



**Moving from Institutional Betrayal to Institutional Courage:
Addressing Sexual Violence and Gender Discrimination**

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Addressing Sexual Violence and Gender Discrimination: Moving from Institutional Betrayal to Institutional Courage

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Today

- Betrayal Trauma Theory & Betrayal Blindness
- Institutional Betrayal
- DARVO
- Institutional Courage

Betrayal Trauma Theory & Betrayal Blindness

Memory & 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

I started with a question in 1991

- Why would individuals remain unaware of (or forget) traumas they had experienced?
 - And, related to this, why are some traumas forgotten (and not others)?
- Proposed answer: Betrayal Trauma theory

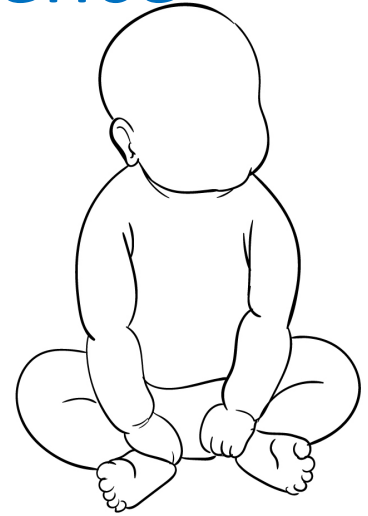
Betrayal Trauma Theory:

Consider our Sensitivity to Betrayal

- Ability to evaluate trustworthiness is highly important to our survival
 - We depend on social contracts
 - We are harmed by cheating and betrayal
- When empowered, we have exquisite sensitivity to cheating and betrayal
 - Response is adaptive: confrontation or withdrawal

Betrayal Trauma Theory: Consider Human Dependence

- Humans are profoundly dependent on others
- Attachment system protects dependent person
- Baby has a “job” to engage (to love and be lovable)
- *Motivates approach and positive engagement*



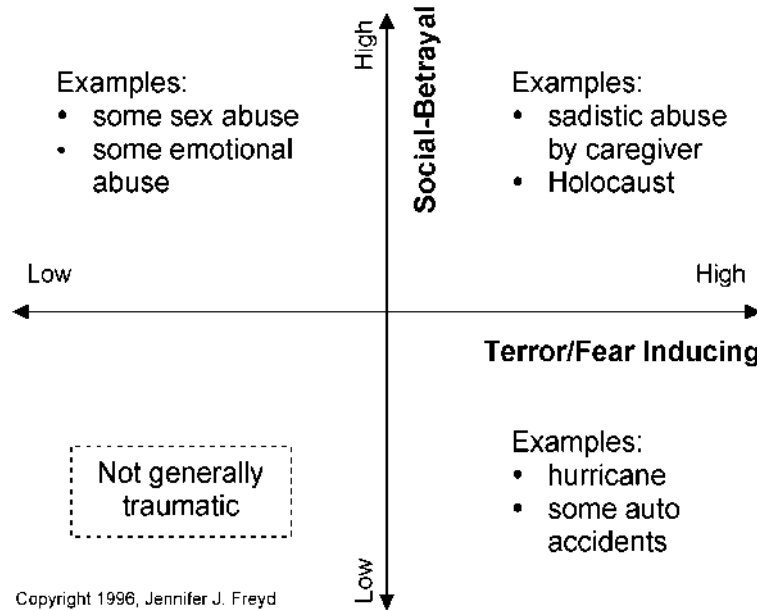
With varying degrees, dependence and attachment continue throughout life, including in family, school, workplace, community, nation.



Betrayal Trauma Theory: Betrayal Blindness as a Survival Mechanism

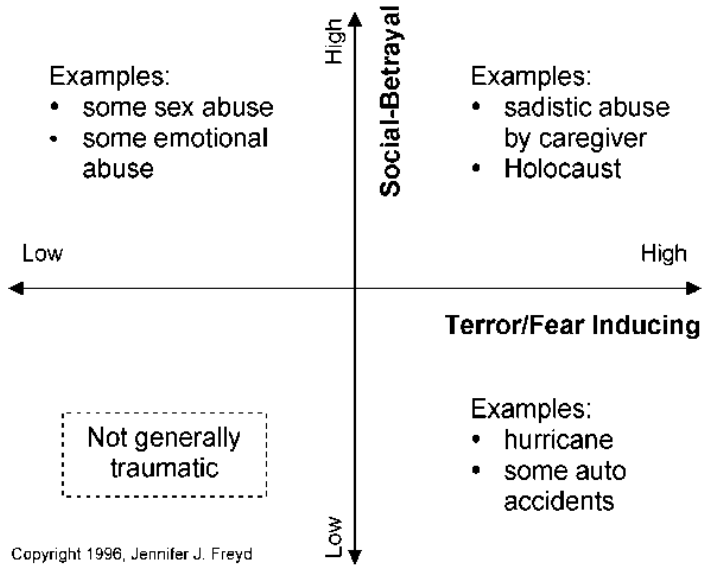
- What does a dependent person do when betrayed?
 - child abused by caregiver (or employee mistreated by boss) risks further mistreatment if awareness motivates withdrawal or confrontation
 - conflicts with needs of attachment (approach & engage)
- Betrayal blindness is advantageous when awareness would threaten necessary (or apparently necessary) relationships
- Unawareness and forgetting are sometimes an adaptive response to betrayal
 - Short run survival; long run cost

Betrayal Trauma Theory Suggests Two Primary Dimensions of Traumatic Events



- Physically threatening and terrorizing (fear inducing)
- Social-betrayal (betrayal trauma)
- Would rates of forgetting and symptoms of distress depend on these dimensions?

Summary of 20+ Years of Research: Betrayal is also Toxic & Gendered



•High Betrayal (as compared to traumas with low betrayal) is associated with increases in symptoms of

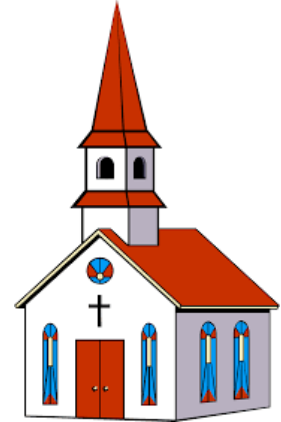
- Forgetting, unawareness, not telling
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Shame
- PTSD, Dissociation
- Physical illness
- Hallucinations
- Self harm
- Problematic substance use
- Revictimization

•*Women/girls at higher risk than men/boys of high betrayal exposure*

Institutional Betrayal

What about Institutional Betrayal?

- We can depend on, trust, & love institutions
- Can institutions betray?
- If so, is it harmful?
- Betrayal blindness?



Defining Institutional Betrayal

- Institutions harming those dependent on the institution
- Includes the failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings within the institution when there is a reasonable expectation of protection.

Dangerous Safe Havens (Smith & Freyd, 2013)

- First empirical focus: educational institutions
- Sample: undergraduate women
- Measured
 - Sexual Assault Experiences
 - Trauma Symptoms
 - Institutional Betrayal

Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ, Smith & Freyd, 2013)

1. Not taking proactive steps to prevent this type of experience?
2. Creating an environment in which this type of experience/s seemed common or like no big deal?
3. Creating an environment in which this experience seemed more likely to occur?
4. Making it difficult to report the experience/s?
5. Responding inadequately to the experience/s, if reported?
6. Covering up the experience/s?
7. Punishing you in some way for this experience (e.g., loss of privileges or status)?

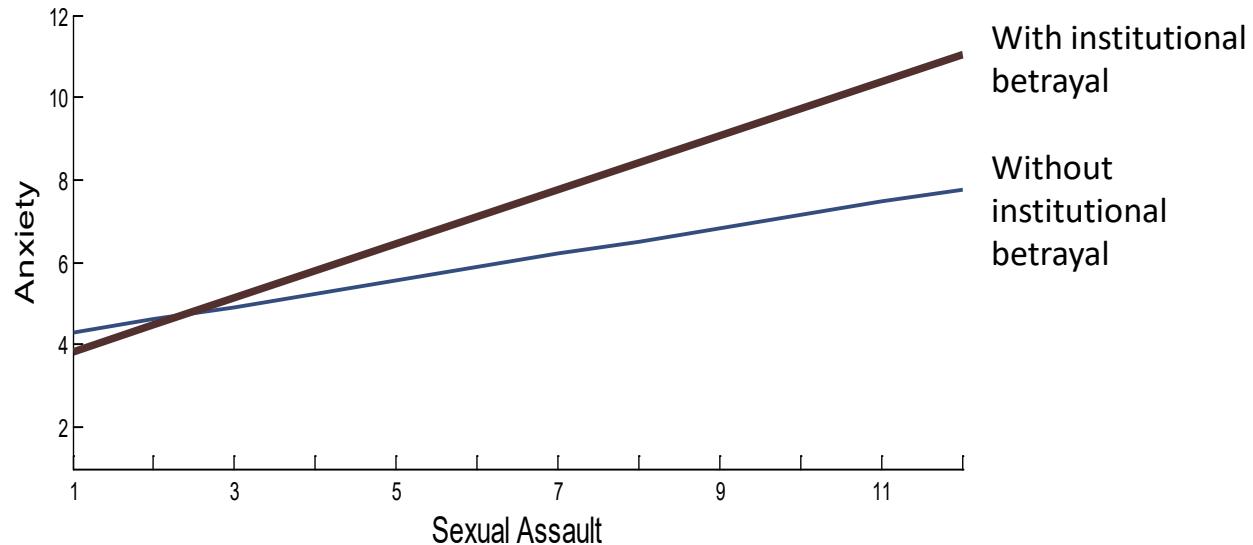
46%

of female students with unwanted sexual experiences
reported experiencing institutional betrayal

(Smith & Freyd, 2013)

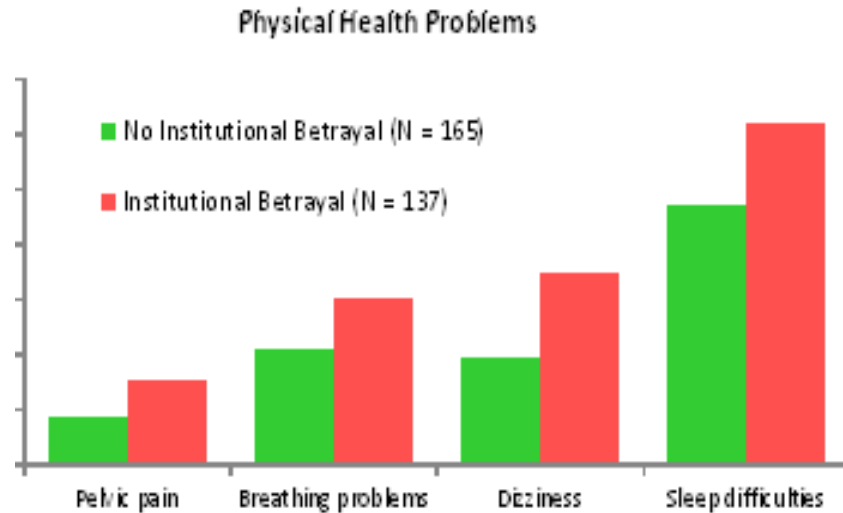
Institutional Betrayal Exacerbates Trauma Symptoms (Smith & Freyd, 2013)

- Exacerbates **Anxiety**, Dissociation, Sexual Problems, & Sexual-abuse related symptoms



Physical Health Costs of Institutional Betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2017)

- Institutional betrayal is also associated with physical health problems, even when controlling for betrayal trauma



Findings with US Veterans (Monteith et al., 2016)

- MST survivors experiences of institutional betrayal associated with:
 - PTSD symptoms
 - Depression
 - **Higher odds of attempting suicide**

Perceptions of Institutional Betrayal Predict Suicidal Self-Directed Violence Among Veterans Exposed to Military Sexual Trauma

Lindsey L. Monteith,^{1,2} Nazanin H. Bahraini,^{1,2} Bridget B. Matarazzo,^{1,2} Kelly A. Soberay,¹ and Carly Parnitzke Smith³

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Institutional betrayal also costly for institutions

- Disengagement from the system
- Illness, absenteeism, turn-over
- Loss of potential talent
- Internal rot, corruption, eventual collapse

- Reputational cost? (depending on societal context, whisper networks, PR disasters)

Institutional betrayal blindness (Smith & Freyd, 2017)

- Institutional betrayal exposure and then staying in the institution is also associated with dissociative symptoms (unawareness, forgetting) even when controlling for betrayal trauma exposure

Not just about sexual violence

- Institutional betrayal in health care, judicial system, governments, etc.
- Institutional betrayal associated with inequality and oppression including racism, homophobia, etc.

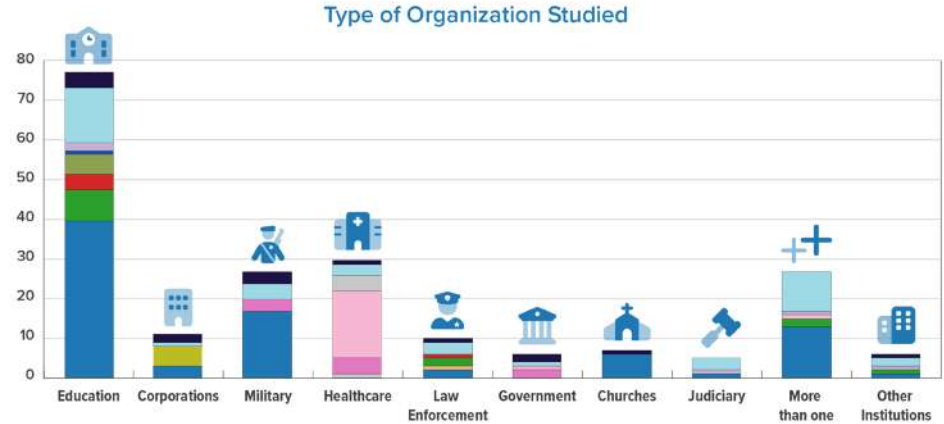
2024 Scoping Review

- “When Institutions Harm Those Who Depend on Them: A Scoping Review of Institutional Betrayal” by Christl, Pham, Rosenthal, and DePrince (2024).
 - The scoping review included articles published through 2022.
 - Thirty-seven articles met inclusion criteria (i.e., peer-reviewed empirical studies of institutional betrayal) and were included in analyses.
 - *The review found that across studies with survivors of interpersonal trauma, institutional betrayal was common and linked with harm.*

Many More New IB Studies

- Research tracking webpage:

<https://www.institutionalcourage.org/tracking-research>



The harm of institutional betrayal

- Institutional betrayal harms individuals in at least two distinct ways:
 - ***Pragmatic (as in material impact)***
 - ***Psychological (we are most vulnerable when we love, trust, and depend upon institutions)***

A thought about our vulnerability



DARVO

DARVO (Freyd, 1997)

- Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim & Offender
 - **D**eny “It never happened”
 - **A**ttack: “You’re a liar”
 - **R**everse **V**ictim & **O**ffender: “I’m the real victim”

Institutional DARVO

- **Institutional DARVO** occurs when the DARVO is committed by an institution (or with institutional complicity)
- Institutional DARVO is a form of institutional betrayal.

DARVO Displayed by Powerful Figures

- And it often seems to be effective

& the Concept Seems to Resonate

Ashley Judd says everyone should know this acronym in the #MeToo era



By **Lila MacLellan** | Published May 1, 2018



Actor Ashley Judd, a prominent voice in the #MeToo movement and co-founder of #TimesUp, wants women and company leaders to learn a new acronym: DARVO.

It stands for “Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender,” and was coined by Jennifer Freyd, a professor of psychology at University of

“It’s called DARVO” (Nov 2019)



- <https://southpark.cc.com/clips/gfwbrf/its-called-darvo>

Some DARVO Research Questions

- How does DARVO impact victims?
- How does DARVO influence observers?
- Who uses DARVO?
- Can we mitigate or prevent DARVO?

DARVO Research Findings

- Harsey, Zurbriggen, & Freyd, 2017 – experiencing DARVO
 - DARVO parts hang together empirically
 - DARVO is *gendered* – women more likely to be DARVO-ed
 - DARVO by perpetrator is associated with victim *self-blame*
- Harsey & Freyd, 2020 & 2023 - observing DARVO
 - For 3rd parties, DARVO results in *more doubt about the victim's credibility*

Education?

- In a final experiment, Harsey & Freyd (2020) compared people who were and weren't taught about DARVO before they read an account of a DARVO-like response
- Education about DARVO reduced its power to discredit the target's credibility
- DARVO must be recognized and identified in order to take away its power

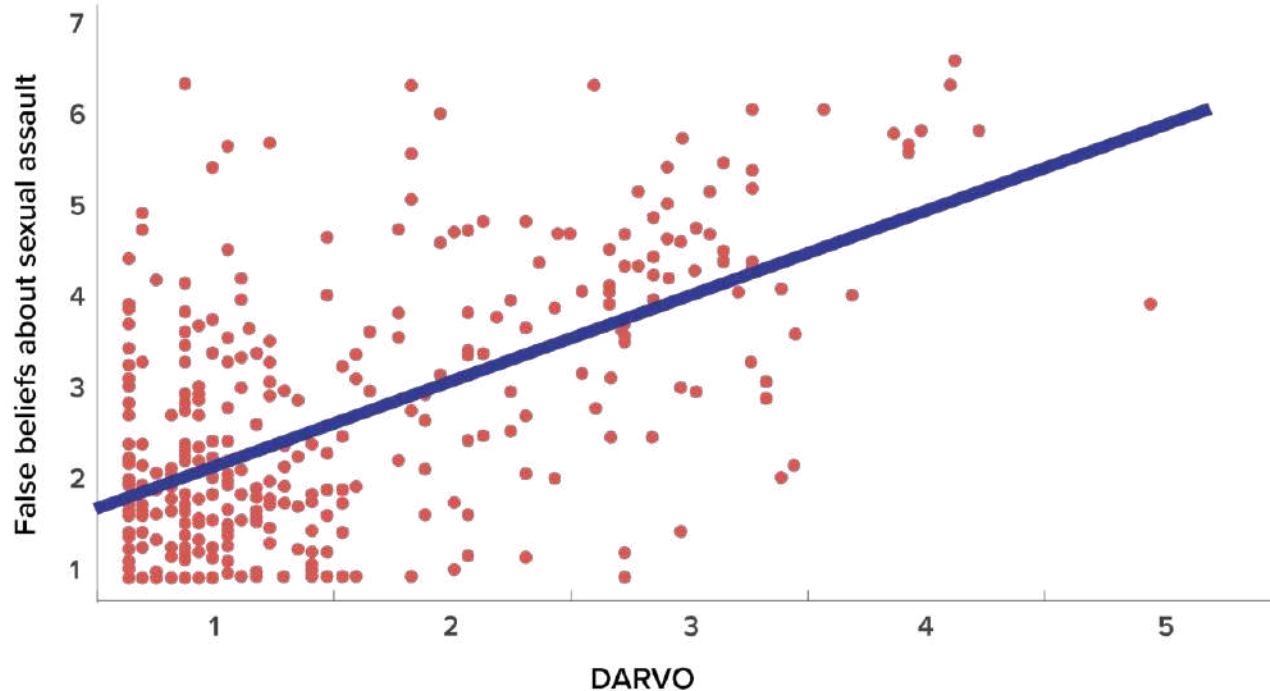
DARVO Use

- Are there behavioral, attitudinal, & personality correlates with DARVO use?
- Harsey, Adams-Clark, & Freyd (2024) and Harsey & Freyd (2023)
- Two Samples
 - Community: 335 adults
 - Students: 602 undergraduates
- Today will discuss community results (similar patterns for students)

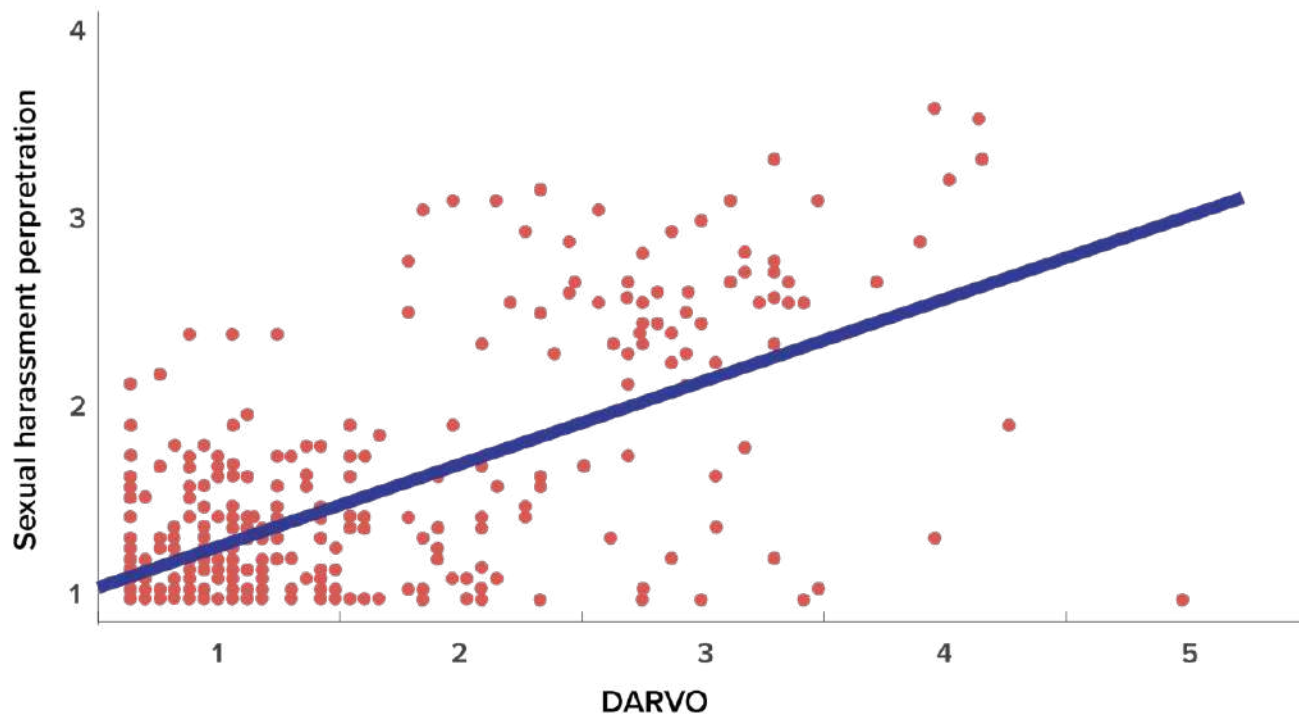
What we found to be associated with DARVO Use

- Anti-social personality variables (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism)
- False beliefs and rape-myth acceptance attitudes
- Sexual harassment perpetration

Using DARVO and rape myth acceptance ($r = .60, p < .001$)



Using DARVO and perpetrating sexual harassment ($r = .65, p < .001$)



DARVO is not a necessary response

- No one has to resort to DARVO to defend themselves and yet individuals and institutions often use DARVO
- Those accused can share their perspective on the situation while avoiding harmful and unnecessary defensive tactics
- A question for future research: can we teach people how to avoid using DARVO and how to use more constructive responses?

What we can or cannot know

- In a dispute about the past, we may never know for sure what happened, but we often *can* observe what is happening in the present dispute.
- Its important to hold people accountable for what they are doing in the present.

Can we repair and prevent
institutional betrayal & institutional
DARVO?

Institutional Courage

Institutional Courage

- An institution's commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost.
- A pledge to protect and care for those who depend on the institution.
- A compass oriented to the common good of individuals, institutions, and the world.
- A force that transforms institutions into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone.

11 Steps to Promote Institutional Courage (Freyd, 2018; updated 2022)

1. Comply with civil rights laws *and* go beyond mere compliance; beware risk management
2. Educate the institutional community (especially leadership)
3. Add checks and balances to power structure and diffuse highly dependent relationships
4. Respond well to victim disclosures (& create a trauma-informed reporting policy)
5. Bear witness, be accountable, apologize
6. Cherish the whistleblowers; cherish the truth tellers
7. Conduct scientifically-sound anonymous surveys
8. Regularly engage in self-study
9. Be transparent about data and policy
10. Use the organization to address the societal problem
11. Commit on-going resources to 1-10

New Research on Institutional Courage

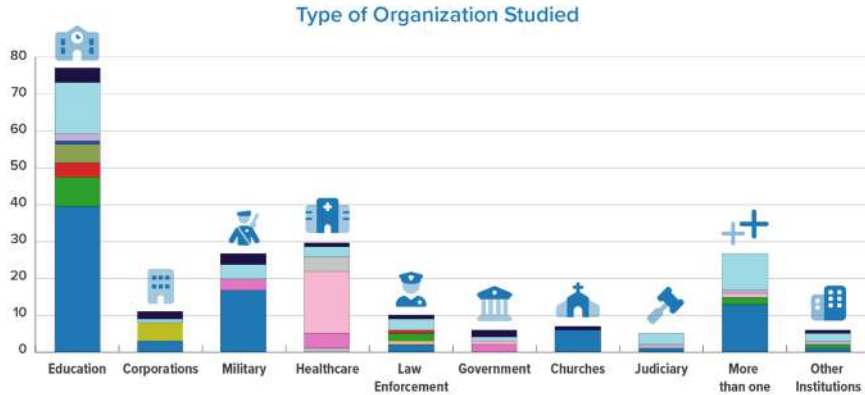
(Smidt, Adams-Clark, & Freyd, 2023, *PLOS ONE*)

- We created the Institutional Courage Questionnaire (ICQ)
- Participants ~800 employees around the country in various industries
- Results: Institutional courage buffers against sexual violence & institutional betrayal for employees

Institutional Courage Impact on Students (Adams-Clark, et al., inpress)

- Institutional courage also buffers against institutional betrayal for students experiencing assault and/or sexual harassment

Tracking Research on Institutional Betrayal & Courage



Analysis of publications.

Details at:

<https://www.institutionalcourage.org/tracking-research>

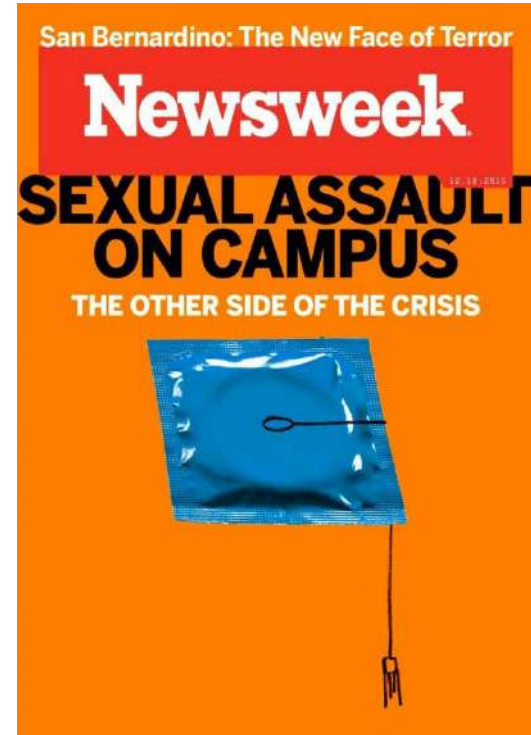
Case Study: What Does Institutional Courage Looks Like?

What Institutional Courage Looks Like: Brenda Tracy and Oregon State U*

- 1998: Tracy reported to police that she had been gang raped at a party. Two of the accused assailants were OSU football players.
- Prosecutors led her to believe the case was weaker than it was; rape kits destroyed; the 2 football players had one game suspension and community service; no one from OSU talked to Tracy

*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/oregon-state-university-sexual-assault_us_56f426c3e4b02c402f66c3b9

Flash Forward to 2014



2014

- Tracy became curious what OSU had done and called OSU.
- At first OSU was evasive but then Brenda Tracy met and talked to John Canzano, a sports columnist at the *Oregonian*.
- Canzano wrote a column about the case
- President of OSU Ed Ray read the column and ordered an investigation
- Three weeks later he met with Tracy and shared the results of the investigation

The University President Apologized for Past Institutional Betrayal

*Dear Brenda,
Oregon State officials are very grateful that you took time to meet with us. We are so sorry for what you experienced in 1998 and have lived with since. What we have learned recently of your suffering is heart breaking, and your bravery inspires us.*



From the apology letter

We are also grateful to you for raising the public dialogue about the consequences of sexual violence in our society and for raising a discussion of how society can better assist survivors of such violence. While we cannot undo this nightmare, we apologize to you for any failure on Oregon State University's part to better assist you in 1998.

From the apology letter

As promised a few weeks ago, we conducted an exhaustive review of the facts of how OSU handled this matter 16 years ago. This review was completed this past Friday, and we want to share the results of that review with you.

Follow-up Courage

- After Ed Ray apologized to Brenda Tracy, he **hired her** to be a consultant to address improving institutional response.
- That led to many important innovations and changes at OSU.

What Institutional Courage Looks Like

- Investigation & transparency
- Acknowledge & apologize
- Cherish the whistleblower-partnership
- Increasing resources and awareness on campus
- Reach beyond - support legislation
- Continuing efforts



OSU President Ed Ray and Brenda Tracy

Institutional Courage

- Its possible, its needed, and it works
- But its relatively rare
- What to do about that?



Where to Do About That?

- **Start with knowledge:** Education about these frameworks + concepts gives language to name the problem of institutional betrayal and the promise of institutional courage.
- **Go for small wins:** Reflect on where there might be institutional betrayal currently happening, and where there might be opportunities for institutional courage. Prioritize what's both feasible and impactful.
- **Ask for help:** Reach out to those with the experience and expertise to help

Thank you!

Center For Institutional
Courage



For institutional courage resources see:
<https://www.institutionalcourage.org/>