Gender Differences in PTSD: The Mediating Role of Betrayal Trauma

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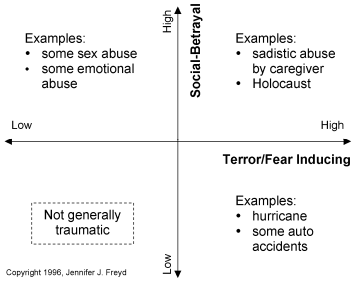
The Puzzle: Gender Differences in Traumatic Experiences

- Men often report higher overall rates of exposure to traumatic experiences than women (Breslau et al., 1998; Kessler et al., 1995)
- Yet women consistently exhibit higher rates of anxiety, PTSD & depression (2:1)
- Types of traumas experienced differ (Breslau et al., 1998; Kessler et al., 1995)
  - Men more likely to experience accidents, physical assault, being threatened with a weapon
  - Women more likely to experience sexual molestation, sexual assault, child abuse
  - Girls more likely to experience sexual abuse by family member and boys by a non-family member (Finkelhor, 1994)

Betrayal trauma theory

- Context of trauma and relationships may in part explain gender differences
- Traumas perpetrated by someone close to the victim are more likely to cause dissociation and unawareness than those perpetrated by someone not close (Freyd, 1994).
- Traumas with high betrayal significantly correlated with number of physical illnesses, anxiety,dissociation, and depression symptoms (Freyd, Klest, & Allard, 2005; Goldsmith, 2004)

Betrayal Trauma Theory (Freyd, 1994)



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*** 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***

Purpose of Study

- High betrayal (HB) experiences will be significantly associated with PTSD, depression, and anxiety; these associations will also be stronger than those for medium betrayal (MB) and low betrayal (LB) potentially traumatic experiences
- Women will report significantly higher rates of HB experiences than MB and LB experiences.
- Experiences of HB trauma will mediate the relationship between gender and PTSD symptoms

Surveys Administered

- Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, in press)
- Revised Civilian Mississippi PTSD Scale (Norris & Perilla, 1996)
- Trauma Symptom Checklist
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Dissociation subscales

Demographics (N = 1240)

College & Community sample

406 Male (33%), 834 Female

Ethnicity

- European American 79%
- Asian/Asian American 8.3%
- Latino/a 4%
- Native American 1.4%
- African American 1.1%
- Other 5.1%

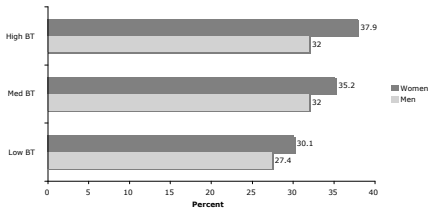
- Age : *M* = 19.67, *sd* = 3.30; Range: 16-68

Comparisons of Correlations of HB, MB, and LB Traumas Using Steiger's Z Statistic

- Depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms more strongly associated with HB trauma than with MB and LB trauma

	HB and MB Trauma	HB and LB Trauma
Depression (n = 1240)	5.06**	4.54**
Anxiety (n = 1240)	4.35**	2.93**
PTSD (n = 741)	2.89**	2.58**

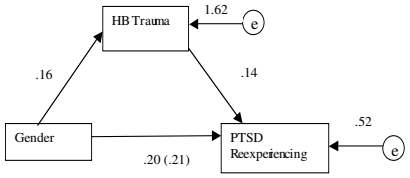
Rates of Trauma Types Reported by Gender



Rates of Trauma by Gender

- Women reported significantly more HB trauma than men (Mann-Whitney U = 176,566, z = 1.92, p = .03)
- Women reported approximately 45% more sexual abuse by someone close and about a third more sexual abuse by someone not close.
- Conversely, men experienced two-and-a-half times more physical assault by not close others and witnessed one-third more attacks.

Mediation of Gender and PTSD Reexperiencing Symptoms by HB Trauma



Limitations

- Largely university sample
- Young age of participants
- Limited ethnic diversity

Conclusions

- Women more likely to have experienced HB traumas than men
- Traumas high in betrayal are more strongly associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress than traumas lower in betrayal
- Betrayal trauma partially explains the higher rates of PTSD reexperiencing symptoms among women