm and how systems can fail or harm individuals. As I got older, I experienced situations that I now realize may fall under this kind of harm, but I never really had the chance to understand or process them. Hearing these ideas explained in an academic and psychological context helped me make sense of experiences that I previously could not fully explain.”

04 · ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

The webinar was marked by strong and active engagement from participants throughout the session. Attendees did not simply listen — they asked questions, shared reactions, and took part in the discussion in ways that showed genuine interest and investment in the topic.

Participation Category	Details
Live Zoom Attendees	177 total participants joined the session in real time via Zoom
Facebook Live Viewers	15+ viewers tuned in concurrently through Facebook Live
Total Facebook Reach	1.7k individuals reached through the Facebook livestream
Q&A Engagement	Participants actively raised questions throughout the open Q&A segment
Reactions & Responses	Strong positive reactions noted in real time, including emoji responses and affirmations in the chat

The level of participation was notably high for a virtual format. The questions raised during the Q&A ranged from deeply personal reflections on trauma, memory, and identity, to complex questions about cultural dynamics unique to the Philippine context, such as the role of hiya and utang na loob in silencing survivors. Participants also connected Dr. Freyd's frameworks to real Philippine events, including the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, showing how present and relevant her work felt to a Filipino audience. Dr. Freyd addressed each question with care and depth, which further encouraged continued engagement throughout the session.

Sample Questions Raised by Participants

- In the side of the victim, is there a boundary that one can cross where they identify too much with being a victim, instead of thriving out of their situation, like being stuck too much to the past instead of living in the present?
- In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, we witnessed a clear pattern of DARVO: officials denied the slowness of aid, attacked critics as "political," and positioned the government as the victim of unfair expectations. When a community is in a state of forced dependency on these very institutions, how can we demand Institutional Courage when the leadership is still using these defensive tactics to blur the truth? Specifically, what power does a community have to force accountability when the institution refuses to even acknowledge the "second injury" it caused?
- In cases of recently recalled childhood abuse by a caregiver, does betrayal trauma theory explain why some memories are experienced in a detached or third-person way, as if they don't fully feel like your own? Could this relate to dissociation or knowledge isolation, and might dynamics like DARVO also play a role?
- If our instinct as human beings is to speak our pain, but experience has shown us that some will deny it, attack us, or twist our truth until we become the ones blamed, where do survivors go when even seeking help carries the risk of being silenced again, and when the very institutions meant to protect them are inaccessible, unresponsive, or complicit in that harm?
- How does betrayal trauma reshape a person's sense of identity, and what helps them regain a stable sense of self?
- In the Philippine context, where cultural values such as hiya (shame), utang na loob (debt of gratitude), and deep respect for authority can unintentionally discourage individuals from speaking out, how can institutions genuinely practice accountability and institutional courage without reinforcing these cultural pressures that often prioritize harmony over justice?
- In religious setting, institutional betrayal often relies on the silence of the 'good people' in the community. How does it impact a survivor's recovery when their peers or colleagues choose to stay silent or 'neutral' rather than standing in solidarity?

05 · SPEAKER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The 3rd year psychology students from University of San Jose Recoletos wish to formally and sincerely recognize Dr. Jennifer Joy Freyd for her generous contribution to this webinar. It is not a small thing to share your life's work with a new audience. It is an act of trust, and we do not take that lightly.

Dr. Freyd did not simply deliver a lecture. She created a space where people felt safe to learn, to reflect, and to ask honest questions. She brought depth and clarity to a topic that can feel heavy or complicated, and she did so with a presence that made even the most difficult concepts feel like something we could carry with us.

Her concepts — Betrayal Trauma, DARVO, Institutional Betrayal, and Institutional Courage — may sound heavy at first, but in her hands, they became something we could hold and use. Through this webinar, she gave our community not just knowledge, but a new way of seeing. We are truly grateful for that.

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Courage is a choice.

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— Dr. Jennifer Joy Freyd

This report is presented to Dr. Freyd not as a formality, but as a record of the real impact her presence made on our institution. We hope she carries it with her as proof that her work reaches further than she may know and that it matters, deeply, to people who are trying to do better.

06 · FROM THE TEAM

A Message from Our Team to Dr. Freyd

Dear Dr. Freyd,

We are 3rd year psychology students from the University of San Jose Recoletos in the Philippines. As part of our course, we set out to find a speaker who could bring something real and meaningful to our community, and we are so grateful that we found you.

You did not just show up, you prepared, you engaged, and you gave us a talk that we will carry far beyond this subject and this semester.

We did not expect to leave that session thinking differently about the institutions we are part of the profession we are entering, and the people we hope to serve one day. But we did. And that is because of you.

Thank you for taking a group of Filipino psychology students seriously. Thank you for crossing that distance — literally and professionally, to share your work with us. It meant more than we can properly put into words.

With deep admiration and gratitude,

The Webinar Team

University of San Jose Recoletos

Presented with Honor and Gratitude

3rd year Psychology students from University of San Jose Recoletos

April 25, 2026