

Campus Sexual Assault and Institutional Betrayal

A Summary of Research

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Jennifer J. Freyd, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology
1227 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1227
jjf@uoregon.edu
<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/>

Freyd Lab at the University of Oregon

<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/>



Dynamic Mental Representations

Freyd Dynamics Lab



Betrayal Trauma

The Freyd Dynamics Lab is located in the [Department of Psychology](#) at the [University of Oregon](#), Eugene, Oregon, USA

People

 <p>Jennifer J. Freyd (principal investigator)</p>	 <p>Rosemary Bernstein (graduate student)</p>	 <p>Pam Birrell (clinical consultant)</p>	 <p>Christina Gamache Martin (graduate student)</p>
 <p>Jennifer Gomez (graduate student)</p>	 <p>Sarah Harsey (graduate student and Lab Manager)</p>	 <p>Brianna Hailey (graduate student)</p>	 <p>Laura Kaehler (graduate student on clinical internship, Duke Medical Center)</p>
 <p>Laura Noll (graduate student)</p>	 <p>Melissa Platt (graduate student on clinical internship, San Diego VA)</p>	 <p>Kristen Reinhardt (graduate student and lab Human Subject Pool Coordinator)</p>	 <p>Marina Rosenthal (graduate student and Lab RA Coordinator)</p>
 <p>Alec Smidt (graduate student)</p>	 <p>Carly P. Smith (graduate student and JTD Editorial Assistant)</p>	 <p>undergraduate RAs</p>	 <p>PhDs and lab emeriti</p>

Primary Collaborators on Institutional Betrayal/ Campus Sexual Assault Research



Carly Smith, Jennifer Freyd, Marina Rosenthal

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)

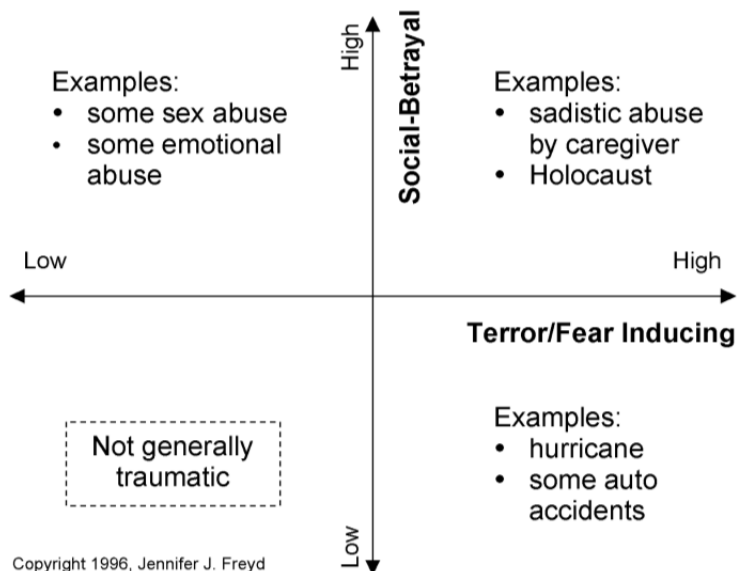


- However, a child abused by a caregiver would risk further mistreatment if awareness caused withdrawal or conflict
 - conflict between sensitivity to betrayal and needs of attachment
- Betrayal blindness occurs when awareness would threaten necessary (or apparently necessary) relationships
 - Thus unawareness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

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

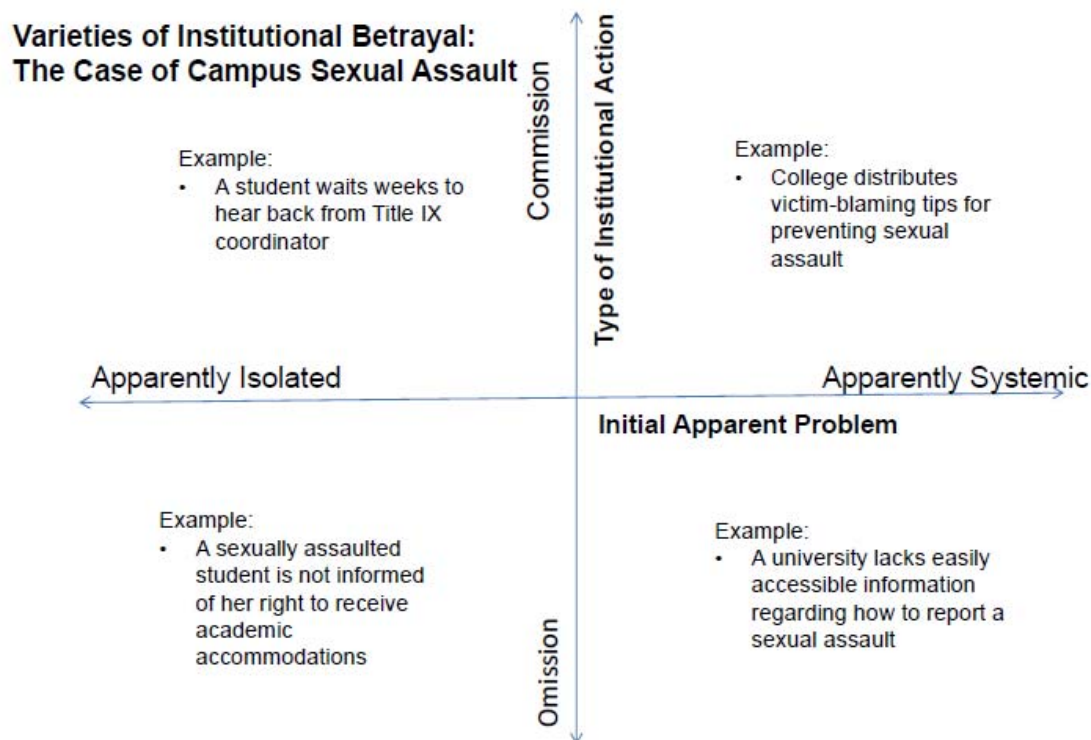
² E.g.: Freyd (1996); Freyd & Birrell (2013)

Concept: Betrayal Blindness³

- 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 Betrayal⁴

- 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)

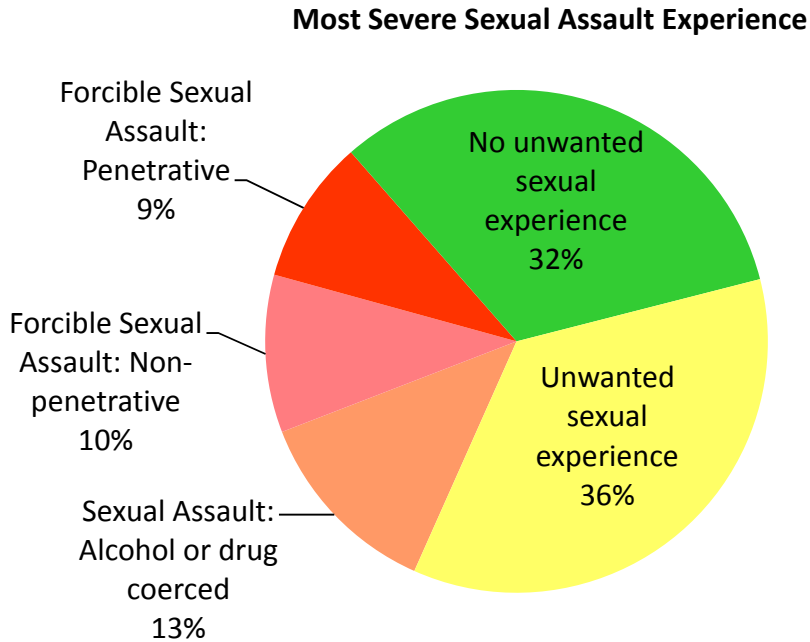
- College student sample (346 women)
- Measured
 - Sexual Assault: Sexual Experiences Scale (Koss & Oros, 1982)
 - Trauma Symptoms: Trauma Symptom Checklist (Briere & Runtz, 1989)
 - Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ – Smith & Freyd)

Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ, Smith & Freyd)

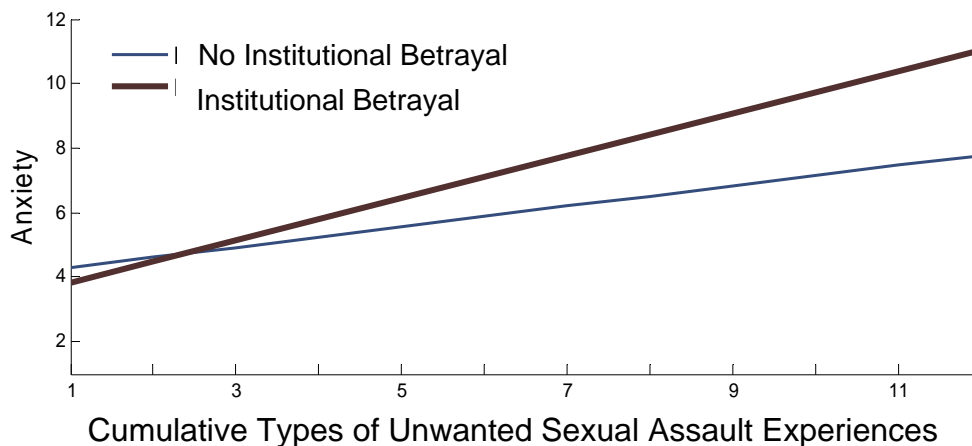
- Example Items:
 - Creating an environment in which this type of experience seemed common or like no big deal?
 - Making it difficult to report the experience?
 - Covering up the experience?
 - Punishing you in some way for this experience (e.g., loss of privileges or status)?

Research Findings: Smith & Freyd (2013) -- Institutions as Betrayers, continued

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



- 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



Research Finding: Cunningham, Smith, & Freyd (under review) – LGBT students show increased exposure to both sexual assault and institutional betrayal

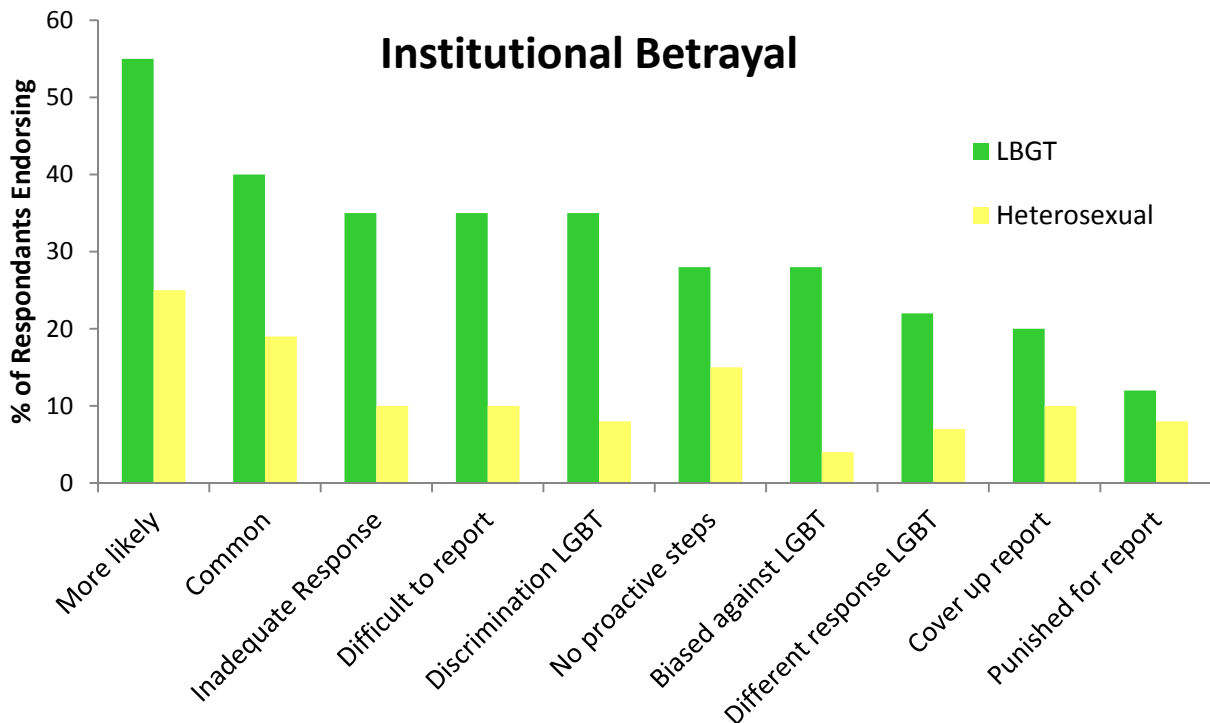
Discrimination within a university as institutional betrayal:

- ...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



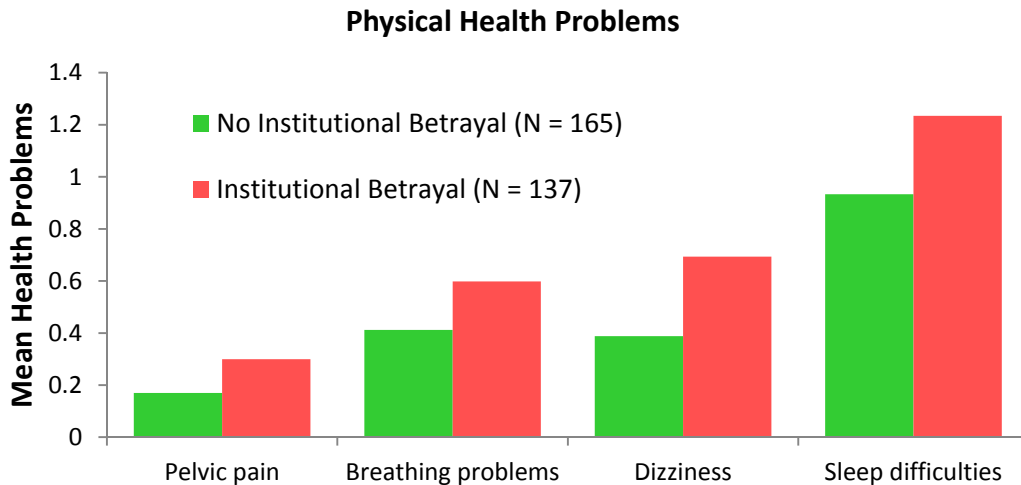
Sarah Cunningham, UO honors student ('13), Teach for America (Los Angeles)

- 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

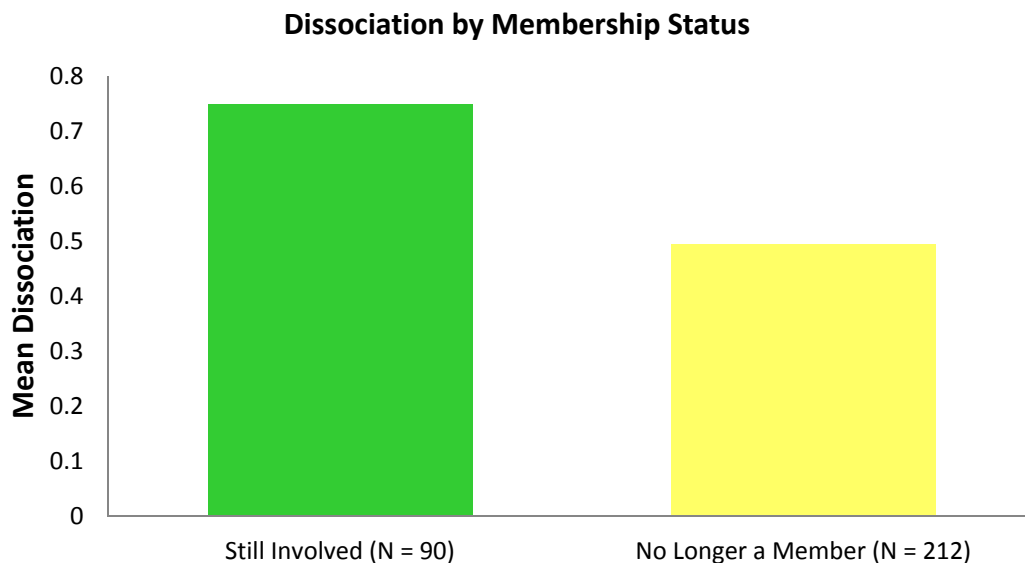


Research Finding: Smith & Freyd (in preparation) – institutional betrayal leads to health problems; dissociation is associated with continued institutional involvement

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



- 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.)



Research Findings: Smith, Bhuptani & Freyd, under review - Typical university assault email alerts contribute to belief in rape myths

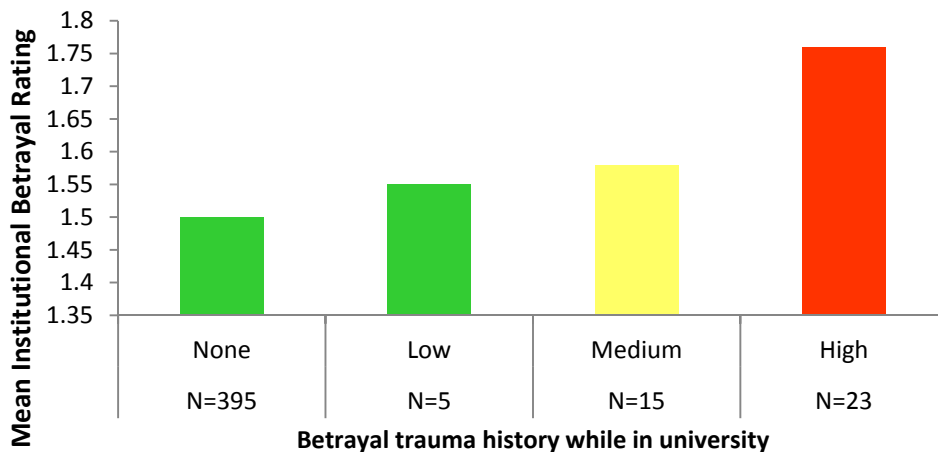
Clery Act mandated crime alerts (i.e., “Timely Warnings”)

- 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



Prachi Bhuptani, University of Oregon undergraduate student

Perceived institutional betrayal by betrayal trauma history



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?



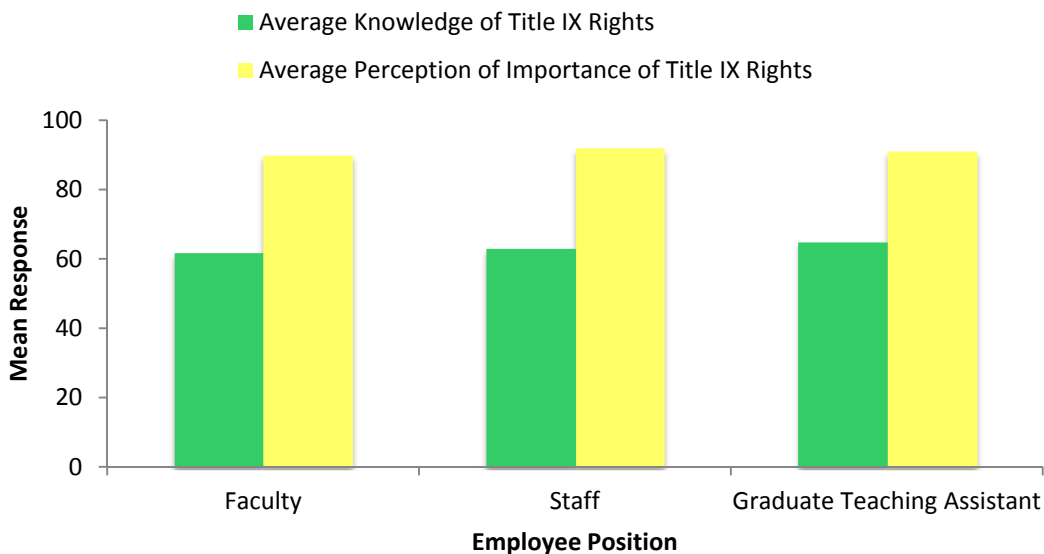
Marina Rosenthal, doctoral student at the University of Oregon

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

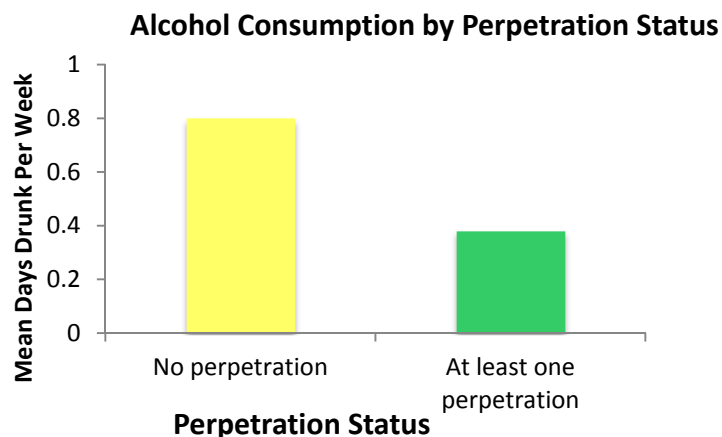
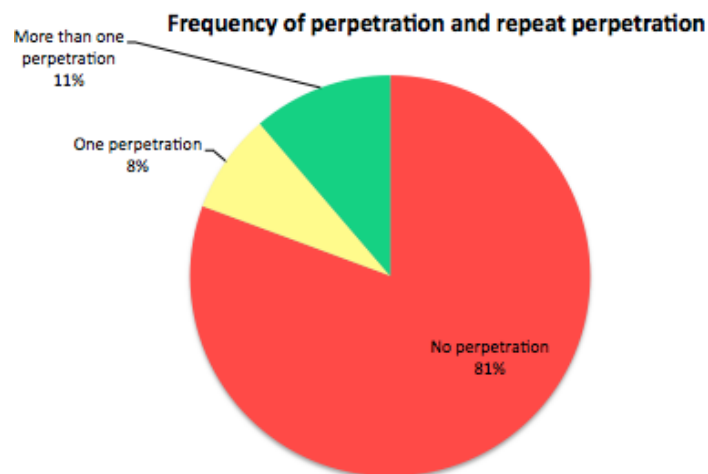
- College student sample (62 men have participated to date and are represented in preliminary analysis; data collection is on-going)

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

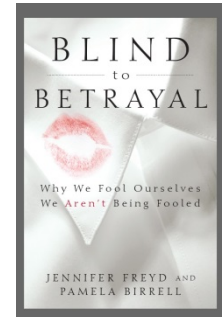


Recommendations

- 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)?



From
Freyd & Birrell (2013),
Pages 171-173

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

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Web resource on Institutional Betrayal:

<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/>