

Finding a Secret Garden in Trauma Research

Jennifer J. Freyd
Anne P. DePrince

SUMMARY. This article briefly summarizes the diversity in perspectives and methodologies captured in the current volume. The authors discuss diversity in the context of the 1998 Meeting on Trauma and Cognitive Science, and the future of traumatic stress studies. In addition, future directions for research and collaborative approaches are discussed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Trauma, multidisciplinary, cognitive science

The fields of trauma and cognitive science have the potential to influence and inform one another when boundaries between traditionally segregated domains of academic pursuit are crossed. This volume (and the 1998 Meeting which inspired the volume) sought to bring together the methods, assumptions, and interpretations of trauma researchers who crossed boundaries of traditional areas within psychology and psychiatry. In so doing, the authors contributed research and theory that differed along important dimensions,

Address correspondence to: Jennifer J. Freyd, Department of Psychology, 1227 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1227 (E-mail: jjf@dynamic.uoregon.edu).

[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Finding a Secret Garden in Trauma Research." Freyd, Jennifer J., and Anne P. DePrince. Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* (The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 4, No. 2 (#8), 2001, pp. 305-309; and: *Trauma and Cognitive Science: A Meeting of Minds, Science, and Human Experience* (ed: Jennifer J. Freyd, and Anne P. DePrince) The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc., 2001, pp. 305-309. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-342-9678, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com].

© 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

305

Freyd, J.J. & DePrince, A.P. (2001) Finding a secret garden in trauma research, *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment, & Trauma*, 4 (2), 305-309. [Also published as: Freyd, J.J. & DePrince, A.P. (Eds). Book in press. *Trauma and Cognitive Science: A Meeting of Minds, Science, and Human Experience*. New York: Haworth Press.]

such as population or methodology, while sharing common themes. Across the different methodologies and perspectives represented in this volume, there is an awareness that multiple forms of assessment and multiple conceptual tools are required to understand the complex relationship of trauma and human behavior. Multiple perspectives are the essential ingredient in the study of trauma and its effects. The contributions made to this volume capture the necessary diversity in methodology, theory, and interpretation that will push our understanding of trauma and its effects forward.

While diversity in theory and methodology appears to be an important goal for researchers, diversity requires the breaking down of traditional boundaries. Breaking down boundaries is a formidable task. In his welcome remarks to the 1998 Meeting on Trauma and Cognitive Science held at the University of Oregon, University President Dave Frohnmayer recognized the importance and magnitude of this task: "I especially commend you for your willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries. Combining the rigor and precision of cognitive science with the complex worlds of trauma and Clinical Psychology. Bringing these worlds together is both a challenge and an opportunity." The 1998 Meeting on Trauma and Cognitive Science and this volume provide a model for addressing problems from different perspectives, paradigms, and intellectual traditions. Now that we have this model, we can see that such collaborative efforts are a very important and productive way to operate. This multidisciplinary approach can be applied to the trauma field more generally, and psychology as a whole. When we listen to other perspectives, the opportunities for discovery and understanding increase. Unfortunately our academic fields are often divided into separate "areas" that become isolated from one another. In contrast, we believe that areas within a field or department are most valuable when used and thought of as focal points for shared intellectual interests. Such intellectual communities intrinsically have fuzzy boundaries, are ever changing, and often have overlapping edges—they are not some set of fixed, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive categories that adequately subdivide the field.

President Dave Frohnmayer (1998) also noted: "Long-standing borders are always difficult to cross; that's the history of inquiry. They are broken down with great courage and great difficulty." This sentiment reflects similar ideas expressed elsewhere in the scientific community. Rhonda Shearer and Stephen Jay Gould published an essay in the November 5, 1999 issue of *Science* magazine, in which they urged scientists not to create disciplinary boundaries where they need not exist. Shearer and Gould (1999) note that while humans have a tendency to divide into "us versus them," humans are also capable of "mental flexibility, and our consequent potential for overcoming such innate limitations by education" (p. 1093). They wrote "The contingent and largely arbitrary nature of disciplinary boundaries has unfor-

tunately been reinforced, and even made to seem 'natural' by our drive to construct dichotomies" (p. 1093). Perhaps their most important observation is:

Our tendency to parse complex nature into pairings of "us versus them" should not only be judged as false in our university of shadings and continua, but also (and often) harmful, given another human propensity for judgment—so that "us versus them" easily becomes "good versus bad" or even, when zealotry fans our xenophobic flames, "chosen for martyrdom versus ripe for burning." (p. 1093)

Frohnmayr (1998), as well as Shearer and Gould (1999) speak to the importance of minimizing disciplinary boundaries. What is true for large disciplinary boundaries is also true for minimizing boundaries within a discipline. The study of trauma requires that we cross and combine traditional areas.

President Frohnmayr (1998) also drew attention to the importance of combining rigorous science with compassionate humanity: ". . . to find you here, obviously indicates the seriousness of the topic and of your intellectual devotion to understanding it more deeply. . . . This conference brings to this campus obviously not only scientists who's professional experience has immersed you in the world of research, but scientists who understand human beings as human beings and the importance of that research to science and society and indeed to human well-being." Supporting Frohnmayr's emphasis on the importance of this research to society, the local newspaper for the city of Eugene covered the conference for the lay public (Mortenson, 1998; Rojas-Burke, 1998).

The future success of traumatic stress studies, and particularly the melding of cognitive science and traumatic stress, will depend upon ever increasing collaboration between scientists, scholars, and thinkers with diverse backgrounds. Key elements are necessary to support this growing diversity and commitment to breaking down boundaries. We hope to see the field become better funded to support diversity in intellectual approach. In addition, a continued emphasis on developmental effects will be essential (see also Putnam, 1997). With the growing awareness that trauma interacts with developmental time course, developmental approaches will be critical to examining the broad range of human behaviors affected by trauma. Moreover, because the study of trauma brings us face to face with human cruelty, it is ethically imperative that we incorporate not just a scientific approach but also wisdom from the humanities. Different ways of knowing, different methodologies, and different perspectives are all essential for continued progress in understanding and ameliorating traumatic stress.

As collaborative progress continues within the fields of psychology and

psychiatry, we hope that trauma researchers and clinicians will seek to broaden the audience for this research. Trauma affects humanity—not any one particular subset of people, but all of humanity. Given this, we need to also break down boundaries to education about trauma and societal denial of the existence of trauma. One critical step to doing this lies in the education of future generations of students in our classrooms, as our advisees, and supervisees. We need to train our students to evaluate and measure the role of previous and current trauma in the lives of research participants, even when trauma is not the specific focus of the research, as traumatic experiences are likely to be impacting a wide variety of aspects of human functioning (including personality, social, cognitive, and neurological functioning). Similarly, we need to include the role of trauma in our curriculum as we teach students about human functioning.

In addition, trauma research can provide a framework for questioning and understanding widespread oppression in society. As collaboration between areas of psychology and psychiatry push forward, we have the opportunity to join other fields, such as women's studies and sociology in understanding how various forms of oppression, violence, and trauma are perpetrated and maintained in society. As our understanding of mechanisms and effects increases, our ability to intervene and prevent violence and trauma will hopefully increase.

There are risks in asking questions about trauma and oppression, one of which is the effect trauma work has on the worldviews we hold as researchers. In asking about trauma, we are challenged to understand our role in a culture that can tacitly support violence against women and children, our own positions of power and accountability, as well as our responsibility to name trauma. These are powerful challenges that most likely change us in the process—our sense of self, other, and context can be transformed through this work. In this transformation, we realize that we cannot remain untouched by trauma. The study of trauma, the participants who courageously share their experiences, and the knowledge of both the limits and bounds of human resilience change us as researchers. This is not what we are taught in traditional training models; rather, we have been taught that research and science require "objectivity," not transformation. And so, in studying trauma, we face a challenge to reevaluate our assumptions, values, and views.

While traumatic events, particularly those involving interpersonal violence and betrayal, can challenge one's faith, as researchers we find hope and inspiration from studying trauma, and from sharing the study of trauma with colleagues from various perspectives. As Frohnmayer said at the 1998 conference: "Your success as it is expressed at this conference will prove to be formative. I believe in the emerging field of trauma and cognitive science helping to set the agenda by focusing on the pursuit of the important cross-

disciplinary questions with a three-fold combination of scientific excellence, attention to ethics, and dedication to humanity.”

REFERENCES

- Frohnmayr, D. (Speaker). (1998). Opening remarks at the 1998 Meeting on Trauma and Cognitive Science [audiotape]. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon. Audiotape purchase information available at: <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/traumaconf.html>
- Mortenson, E. (1998, July 19). Psychologists coming together over memories. *The Register-Guard*, pp. 1D-2D.
- Putnam, F. (1997). *Dissociation in children and adolescents: A developmental perspective*. New York: Guilford.
- Rojas-Burke, J. (1998, July 20). Professor examines “forgotten” memories. *The Register-Guard*, pp. 1C, 4C.
- Shearer, R. R., & Gould, S. J. (1999). Of two minds and one nature. *Science*, 286, 1093-1094.