

Betrayal Blindness and Institutional Betrayal

Jennifer J. Freyd, Department of Psychology, University of Oregon

What is Betrayal Blindness?

Betrayal blindness is the unawareness, not-knowing, and forgetting exhibited by people towards betrayal. The term "betrayal blindness" was introduced by Freyd (1996), and expanded in Freyd (1999) in the context of [Betrayal Trauma Theory](#). This blindness may extend to betrayals that are not traditionally considered "traumas," such as adultery, inequities in the workplace and society, etc. Victims, perpetrators, and witnesses may display betrayal blindness in order to preserve relationships, institutions, and social systems upon which they depend. (Also, see Eileen Zurbruggen's essay on [Betrayal Trauma in the 2004 Election](#).)

What is Institutional Betrayal?

The term "Institutional Betrayal" refers to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution. The term "Institutional Betrayal" as connected with Betrayal Trauma Theory is discussed in more detail in various publications, including in a section starting on page 201 of [Platt, Barton, & Freyd \(2009\)](#) and in recent conference posters by [Smith & Freyd \(2011a; 2011b\)](#) and by [Medrano, Martin, and Freyd \(2011\)](#).

Research Findings and Measurement Instrument: Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ)

Carly Smith and Jennifer Freyd have been developing the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ) to measure institutional betrayal regarding sexual assault. The IBQ is designed to measure institutional betrayal that occurs leading up to or following a sexual assault (e.g., [The institution] "... created an environment where sexual assault seemed like no big deal"; "... responded inadequately to reports of sexual assault"). The IBQ also measures identification with the institution and prompts for a description of the institution involved. [The IBQ and links to preliminary findings can be found here.](#)

Also see:

- Media discussions of institutional betrayal:
 - [Cultural Denial and Child Sex Abuse](#), *Voices in the Family* on npr affiliate WHYY, 14 November 2011, [podcast](#).

- [Penn State: Would you do better than Joe Paterno?](#), *BBC News Magazine*, 10 November 2011 ([pdf](#))
- [Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire](#)
- [Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey \(BBTS\)](#)
- [Science Article about Child Sexual Abuse \(Freyd et al 2005\)](#)
- [Additional articles on trauma, disclosure, etc](#)
- [Freyd Dynamics Lab](#)