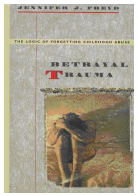

Trauma Appraisals and Betrayal: Support for the Brief Betrayal-Trauma Survey

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ABSTRACT

Although traumas higher in betrayal, as measured by the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006), have been associated with greater physical and psychological symptomatology than traumas lower in betrayal (Freyd et al., 2005), it is not known whether betrayal-trauma survivors subjectively appraise—or evaluate—themselves as being betrayed. Participants were 274 college students who had experienced a traumatic event(s) lower in betrayal only (LBT; $n = 89$) higher in betrayal only (HBT; $n = 57$) or both lower and higher—combined—in betrayal (CBT; $n = 130$). HBT and CBT survivors reported stronger trauma-related appraisals, especially betrayal appraisals, compared to LBT survivors. These results provide convergent validity for the BBTS, confirming its ability to categorize trauma survivors according to the level of betrayal involved.

INTRODUCTION

Background

- Betrayal-traumas (BTs) are traumas that occur when close individuals (i.e., caregivers, partners) violate or abuse their trust (i.e., incest; Freyd, 1996).
- Traumas higher in betrayal have repeatedly been associated with greater physical and psychological symptomatology (e.g., Freyd, Klest, & Allard, 2005).
- Betrayal-traumas, as measured by the BBTS, are defined by the type of event experienced. Respondents' recognition of betrayal is not assessed.
- Negative self appraisals—evaluations—have also been found to account for symptomatology beyond other factors, such as amount of trauma exposure and abuse severity (e.g., Cromer & Smyth, 2010; Fairbrother & Rachman, 2006).

Current Study

- The current study examines trauma appraisals by level of betrayal. Provided the relationship between betrayal traumas and post-trauma symptomatology and negative post-trauma appraisals and symptomatology we hypothesized that:

1) High betrayal trauma survivors will make stronger negative trauma appraisals

2) High betrayal trauma survivors will make more betrayal appraisals compared to other trauma-related appraisals.

METHOD

Participants

- $N = 274$ undergraduates who reported experiencing at least one traumatic event
- Ages ranged from 18 to 52 ($M = 20.36$, $SD = 3.98$)
- 82% Caucasian, 7% Multi-racial, 6% Asian, 5% Other/Declined to respond
- 70% female

Measures

- The *Brief Betrayal-Trauma Survey* (BBTS: Goldberg & Freyd, 2006) was used to group participants as experiencing: 1) lower betrayal traumas only (LBT; $n = 89$), higher betrayal traumas only (HBT; $n = 57$), or 3) lower and higher (combined) betrayal traumas (CBT; $n = 130$).
- The *Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire* (TAQ: DePrince, Zurbriggen, Chu, & Smart, 2010) was used to assess the strength of trauma appraisals related to 1) betrayal, 2) self-blame, 3) fear, 4) anger, 5) shame, and 6) alienation. Responses ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Only items that referred specifically to trauma-related beliefs (in contrast to emotions or behaviors) were utilized ($n = 33$).

Procedure

- Participants completed consent and all study measures online. Participants did not self-select into the study based on knowledge of its content.

Figure 1. Self-Blame and Betrayal Appraisals by BT

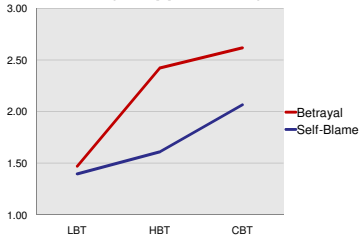


Figure 2. Fear and Betrayal Appraisals by BT

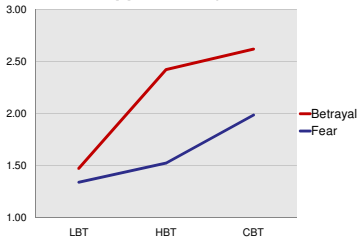


Figure 3. Anger and Betrayal Appraisals by BT

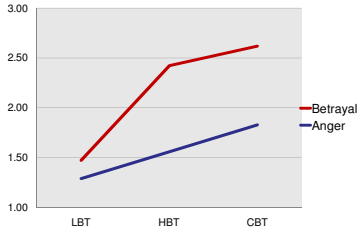


Figure 4. Shame and Betrayal Appraisals by BT

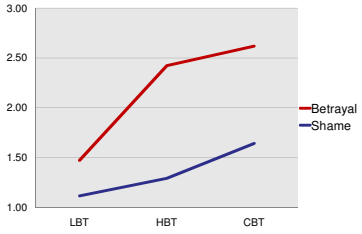
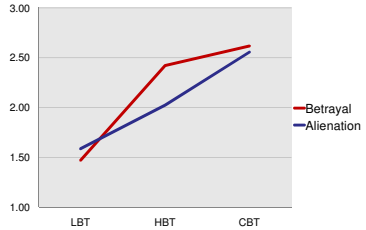


Figure 5. Alienation and Betrayal Appraisals by BT



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RESULTS

A 3x6 mixed between-within MANOVA design was conducted to examine whether the type of trauma experienced (LBT only, HBT only, or CBT) was related to the strength of six trauma-related appraisals (betrayal, self-blame, fear, anger, shame, and alienation).

Hypothesis 1: A univariate main effect for type of trauma experienced was found ($F(2, 271) = 35.56$, $p < .001$), where individuals who had experienced any HBTs (HBT only and CBT) made stronger trauma appraisals ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.97$) than those who had only experienced a LBT ($M = 1.37$, $SD = 0.62$; $F(1, 271) = 57.83$, $p < .001$). In addition, trauma survivors who had experienced CBTs made stronger trauma appraisals ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.01$) than those who had experienced a HBT only ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.92$; $F(1, 271) = 13.29$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 2: There was a significant omnibus interaction of strength of appraisal by trauma type ($F(10, 536) = 2.91$, $p = .001$)*. Five pairwise contrasts were conducted to examine differences between betrayal appraisals to each of the other appraisals by trauma type, with a Bonferroni correction to correct for the familywise error rate ($p = 0.05/5 = 0.01$). Significantly stronger betrayal appraisals were made compared to self-blame ($F(2, 271) = 5.96$, $p < .01$; Figure 1), fear ($F(2, 271) = 7.77$, $p = .001$: Figure 2), anger ($F(2, 271) = 9.24$, $p < .001$; Figure 3), and shame ($F(2, 271) = 9.71$, $p < .001$; Figure 4). Stronger betrayal appraisals were also made in comparison to alienation, although the relationship was not significant ($F(2, 271) = 3.73$, $p = .03$; Figure 5).

Simple effects tests revealed that HBT and CBT survivors made significantly stronger betrayal appraisals than appraisals of self-blame ($F(1, 54) = 12.76$, $p < .01$; $F(1, 128) = 11.50$, $p < .001$), fear ($F(1, 55) = 13.35$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 128) = 14.37$, $p < .001$), anger ($F(1, 55 = 12.41$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 128) = 22.29$, $p < .001$), and shame ($F(1, 55) = 24.76$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 128) = 41.61$, $p < .001$), respectively. There were no significant differences between the strength of betrayal compared to all other appraisals for the LBT only survivors.

*Pillai's V criterion is reported due to violations of the homogeneity of variance assumption.

DISCUSSION

- Results from this study suggest that survivors of traumas higher in betrayal may interpret their traumatic experiences more negatively than individuals who experience traumas lower in betrayal.
- HBT and CBT survivors made stronger negative trauma-related appraisals than LBT survivors.
- HBT and CBT survivors made stronger betrayal appraisals compared to appraisals related to self-blame, fear, anger, or shame.
- These results provide convergent validity for the BBTS, confirming its ability to categorize trauma survivors according to the level of betrayal involved.

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