

**Introduction to ADVANCE Journal Special Issue:  
Institutional Betrayal, Academic Trauma, and Institutional Courage**

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*Targeting behavior in academia is a disease that . . . thrives in the absence of open and honest conversation; no matter how difficult disclosure may be, it is a key to effective intervention.*

*~Juan Antonio Trujillo*

Freyd and Smith (2014) write that “institutional betrayal occurs when an institution causes harm to an individual who trusts or depends on that institution (p. 578).” This special issue of the ADVANCE Journal honors and centers the narratives of those who have experienced academic trauma and betrayal in higher education. By offering a brave space for authors to name and describe their experiences of oppression, we hope that this special issue challenges institutional betrayal and the “brick wall,” to borrow Sara Ahmed’s (2012) metaphor. Indeed, the large number of submissions we received tell us that institutional betrayal is rampant in STEM and higher education, more generally. These submissions also show that women across genders and people across races are eager to share their painful stories and experiences as well as hopeful counternarratives of institutional courage to overturn oppression through (inter)personal healing and systemic change. To ensure that readers can learn from diverse scholars-authors-creators, we will publish the accepted submissions in two special issues, this being the first.

Given the many ways institutional betrayal and academic trauma pierce mind, body, and spirit, the authors in this issue make use of a variety of methods and ways of knowing; including the scientific method, narrative and storytelling, poetry and verse, and the visual arts. Expect to learn a great deal through these diverse ways the authors describe the reality of their personal experiences and the institutions in which they work(ed). The stories are powerful and devastating. They are filled with hope. Collectively, they offer validation to others who are not

ready to share their stories. The editorial team hopes that this issue also seeds freedom and willingness in leaders and the entire academic community to ensure that institutional courage becomes the norm, not the exception.

We open the issue with a poem. Trujillo (2023) offers poignant verse that taps into the liberating hopes and dreams of what higher education can and should offer. His conversation with his mother on her deathbed shows how institutional betrayal, in some ways, makes no sense if we truly honor the values of diversity and the dignity of each human person. Although we only read one question from his mother, one gets the impression that it makes no sense to her why the university would not love her baby. Powerfully, Trujillo writes that institutional betrayal and oppressive culture dashed these hopes.

In her art piece and accompanying text, Kelton (2023) depicts how whiteness fuels institutional betrayal by forcing individuals with combinations of privilege and marginalizations into tidy boxes for others to manipulate to exclude or include others. Through the ingenious use of white space in her art, she shows that whiteness acts as a central processing unit that, by design, forces simplistic interpretations of who belongs. Through her experiences, she describes how institutional betrayal heightens the already hypervigilance that comes from self-monitoring her identities. Her submission underscores that, for people with a mix of dominant and marginalized identities, coming to terms with oneself is a lifelong process.

Baffour (2023) uses Scholarly Personal Narrative and Critical Race Theory to offer an intersectional account of her experience as a Black woman who experienced institutional betrayal throughout her life. She describes the shame of these betrayals along with the courage to seek post-traumatic healing and transformation. Her submission witnesses to the reality of what many people with intersecting marginalizations experience in academia. She also provides a

powerful counternarrative through her work advocating for others, refueling in healing spaces, and instilling inclusive practices into the academic enterprise to center BIPOC voices.

The next two pieces focus on institutional betrayal that occurs even when formal processes are in place to protect the targets of harassment and abuse. Goldsmith (2023) interweaves the stereotypically formal language of administrative leaders with subtext; what does the leader really mean? Her work is clever and ironic, using visual and verbal cues to connect with readers viscerally. In what is not said, we also get a sense of how leaders might have responded with institutional courage.

Martin and Dace (2023) depict hopelessness and outrage with visual art, verse, and narrative. In their description of institutional betrayal by a thousand anonymous cuts, they describe how a combination of unhealthy academic cultural norms and unchecked retaliation can contribute to repeated institutional betrayals. After what appears to be retaliation stemming from a sexual harassment, cultures of politeness and professionalism can be used against targets so that academic mobbing flourishes. In turn, institutional betrayal can take hold through violation of due process and lack of transparency. Martin and Dace also offer that collective movements to co-create culture like punk can resist and challenge status quo oppressive cultures.

Anonymous invites us with a poem to remember the reality of many institutions engaged in this work. That is, many initiatives of inclusive culture change, ADVANCE included, are beholden to university presidents and provosts who identify as straight, white men and who may be weakly allied with the project aims. It may be advantageous and prestigious to tout an ADVANCE grant, but at the same time it requires institutional changes that these privileged leaders may not always be willing to enact. The poem captures the insecurity and psychological

distance that the author experienced, along with the impersonal nature of their leadership as women handled the hard work and banded together to create something new.

The institutionally courageous submission by Gómez (2023) offers readers an example of how to respond to institutional betrayal and academic trauma with institutional courage. First, her resignation letters informing colleagues and administrators why she was leaving are wonderful examples of courageous truth-telling. Second, she provides concrete examples of what needed to change to liberate the academic environment from oppressive practices that harmed faculty, staff, and students. Third, she provides a lived example of how leaving toxic academic environments can lead to healing for self and others. It is possible to seed courageous change while also seeking freedom and healing for ourselves by leaving.

Giroux and colleagues use the lens of Jennifer M. Gómez' cultural betrayal trauma theory (CBTT) to examine post-traumatic stress symptoms in students of color who are survivors of sexual violence. Their review shows that survivors of within-group sexual violence (ethno-cultural betrayal) have especially severe PTSD symptoms. They implore institutions to use CBTT to understand the needs of survivors and to make policy changes that support college women and protect against cultural and institutional betrayal.

Cathleen Power draws parallels between the abuse she witnessed as a child and the more-subtle but no less damaging forms of gendered and racialized abuse she observed and experienced in academia. She describes the strategies and structures in place to deflect institutions' responsibility for systemic oppression, and reminds us to listen to those who have been harmed, even if their "bruises" are not visible.

This and the other contributions in this issue remind us that courage must be enacted across the board. Individuals, especially those from marginalized and excluded groups and those with less positional power, should not be held responsible for carrying this burden alone.

We close the issue with a powerful poem and accompanying vibrant image entitled “Wāhine Toa | Warrior Woman (2023)” by Emma J. Coddington Brown (Settler-Māori, dis/abled, Kalapuya Oregon & Rangitikei Aotearoa). Coddington Brown’s work is a call to remember women’s creative power, knowledge production, and strength. Perhaps we can birth a new reality from a primordial creative space and be fully alive; a new reality in STEM and academia writ large that allows everyone to be free, generative, and courageous.

We invite readers to sit with the submissions in this issue, especially the “non-traditional” pieces of art, poetry, and verse. Be mindful of your initial reactions and deeper responses to what you read and experience. What thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations arise as you experience these pieces? How does the art speak to your experience of institutional betrayal, trauma, and courage? We welcome readers’ perspectives on these artistic pieces for the second part of this *ADVANCE* special issue. Submit your responses as letters to the editor to [ADVANCE@oregonstate.edu](mailto:ADVANCE@oregonstate.edu).

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