Addressing Retaliation with Institutional Courage

Jennifer J. Freyd, PhD
Professor of Psychology, University of Oregon
Visiting Scholar, Stanford University School of Medicine
https://www.jjfreyd.com/

Retaliation is difficult to prevent through rules

• Typically is highly relational and thus difficult to legislate and difficult to enforce
• A different approach through *institutional courage*
Retaliation Matters

• Harmful to victims of retaliation
• Harmful to community / institutional culture
• Retaliation chills future reporting
The Problem of Chilling Reporting

• Without reporting difficult to stop assault and harassment
• And yet reporting is rare.
• E.G. Only 6% of sexually harassed grad students reported the harassment to university sources (Rosenthal, Smidt, & Freyd 2016)
Barnes & Freyd (2017) – 512 undergrads surveyed

- Of the 189 students who had experienced sexual victimization on campus only 50 had told anyone at all. And who had they told?
Why don’t victims report?

• While reporting can lead to a good outcome, *reporting is risky* (e.g. *risk of retaliation*)
• A bad response makes things *worse* for the victim
• A bad response can be a *new betrayal trauma*
• A bad response from the institution is *institutional betrayal*
What is 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.
Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ, Smith & Freyd)

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)?
Institutional Betrayal Matters

• Associated with mental & physical health problems (Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2017)
• Associated with higher odds of attempting suicide (Monteith et al 2016)
Can we repair and prevent institutional betrayal?
Institutional Courage

• Practices and policies that:
  – prevent and repair institutional betrayal
  – establish institutional accountability and transparency
10-Steps to Promote Institutional Courage (Freyd, 2018)

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

• The problem of ignorance

• Educate all and especially leadership
  – E.G. About victim psychology, institutional betrayal, the reasons for not reporting, identifying DARVO
Educate: DARVO is a pernicious form of retaliation (Freyd, 1997)

- The perpetrator (or others) may
  - Deny the behavior
    - “None of this ever took place”
  - Attack the individual doing the confronting
    - “You are a disgusting human being”
  - Reverse the roles of Victim and Offender
    - "I am a victim"

http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/defineDARVO.html
DARVO Research Findings

• Harsey, Zurbriggen, & Freyd, 2017
  – DARVO by perpetration is associated with victim self-blame

• Harsey & Freyd, under review
  – For 3rd parties, DARVO results in more doubt about the victim’s credibility
  – Education about DARVO reduces its power to discredit the victim’s credibility

• Education as Institutional Courage: DARVO must be recognized and identified in order to defang it
https://southpark.cc.com/clips/gfwbrf/its-called-darvo
Respond well to victim disclosures

• Respond well to victim disclosures (& create a trauma-informed reporting policy)
• Well-Intentioned but Un schooled Listeners Can Learn
  – People can learn to become better listeners through education (e.g. Foy nes & Freyd, 2011)
  – Tips and discussion guides at http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/disclosure/goodlistener.html
Bear witness, be accountable, apologize

• When a victim comes forward, acknowledge the harm
• Apologize sincerely
Cherish the truth tellers

• Cherish the truth tellers/cherish the whistleblowers

• Provide acknowledgment and thanks to those who report, blow the whistle, speak difficult truths
We Can Address Retaliation Through Institutional Courage

- Educate leaders
- Respond well to disclosures
- Acknowledge & apologize
- Cherish truth tellers

https://www.jjfreyd.com/project-on-institutional-courage