

Mini Workshop BETRAYAL TRAUMA: Theory and treatment implications

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Mini Workshop BETRAYAL TRAUMA: Theory and treatment implications

- Part 1: Betrayal Trauma theory – Jennifer Freyd
- Part 2: Treatment implications – Laurie Kahn

Betrayal Trauma Theory

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<http://dynamic.uoregon.edu>

16 November 2008

Brief Overview of Betrayal Trauma Theory

- Mainstream trauma model has emphasized life threat and fear
- *Betrayal Trauma Theory*: Focus on the impact of relational and social betrayal.

Forgetting Trauma – Consider Frank Fitzpatrick

Frank Fitzpatrick... began remembering having been sexually molested by a parish priest at age 12. ... Mr. Fitzpatrick's retrieval of the repressed memories began, he said, when "I was feeling a great mental pain..."

Mr. Fitzpatrick... slowly realized that the mental pain was due to a "betrayal of some kind," and remembered the sound of heavy breathing. "Then I realized I had been sexually abused by someone I loved," said Mr. Fitzpatrick.

But it was not until two weeks later that he suddenly remembered the priest, the Rev. James R. Porter.

The New York Times, 21 July 1992

Betrayal Trauma Theory Beginnings

- My initial (1991) research question
 - Why and how would individuals remain unaware of (or forget) traumas they had experienced?
 - Why are some traumas more likely to be forgotten than others?

The core of betrayal trauma theory: the *why* question.

- Betrayal blindness as survival mechanism

Human sensitivity to betrayal (S)

- Ability to evaluate trustworthiness highly important to social species
- Cosmides proposed humans have evolved "cheater detectors"
 - Evidence from reasoning tasks (e.g. Wason Selection task) showing people much better at reasoning when task involves detecting violation of social contract.
- Empowered individuals are likely to be exquisitely aware of betrayal
- Typical response to betrayal is withdrawal or confrontation

Dependence in Humans (D)

- Social animals depend on others
- Human children are extremely dependent
- Attachment system protects dependent person/child
- Baby has "job" (love and be lovable):

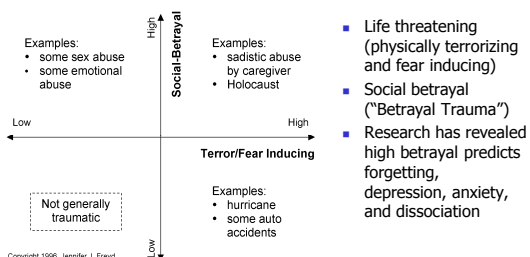


Betrayal Blindness (S+D = BB)

- What does a child do when caregiver betrays?
 - a child abused by a caregiver would risk further mistreatment if awareness caused withdrawal or conflict
- Betrayal blindness occurs when awareness would threaten necessary (or apparently necessary) relationships
- Thus unawareness and forgetting are sometimes an adaptive response to betrayal



Betrayal Trauma Theory Suggests Two Primary Dimensions of Traumatic Events

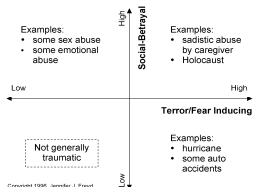


- Life threatening (physically terrorizing and fear inducing)
- Social betrayal ("Betrayal Trauma")
- Research has revealed high betrayal predicts forgetting, depression, anxiety, and dissociation

Some Research

- Betrayal and Memory

Memory Prediction

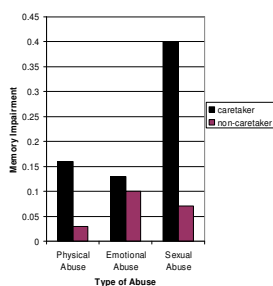


- Betrayal trauma theory predicts that forgetting and unawareness will be greater for betrayal traumas than non-betrayal traumas

Motivation to Not Remember: A Specific Prediction

- Childhood abuse perpetrated by a caregiver will lead to more memory impairment than will abuse perpetrated by a non-caregiver

BTI: Memory and Victim-Perpetrator Relationship (Freyd, DePrince, & Zurbriggen, 2001)



- College student population of 202 participants.
- Abuse perpetrated by a caregiver is related to less persistent memories of abuse.
- Caretaker status significant for sexual and physical abuse.
- Follow-up regression analyses: Age and duration of abuse did not account for findings.

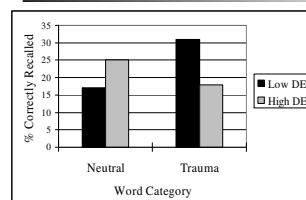
(BTT) How does this forgetting happen?

- Very likely more than one mechanism – e.g.:
 - Dissociation at time of encoding (attentional unawareness)
 - Lack of discussion likely to impact memory (shareability)
 - Retrieval inhibition of relatively well-formed memories at a later time ("memory repression")
- Nature of processes in forgetting have implications for retrieval process
- Communication about an event (shareability) may change the memories to become more explicit & declarative.

The role of communication? Shareability Theory

- Shareability theory (Freyd 1983, 1990, 1996) proposes that through the sharing of information (communication), internal knowledge is reorganized into more consciously available, categorical, and discrete forms of representation.
- Much childhood abuse happens without the opportunity for communication, thus memory for non-shared abuse experiences may be fundamentally different in memory (more implicit than explicit, more procedural, more continuous, less categorical)

How does this happen? Research on mechanisms of unawareness

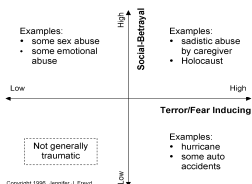


- Series of lab studies on mechanisms of forgetting trauma stimuli
- Adults Forgetting Trauma Words & young children Forgetting Scary Pictures
 - High dissociators/traumatized children and adults are good at forgetting trauma stimuli so long as they can divide their attention!

More Research

- Betrayal & Health

Are Physical and Mental Health Symptoms Also Related to Betrayal Traumas?



■Memory/forgetting is related to betrayal.

■BT theory also predicts that avoidance, withdrawal, and related symptoms will be greater for betrayal traumas than non betrayal traumas.

■Is exposure to BT related to symptoms?

Goldberg & Freyd: Developing the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS)

- We want to measure trauma history and health status.
 - We needed to create a brief measure of betrayal traumas.

BBTS – 12 items total 3 example Items:

- **Low Betrayal:** Been in a major earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane, or tornado that resulted in significant loss of personal property, serious injury to yourself or a significant other, the death of a significant other, or the fear of your own death.
- **Medium Betrayal:** You were deliberately attacked so severely as to result in marks, bruises, blood, broken bones, or broken teeth by someone with whom you were not close.
- **High Betrayal:** You were made to have some form of sexual contact, such as touching or penetration, by someone with whom you were very close (such as a parent or lover).

BBTS Form
Fits on
One page!

Personal Experiences

We hope that you trust us to keep your responses to complete confidence and privacy this is the reason that we ask you not to include your name on any of our questionnaires.

Instructions: If you find uncomfortable answering any of the items indicate questions in this section, just skip them, and go on to the next section. For each item below, please mark one response in the column labeled "Before Age 18" AND one response in the column labeled "Age 18 or Older".

	BEFORE AGE 18	AGE 18 or OLDER
Have each of the following events happened to you, and if so, how often?		
Been in a major earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane, or tornado that resulted in significant loss of personal property, serious injury to yourself or a significant other, the death of a significant other, or the fear of your own death.		
Been in a major automobile, boat, motorcycle, plane, train, or industrial accident that resulted in similar consequences		
Witnessed someone with whom you were close (close friend or a person, lover or close, caretaker, or intimate partner) committing suicide, being killed, or being harmed by another person so severely as to result in marks, bruises, blood, or broken bones. This might include a close friend or loved one.		
Witnessed someone with whom you were close undergoing a similar kind of traumatic event		
Witnessed someone with whom you were close deliberately attack another family member so severely as to result in marks, bruises, blood, broken bones, or broken teeth		
You were deliberately attacked that severely by someone with whom you were not close		
You were made to have some form of sexual contact, such as touching or penetration, by someone with whom you were not close (close friend or a parent or lover)		
You were made to have sexual contact by someone with whom you were not close		
You were emotionally or psychologically abused over a significant period of time by someone with whom you were not close (close friend or a parent or lover)		
Experienced the death of one of your own children		
Experienced a seriously traumatic event not already covered in any of these questions		

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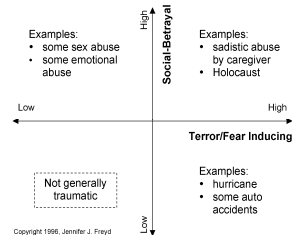
BBTS (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006) Features

- BBTS takes 5-10 mins to complete
- BBTS well tolerated by participants
- Trauma history results comparable to other instruments
- The complete BBTS is on the web at:
 - <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/bbts/>

Now That We Have the BBTS

- What will it tell us?

Reminder: Are Health Symptoms Also Related to Betrayal Traumas?



- We assessed betrayal traumas and physical and mental health symptoms
- 185 college students (Goldsmith, Freyd, & DePrince, 2004)
- 99 adult community members with health/pain problems (Freyd, Klest, & Allard, 2005)

Goldsmith, Freyd, & DePrince (2004), 185 college students, BBTS

	Exposure to Trauma with Low Betrayal	Exposure to Trauma with High Betrayal
Days Sick	-.02	.24**
Number of physician visits	-.02	.26**
Anxiety	-.07	.38**
Depression	.16*	.35**
Dissociation	.18*	.39**

- Trauma with high betrayal is a significant predictor of both anxiety and depression.

- When we add trauma with low betrayal into the model (using multiple regression), R-square statistics change very little, and these changes are not significant.

Freyd, Klest, and Allard (2005), 99 Individuals From the Community with Chronic Illness and/or Pain, BBTS

	Exposure to traumas with low betrayal	Exposure to traumas with high betrayal
Depression (TSC)	.31**	.45**
Anxiety (TSC)	.39**	.49**
Dissociation (TSC)	.40**	.46**
Physical Illness Symptoms	.31**	.37**

- Trauma with high betrayal is a significant predictor of both anxiety and depression.

- When we add traumas with low betrayal into the model (using multiple regression), R-square statistics change very little, and these changes are not significant.

Some ongoing research: Betrayal & BPD

- Kaehler & Freyd (under review): Borderline Personality Disorder Symptoms and Betrayal Trauma History
 - Betrayal trauma is associated with BPD characteristics
 - Trauma with high betrayal is the largest contributor
 - Trauma with low betrayal does not influence BPD traits

Some ongoing research: Betrayal, Revictimization, and Awareness

- Gobin & Freyd (under review)
 - Betrayal trauma history predicts revictimization in adult hood
 - Childhood trauma with high betrayal predicts being betrayed in close relationships in college
 - Childhood trauma with high betrayal predicts lower awareness of betrayal in close relationships in college

More Research

- Betrayal & Gender

Gender and Traumatic Events

- Depression, anxiety, and dissociation are associated with exposure to betrayal traumas
- Other research suggests that women have higher rates of these sorts of mental health problems
- This raises the question:
Is gender predictive of exposure to betrayal traumas?

What about Gender and Traumatic Events?

- Goldberg and Freyd (2006) asked 750 homeowners about their trauma experiences
- Traumatic event rates were quite high for both males and females (as has been found by other researchers)
- But, specific event categories tend to show highly significant gender differences

Lots of Gender Differences for Different Types of Event Occurrences (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006)

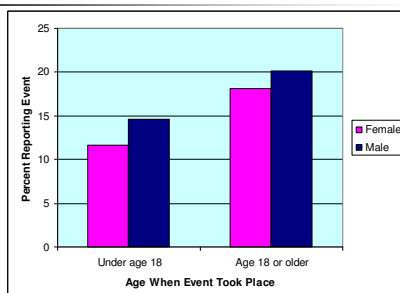
Significance Levels for chi-square test of gender differences (Likelihood Ratio).

Violet indicates women report more; **blue** indicates men report more. Significant effects in bold. *** means $p < .001$

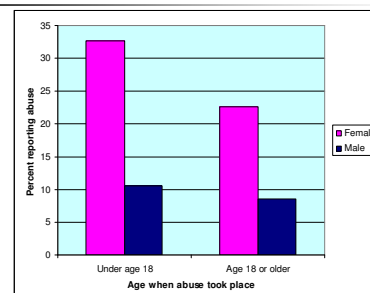
[Eugene-Springfield community sample: 422 women; 304 men]

	Before 18	After 18
Earthquake, fire, flood	.27014	.19245
Automobile, bike accident	.29703	.00025***
Witness...close...killed	.37203	.25018
Witness...not close...killed	.00000***	.00000***
Witness...close...attack family member	.04805	.00057***
Attacked...close	.06219	.00000***
Attacked...not close	.00000***	.00002***
Sex abuse...close	.00000***	.00031***
Sex abuse...not close	.00000***	.00001***
Emotionally mistreated	.00001***	.00000***
Death of own child	n too small	.01454
Other traumatic event	.87752	.04473

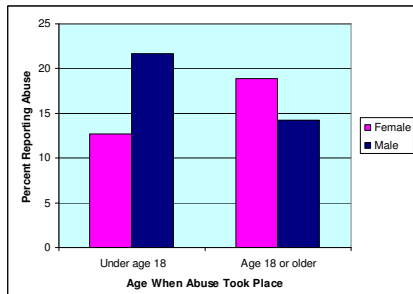
For Traumatic Accidents, Males Experience More, Particularly as Adults



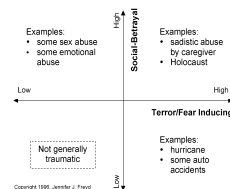
Women Experience More Sexual Abuse in Both Childhood and Adulthood



But for Physical Abuse the Rates are Much Closer, with Boys the More Common Victims in Childhood, and Women in Adulthood



What about Gender and Betrayal?



- Combining across events, men and women have similar overall rates of trauma
- But gender differences emerge for different types of event categories
- Can we get more insight into this gender difference by considering exposure to betrayal trauma versus terrorizing traumas?

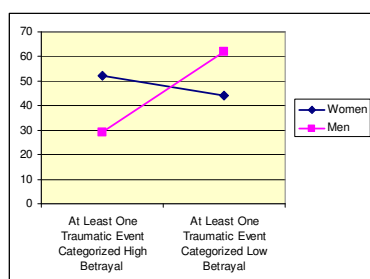
Observed Gender Differences Categorized by Degree of Betrayal (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006)

	High Betrayal Items (6 items)	Medium Betrayal Items (12 items)	Low Betrayal Items (6 items)
Women Report More of This Trauma (p<.001)	Emotional Abuse Adult*** Emotional Abuse Adult*** Close Sex Abuse Child*** Emotional Abuse Child*** Close Sex Abuse Adult***	Not-close Sex Abuse Child*** Not-close Sex Abuse Adult*** Witness someone close attack family member Adult ***	
Men Report More of This Trauma (p<.001)		Not-close Attack Child*** Not-close Attack Adult***	Witnessed Not-close Death Adult*** Accident Adult*** Witness Not-close Attack Child***

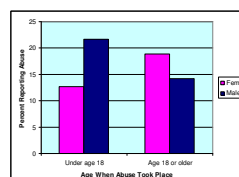
More Gender Effects

	Women	Men	Significance Level of Gender Diff (chi square)
Percent Reporting at Least one High Betrayal Items (6 items)	52%	29%	.00000***
Percent Reporting at Least one Medium Betrayal Items (12 items)	72%	62%	.00230*
Percent Reporting at Least one Low Betrayal Items (6 items)	44%	62%	.00000***

High versus Low Betrayal Events in Graphical Form (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006)

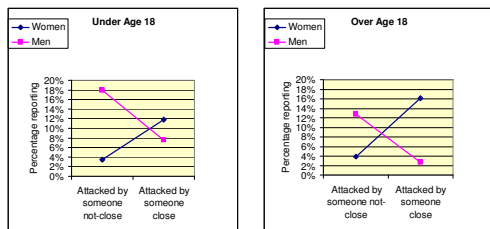


What about Physical Abuse?



- Remember....for physical abuse the gender effects were not so large. . .
- But what happens if we look at closeness of the perpetrator?

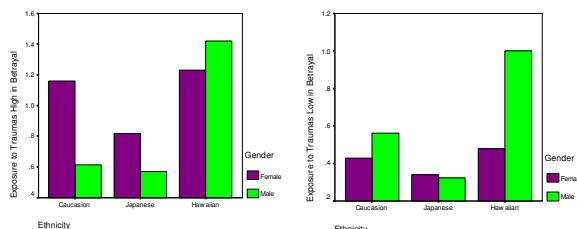
Gender and Exposure to Physical Abuse: Close versus Not-close Attacks



Questions

- Dominant narrative: Close relationships and family are supposed to be safe places....
 - Why is this accepted wisdom so different from the empirical reality for so many people?
 - Are betrayal traumas disbelieved & discounted because they are disproportionately experienced by women?
- To the extent that BT leads to specific reactions, and that gender is highly related to BT exposure, gender diffs in mental health may be partly explained.

From Klest, Freyd, Hampson, Goldberg (2008) – Trauma, Gender, Ethnicity

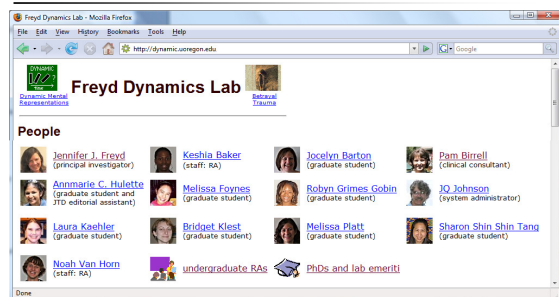


Lower status ethnic group membership may affect men more, as women already exhibit the impact of lower status related to gender

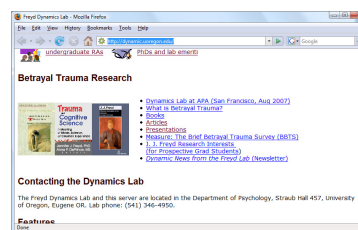
Concluding Words

- Childhood abuse, most sexual assault, and intimate traumas involve social betrayal
- BT theory suggests a primary motivation for forgetting and unawareness: preserving necessary relationships
- High betrayal is associated with forgetting, depression, anxiety, dissociation, and health symptoms
- To the extent that BT leads to specific reactions, and that gender is highly related to BT exposure, gender diffs in mental health may be partly explained.
- Research is shedding light on these & related issues; as usual, much additional research is needed

Thanks to many collaborators!



Lots of resources free on my website!



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