An Assessment of Coping and Outcome Experiences After Interpersonal Betrayal

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Abstract

Little is known about the process of coping with interpersonal betrayal. The purpose of the present exploratory study was to assess various characteristics of victim reports of their worst experiences with interpersonal betrayal to determine relationships to strategies utilized for coping with the experiences. In addition, betrayal characteristics and coping strategies were assessed to determine relationships to psychological outcome measures. Results indicated that the types of betrayal experienced by the victims and the levels of anxiety produced by the event were related to choices of coping strategies after betrayal, but other characteristics of the situation (*e.g.*, who betrayed the victims, etc.) were not. In addition, coping strategies utilized following betrayal significantly predicted psychological outcomes. For example, victims who claimed they positively reinterpreted the betrayal in an effort to cope generally reported fewer negative emotions when thinking about the betrayal and reported higher self-esteem and life satisfaction at the time of participation in the study. Interestingly, characteristics of the betrayal situation were not related to psychological outcomes. Implications for these results and suggestions for future research are presented.

Review of the Literature

Relationships are a very important part of the human experience (*e.g.*, Jones, 1991a). When one engages in any form of relationship he/she often does so with some sense of his/her behavioral and emotional expectations for the partner (whether explicit or implicit). When a partner upholds the expectations of the other, essential relationship qualities may be established (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). However, if one's expectations are not upheld, he/she can feel betrayed. Betrayals have been defined as violations of the norms and expectations of a specific relationship (Jones, 1988; Jones, Cohn & Miller, 1991), and they often damage the development and maintenance activities of the relationship.

Betrayals may include violations such as betraying a confidence, disloyalty, deceit, unfaithfulness, and harm-doing. This list is by no means exhaustive, and even comparably minor offenses may be considered betrayals and disrupt the relationship. However, it is difficult to describe betrayal because individuals in the same relationship may not even agree when a betrayal has occurred (Jones & Burdette, 1994). A wide variety of acts can be interpreted as betrayals, depending on the perspective of the individual involved (*i.e.*, whether he/she is the victim or the perpetrator of the event), and the current state of the relationship. The degree of involvement in the relationship (Berscheid, 1983), personal importance attributed to events (Bower & Cohen, 1982; Srull & Wyer, 1986), and uncertainty produced by the act also contribute to the likelihood of the act being labeled as a betrayal (Bower & Cohen, 1982; McCormack & Levine, 1990; Metts, 1994). Thus, it seems clear that interpretation of the betrayal depends, in great part, on the situation.

Many relationships are ended due to the effects of betrayal and not surprisingly, voluntary

ties (non-familial) account for a disproportionate number of these relational terminations (Jones, 1988). When the relationship in question is ended, serious adjustments must often be made by both partners, including identifying new roles for the self, dealing with trust issues, feelings of guilt or other painful emotions, and managing social relationships with others who may be informed about the betrayal. Another consequence of betrayal is the cognitive restructuring that must take place after such an event is discovered; that is, one must change the way he/she thinks about relationships and partners. Berscheid (1983) argues that betrayals interrupt cognitive structures and tax individuals cognitively, as well as emotionally, because the betrayal information often does not seem to fit with other information that has already been assimilated into the individual's beliefs about the perpetrator's character or the relational situation. The old information must be retrieved and labeled as invalid, and then replaced with new information. Difficulties such as these make it clear that a variety of negative outcomes may follow a betrayal that ends the relationship.

Coping with any of these problems can be difficult, but not all relationships end due to betrayal. A surprising number remain intact (*e.g.*, some studies have found as many as 60% remain intact). However, intact relationships may also meet with difficulty. When a betrayal threatens the relationship, its effect on the relationship is often filtered through self-serving tendencies and one's perspective of the event. For example, of those intact relationships, victims of betrayal were more likely to report that the betrayal had negative effects on the relationship (*i.e.*, the relationship was reported as worse, or less satisfying), whereas perpetrators were more likely to report that the relationship was about the same or had improved (Jones, 1988; Hansson, Jones, & Fletcher, 1990). In addition, when rated by independent judges, the accounts of the

victims were judged to be more serious than those told from the perpetrator's perspective (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Couch, 1996).

Regardless of whether the relationship remains intact following betrayal, there is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that experience with betrayal has negative interpersonal and psychological consequences (*e.g.*, Hansson, Jones, & Fletcher, 1990; Jones, 1991b; Jones & Burdette, 1994; Jarvis & Couch, 1995; Jones, Couch, & Scott, 1997; Montgomery & Brown, 1988). Research has shown, for example, that groups of people found to experience interpersonal and psychological problems often report greater experience with betrayal. For example, individuals with greater than average experience with betrayal included children of divorced parents, psychiatric patients, victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse, alcoholics, adult children of alcoholics, adjudicated delinquents, and adolescents permanently removed from the public schools (Jones, 1988; Jones, Cohn & Miller, 1991). A larger group of findings associated with betrayal tendencies involves the psychological characteristics of the person likely to betray or to be betrayed. Overwhelmingly, greater experience with betrayal tends to be associated with characteristics that are identified as negative to the relational experience, such as self-descriptions using terms such as vengeful, jealous, suspicious, and untrusting (Jones, 1988), and self-reported shame, guilt, resentment, suspiciousness, and resistance to authority (Jones & Burdette, 1994). Individuals having substantial experience with betrayal also often are labeled as having histrionic, passive-aggressive, schizotypal, and dependent personality disorders (Montgomery & Brown, 1988); they are more critical of themselves when faced with depression (Haley & Strickland, 1986); and they score low on measures of responsibility, well-being, self-control, empathy, tolerance, achievement, and relational satisfaction (Montgomery & Brown, 1988). Finally, as

compared to those with little betrayal experience, individuals who have a strong tendency to betray or to be betrayed also report haiving more extramarital affairs, and report more dissatisfying sexual relationships, negative emotions, and impatience in their marriages (Jones &. Burdette, 1994).

The nature of the process individuals go through after experiencing betrayal is of great interest because betrayal has the potential to threaten not only the individual's sense of self and security with the relationship in question, but also psychological health. Specifically, perceptions of the characteristics of the betrayal experience and attributions one makes about the event(s) may influence the coping strategies he/she uses to deal with it, and in turn may impact the interpersonal and psychological outcomes for the individual. Therefore, an emphasis on coping with betrayal could prove valuable in understanding not only the factors associated with decisions about how to cope, but also in understanding which coping strategies are most effective. Unfortunately, betrayal as a unitary construct is understudied, and no studies were found specifically addressing methods of coping with betrayal. There are, however, a number of studies suggesting that coping styles which are employed during other stressful situations, such as illness, may be related to similar factors or outcomes.

Coping refers to cognitive and behavioral efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by a stressful event (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The complicated process begins with cognitive appraisals about the situation and continues with the selection and implementation of behaviors designed to deal with the stressor. Some believe, however, that the process is separate from its outcome; that is, it is assumed that characteristics of the individual are related to his/her choices of strategies for dealing with a given stressor, but

that coping effectiveness is not always inherent in the process. For example, Bolger (1990) found that neuroticism mediates choice of coping style in anxiety provoking situations (*e.g.*, preexamination anxiety), but it was not necessarily related to given outcomes for the stressful situation. Some have even discussed coping as being a part of one's disposition (*e.g.*, Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Indeed, many have suggested that there are coping "styles" or "dispositions" that people bring to a situation which, in turn, influence their reactions to a stressor; that is, each person brings a preferred set of coping strategies that remain relatively fixed across time and circumstances. Under similar stress, some people become distressed whereas others remain resilient because of these individual differences. Whereas a great deal of evidence has been accumulated to support this dispositional approach, little research has investigated a strictly situational approach, and none has focused on coping with interpersonal betrayal. As discussed above, when a transgression occurs, it is clear that individuals utilize situational information to decide whether the event should be classified as betrayal, whether to end the relationship, or what other possible outcomes of the situation will be. It follows that other decisions, including ones about how best to cope with the situation, also may be made based on characteristics of the situation. However, research is needed to address this assumption.

Investigations that have dealt with relationships between coping and outcomes have suggested links between certain coping strategies and preferred outcomes. However, it is not the case that *any* style of coping leads to success in dealing with a stressor. In one global investigation, for example, active strategies as opposed to more passive or evasive strategies were found to be associated with lower levels of psychological distress (Zautra & Wrabetz, 1991). In another study a strategy of escapism was found to be predictive of depression, whereas solace

seeking was found to act as a buffer against depression (Rohde, Lewinsohn, Tilson, & Seeley, 1991). In addition, Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) found that optimistic strategies were predictive of low levels of anxiety during times of stress, whereas wishful thinking and self-blame have been associated with poor mental health under stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Most research has dealt with the issue of coping as a style in managing health problems or anxiety-producing situations, such as test-taking or public speaking. Because so little is understood about coping after betrayal, research is needed to determine if past findings consistently predict how individuals deal with these emotionally charged interpersonal situations. In particular, since betrayal is threatening not only to the relationship in question, but also to the victim's self-image and future relational experiences, it would be prudent to investigate the impact of coping on outcomes which are related to beliefs about the future, such as optimism in general or the likelihood of trusting the perpetrator or other partners, or its impact on the victim's self-esteem and retrospective emotional reactions to the event.

In addition, little has been studied regarding cognitive assessments that individuals make concerning their experience of stressful events. One study found that beliefs or attributions about the nature of the stressful situation impacted one's effectiveness in coping. Specifically, blaming others for one's stressful situation and focusing on how the situation could have been different were actually found to predict poor outcomes, whereas self-blame for the stressor was found to lead to positive outcomes (Bulman & Wortman, 1977). These findings may be applied to the ways people cope with interpersonal betrayal as well. For example, the attributions a victim makes about the causes of the betrayal, the stability of those causes, and the intentionality of the event may influence his/her choice of active versus passive coping strategies. Research is also

needed to assess this relationship.

The present research seeks to assess the factors which influence one's choice of coping strategy and the outcomes of coping following a threatening betrayal experience. It is believed that the characteristics of the betrayal and the attributions made by the victims for the event influence one's choice of coping strategy following betrayal, and may influence emotional reactions to the event and/or relational and psychological outcomes after coping as well. In addition, it is hypothesized that certain strategies for coping with betrayal will be related to positve psychological and relational outcomes such as trust, optimism, and higher levels of self-esteem, whereas others will be related to negative outcomes such as anxiety and fears about intimacy.

Method

Participants were recruited to take part in a study of interpersonal betrayal. All volunteers were told that they would describe and answer questions about their worst experience as a victim of interpersonal betrayal. Participants were recruited for the study by one of three methods: 1) undergraduates in psychology courses were given the opportunity to participate in the study in exchange for $5 compensation or nominal course credit, 2) non-University adults were contacted about participation in the study by undergraduate student participants that they knew (a method known as the "snowball technique" for data collection, Adams, & Jones, 1997) and participated in exchange for $5, or 3) an advertisement for the study was placed in area newspapers asking volunteers to contact the researcher about participation in exchange for $5 compensation.

One hundred and two individuals contacted the researcher about participation in the study.

Each was given a questionnaire and instructions for participation. They were asked to complete the questionnaire in an "at home" session and return it to the researcher through the mail in postage-paid envelopes. Completed surveys were returned by 89 adults (16 males and 73 females) between the ages of 18 and 74 (mean age = 32.3 years), all of whom reported significant betrayal experiences. The sample was mostly comprised of Caucasians (93.3%), and they reported experiences with interpersonal betrayal that ranged from 1 month prior to the study to 30 years prior to the study (mean time since the betrayal = 7.5 years).

The questionnaire consisted of an informed consent statement, demographic information questions, and a Betrayal Narrative Form that asked participants to describe their most significant experience as a victim of betrayal using an open-ended format. This description was followed by several other open-ended questions specific to the event (e.g., questions about why the betrayal occurred, the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, and the gender of the perpetrator, etc.) and forced-choice items dealing with attributions the participant made concerning the event according to Weiner's (1986) classification of attributions into internal vs. external, stable vs. unstable, and intentional vs. unintentional causes. The open-ended items from this betrayal narrative form are presented as Appendix A. A number of checklists (each with several subscales) were used to assess various styles used to cope with the betrayal. The checklists were completed with reference to the betrayal event that the participant described, and they included the Ways of Coping Scale (WOC; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the COPE Inventory (COPE; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). A complete list and description of the various strategies measured by these instruments, as well as the instructions for the items, is presented as Appendix B. In addition, ten emotions were assessed by the Differential Emotions

Scales (Izard, 1977) as participants recalled and described their betrayal experience. On the assumption that unsuccessful coping would lead to heightened emotional experiences during recall of the event, especially negative experiences, these scales provided an index of coping success. Finally, in order to assess psychological/relational outcomes following their attempts to deal with the event, participants were asked to consider their *psychological state at the time of participation* and complete the Trust Inventory (Couch, Adams, & Jones, 1996), the Life Orientation Test (Scheier & Carver, 1985), two revised versions of the Spielberger State Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991), and the Life Satisfaction Scale (Deiner, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The questionnaire was followed by a short debriefing statement that provided a complete description of the hypotheses of the study.

Materials.

All instruments used in the study are widely used and considered to be valid and reliable. A brief description of each is presented below.

COPE Inventory. The COPE Inventory (COPE) is a 60-item measure that has been used to identify the extent to which various coping strategies are used to deal with a stressor. Participants were instructed to complete the items by indicating the extent to which each strategy was utilized following what they described as their worst experiences as victims of betrayal. The inventory is comprised of fifteen 4-item scales, each of which represents a different strategy for coping. Each scale utilizes a 5-point Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree; 5 =

strongly agree). As can be seen in Appendix B, these include: active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking social support for emotional or instrumental reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, turning to religion, a focus on and/or venting of emotions, denial, behavioral and mental disengagement, drug and alcohol use, and the use of humor.

The Ways of Coping Scale. The Ways of Coping Scale (WOC) is a 66-item measure of strategies used to cope with a stressor, and is based on a 5-point Likert response format. Participants completed the measure as it referred to their coping experiences after betrayal. Two scoring forms have been derived for the items based on factor analytic techniques. For purposes of this study, scoring appropriate for community samples (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986) was used because the sample was primarily community based. Thus, the instrument yielded eight subscales (50 items): confrontive coping (6 items), distancing (6 items), self-controlling (7 items), seeking social support (6 items), accepting responsibility (4 items), escape-avoidance (8 items), planful problem-solving (6 items), and positive reappraisal (7 items). Each of these strategies is described in further detail in Appendix B.

Differential Emotions Scales. Participants were also asked to complete the Differential Emotions Scales (DES; Izard, 1977) as they considered their emotional reactions to recalling and describing their worst experience as a victim of betrayal. The DES is a widely used 30-item measure of state emotion. The DES asks the individual to rate on a five-point intensity scale the extent to which each word describes the way he/she felt during recall (*e.g.*, 1 = not at all; 5 = very much). The DES yields ten scores, each corresponding to an emotion. These include: interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame/shyness, and guilt.

Trust Inventory. The Trust Inventory is a 50-item instrument yielding three scales, each designed to measure a different type of trust. Participants completed each using a 5-point Likert format to the extent that the items reflected feelings they experienced during participation. The Partner Trust Scale (20 items) measures feelings of confidence in one's romantic partner or one's romantic relationship. The Network Trust Scale (10 items) measures the tendency to trust one's close friends and family members, and the Generalized Trust Scale (20 items) measures the tendency to trust people in general. Because a variety of relationships between victims and perpetrators of the worst betrayal experiences were described, a composite score for trust was computed as the sum of the scores on each of the three scales. All analyses of participant trust were conducted using this total score.

Life Orientation Test. The Life Orientation Test is a 12-item measure of the extent to which one is optimistic about his/her future. Sample items include, "I'm optimistic about my future" and "If something can go wrong for me it will." The instrument is comprised of 8 items that measure the construct and 4 filler items, all of which are scored using a 5-point Likert format. Participants were asked to respond to the items with respect to their feelings at the time of participation in the study.

Anxiety Measures. Two revised versions of the Spielberger State Anxiety Scale were used to measure the extent to which the respondent felt anxious: 1) immediately following the betrayal, and 2) when recalling and describing the event during participation in the study. The first instrument asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they experienced each of 20 anxious/calm emotions during the period immediately after they learned of the betrayal. The second version asked them to indicate the extent to which they were experiencing the

anxious/calm emotions as they described the betrayal during participation. Responses utilized a 5-point Likert response format (1 = not at all, 5 = very much).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale is a widely accepted measure of positive feelings toward oneself. The instrument is comprised of 10 items, such as "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others," scored using a 5-point Likert format. Participants were asked to respond to the items as they felt about themselves during participation in the study.

Fear of Intimacy Scale. The Fear of Intimacy Scale is a 35-item Likert-type instrument that assesses apprehension about becoming intimately involved with another or remaining psychologically close to another. Participants were instructed to complete the items after describing their experiences with betrayal and as they reflected upon possible future interactions with close others.

Satisfaction with Life Scale. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a widely used index of the feelings of happiness or contentment one feels when considering his/her life. The 5-point Likert-type instrument includes items such as "If I could do my life over, I would change almost nothing." Participants were asked to complete the instrument to reflect feelings at the time of participation.

Results

The betrayal narratives and open-ended questions concerning the event were coded and analyzed for themes. Participants reported many types of betrayals. For ease of comparison the

reported betrayals were divided into five categories: 1) abandonment or ending a relationship with no explanation, 2) romantic or sexual betrayals (including infidelity), 3) betrayals of information (*e.g.*, lies, withholding information, gossip, etc.), 4) failure to respect the feelings of the victim in decisions or actions, and 5) illegal acts (including physical abuse, theft, etc.). In addition, responses were categorized according to who the perpetrator of the betrayal was in relation to the victim, the perpetrator's gender, the reported change in the relationship between victim and perpetrator, the reported change in the victim, beliefs about why the event occurred, reasons for the victim sharing information about the betrayal with others, and feelings the victim reported about others knowing of the situation. Proportions of responses to each of these items concerning characteristics of the betrayal situation can be seen in Table 1.

Based on these categorizations of the characteristics of the betrayal report, analyses were conducted to assess relationships between the various characteristics. Then, these variables were analyzed to determine the extent to which they variables were associated with victim reports of the strategies that were used to cope with their betrayal experiences, and to determine if they were associated with outcomes after coping. In addition, analyses were conducted to assess the role of initial feelings of anxiety produced by knowledge of the betrayal in determining which strategies were used to cope. Finally, coping strategies were analyzed to assess the extent to which the various strategies were related to positive outcomes after betrayal.

Betrayal Experience Characteristics

Chi square analyses were performed to determine whether the gender of the perpetrator, relationship between victim and perpetrator, or a change in relationship or the victim were

reliably associated with the kinds of betrayals or other characteristics of the experience that were reported by the participants. Due to multiple analyses of each variable, alpha was corrected to the .01 level. Results indicated that the type of betrayal reported by the victim was related to the gender of the perpetrator of the event, χ^2 (df = 4) = 19.11, p < .001. Eighty percent of abandonments and 75% of romantic or sexual betrayals were perpetrated by males, whereas 73% of betrayals of information and 71% of failures to respect feelings of others were perpetrated by females. In addition, the gender of the perpetrator was related to the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of the event, χ^2 (df=1) 15.86, p < .001. When the perpetrator of the betrayal was a male, victims reported that he was a romantic partner in 76% of the cases, whereas when the perpetrator was a female the victims reported she was usually a family member or friend (68% of the cases). Finally, the types of betrayals reported by victims were reliably associated with the relationships between victims and perpetrators, χ^2 (df = 4) = 12.44, p = .01. Abandonments (67%) and reports of romantic or sexual betrayals (75%) were most likely to be perpetrated by romantic partners, whereas betrayals of information (71%) and failures to respect others' feelings (60%) were more likely to be perpetrated by family and friends. No other significant effects were observed for analyses of betrayal experience characteristics.

Experience Characteristics and Coping

A series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were calculated to determine if characteristics of the betrayal narrative or responses to related questions were associated with participant choices of strategies for coping with the betrayals they reported. Significant effects were assessed using Wilk's criteria and post hoc analyses of multiple category variables were

conducted using Tukey's test. In each analysis, the strategies for coping measured by COPE and the WOC were used as the dependent variables, and an aspect of the betrayal experience was used as an independent variable. These independent variables included the type of betrayal reported, the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and the perceived changes in the relationship and/or victim as a result of the betrayal. A Bonferroni correction was made to the .01 level for analyses involving each narrative characteristic due to repeated use of the dependent variables. Results indicated that the type of betrayal reported by victims was related to their choice of coping strategy [multivariate F (92,212) = 1.73, $p <$ .001], however, no other significant effects were observed for coping based on experience characteristics. Post hoc analysis of significant effects for coping strategies used after betrayal indicated that victims who reported their partners had failed to respect their feelings (M = 11.06) were less likely to choose a strategy of planning as a means of coping with betrayal than victims who reported they had been betrayed by abandonments (M = 15.14) or those who experienced romantic/sexual betrayals (M = 14.43), F (4,75) = 4.56, $p <$ .01. In addition, victims of abandonments (M = 6.21) were less likely to report that they used humor to deal with betrayal than victims of romantic/sexual betrayals (M = 10.46) or victims who were betrayed by a partners' failures to respect their feelings (M = 10.35), F (4,75) = 3.63, $p =$ .01. And finally, victims were more likely to use alcohol and other drugs to cope when they had experienced a romantic/sexual betrayal (M = 8.60) than when they were abandoned (M = 4.50), F (4,75) = 3.87, $p =$ .01.

Experience Characteristics and Emotional Reactions to Describing Betrayal

Various characteristics of the betrayal narrative (type of betrayal, etc.) were analyzed to

determine their relationship to emotions experienced by victims as they recalled and described their experience with betrayal. A series of MANOVAs were conducted using the ten Differential Emotions Scales as dependent variables and experience characteristics as independent variables. Alpha was corrected to the .01 level due to multiple analyses using these dependent variables. No significant effects on the emotional reactions during recall were observed for the type of betrayal reported, relationship between victim and perpetrator, gender of the perpetrator, or changes in the relationship or victim following the betrayal.

Experience Characteristics and Psychological Outcomes

Various measures of psychological outcome were assessed to determine if they were related to characteristics of the experiences reported by betrayal victims. In particular, the types of betrayals, the relationships between victims and perpertrators, and reports of changes to the relationships or to the victims were used as independent variables in a series of MANOVAs with anxiety, optimism, trust, self-esteem, fears about intimacy, and life satisfaction at the time of participation as the dependent variables. An alpha correction was made to the .01 level because of multiple analyses of the dependent variables. No significant effects for outcomes were observed for analyses involving the narrative characteristics.

Emotional Reactions to Describing Betrayal After Coping

One index of the success of coping with betrayal is the extent to which recalling the betrayal produces emotional experiences, especially negative ones. To assess whether various coping strategies predict emotional reactions as victims remember the event, a series of stepwise

multiple regression analyses was performed. Coping strategies measured by COPE and the WOC were used as predictors of ten emotions, each measured by the Differential Emotions Scales. Alpha levels were corrected to .005 for the number of analyses which were conducted. Although not all of the emotions that were assessed are negative emotions, results indicated that the use of certain coping strategies predict some emotional experiences when victims recalled their experiences with betrayal. Coping was not predictive of feelings of disgust, contempt, shame, surprise, or interest, however, analysis revealed that distress experienced as a function of recalling the betrayal was predicted by two coping strategies (R^2 adjusted = .294). Coping with betrayal by focusing on and venting emotions was related to high levels of distress upon recall, β = .443, t (77) = 4.68, p = .0000, whereas using positive reinterpretation of the event in an attempt to grow from the experience was associated with low levels of distress, β = -.326, t (77) -3.06, p = .0003.

Feelings of anger were also significantly predicted by the use of three different coping strategies. Whereas using positive reinterpretation of the event in an attempt to grow from the experience was associated with low levels of anger during recall of the betrayal, focusing on and venting of emotions and using self-control, were associated with high levels of anger (see Table 2). In addition, the emotional experience of guilt was predicted by only one coping strategy used following betrayal (R^2 adjusted = .114). Victims who attempted to accept responsibility for the betrayal experienced high levels of guilt, β = .354, t (78) = 3.34, p = .001.

Fear as victims recalled their experiences with betrayal was predicted by two different strategies for coping (R^2 adjusted = .188). Having used strategies of self-control was associated with high levels of fear as victims thought about the event, β = .429, t (76) = 4.02, p = .0001,

whereas having positively reinterpreted the event in an attempt to grow from the experience was associated with low levels of fear, $\beta = -.326$, $t\ (76) = -3.06$, $p = .003$.

Surprisingly, some victims also reported feelings of enjoyment upon recalling their expriences with betrayal, and these feelings were predicted by their choice of one strategy for coping with their experience. Using positive reinterpretation of the event in an attempt to grow from the experience was associated with feelings of enjoyment upon recall (R^2 adjusted = .180), $\beta = .436$, $t\ (78) = 4.28$, $p = .0001$.

Psychological Outcomes After Coping

The role of anxiety immediately following betrayal as it related to chice of coping strategies was assessed. Levels of anxiety experienced at the time of betrayal were correlated with measures of coping strategies (measured by COPE and the WOC) to determine if higher levels of anxiety were related to the choice of certain strategies. Results indicated that high levels of anxiety at the time of betrayal were associated with the reported use of focusing on and venting of emotions ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), the use of self-control ($r = .35$, $p < .01$), and escape-avoidance ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), whereas low levels of anxiety at the time of betrayal were associated with the use of humor for coping with betrayal ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$).

A series of stepwise multiple regression equations were calculated to predict various other outcomes after coping with interpersonal betrayal. In particular, equations were calculated to predict anxiety, trust, optimism, and self-esteem levels during participation, as well as reports of life satisfaction and fears about intimacy following betrayal. Predictor variables in each equation were the scales of COPE and the WOC. Due to the number of analyses performed using these

variables, alpha was corrected to the .0083 level.

The reported use of various coping strategies following betrayal was used to predict levels of anxiety participants experienced at the time they were asked to recall and describe their experience with interpersonal betrayal. Results from the analysis suggest that having focused on and vented emotions after betrayal was related to high levels of anxiety as victims participated in the study (R^2 adjusted = .143), β = .392, t (78) = 3.77, p = .0003. Results from the regression procedure to predict trust at the time of participation suggested that using self-control following betrayal was related to low levels of trust at the time of participation (R^2 adjusted = .078), β = -.300, t (75) = -2.72, p = .0080. As can be seen in Table 3, self-esteem at the time of participation was also predicted by coping strategies after betrayal. High levels of self-esteem at the time of participation were associated with having positively reappraised the betrayal, whereas having used strategies of self-control or denial to cope with betrayal was associated with low levels of self-esteem. Analysis indicated no significant coping predictors of optimism at the time of participation.

Fears about future intimacy with important others was predicted by one coping strategy selected to deal with interpersonal betrayal (R^2 adjusted = .143). Victims who used a strategy of mental disengagement after their betrayal experiences reported a high degree of fear about future intimacy at the time of participation, β = .363, t (79) = 3.46, p = .0009. Life satisfaction was also predicted by coping strategies following betrayal. As can be seen in Table 4, attempts to suppress competing activies and use self-control were associated with low levels of life satisfaction at the time of participation, whereas positively reappraising the situation was associated with high levels of satisfaction.

Attribution

The type of experience reported, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, gender of the perpetrator, and reported changes in the relationship in question or in the victim were analyzed to determine if they were related to attributions for the causes of the betrayals reported by victims. Alpha was corrected to the .0125 level for these analyses. First, responses to open-ended items concerning the victims' beliefs about the causes for the betrayals they experienced were coded and used in chi square analyses. No significant effects were observed based on these open-ended responses. Next, responses to the three forced-choice items based on Weiner's attribution scheme were subjected to similar chi square analyses to determine relationships between attributions and experience characteristics. Few significant effects were observed for participant ratings of the global causes of the event (internal vs. external causes), for beliefs about the intentionality of the betrayal (intentional vs. unintentional), or for beliefs about the stability of the causes (stable vs. temporary) based on reported characteristics of the betrayal. Significant effects were observed for reported changes in the relationship as a result of the betrayal based on stability beliefs. Of those victims who reported that the relationship ended or turned sour as a result of the betrayal, 76% felt that the betrayal was caused by something stable (*i.e.*, the cause will always be there), whereas only 24% felt it had been caused by something temporary, χ^2 (df = 2) = 15.43, $p < .001$. Victims' views about the global causes of the betrayal approached significance. When victims reported that the betrayal had ended the relationship in question or turned it sour, 77% reported that the betrayal was due to the perpetrator's character or personality, whereas only 23% felt the situation was to blame, χ^2 (df = 2) = 8.57, $p = .014$.

Attributions made by the victims about causes for the betrayal were assessed to determine whether they were related to choices of coping strategy to deal with the situation. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were calculated using measures of coping as dependent variables. Corrections were made to the alpha criteria for the analysis due to the number of analyses performed. Results were judged to be significant if they were below the .0125 alpha level. In the first analysis, coded responses from an open-ended question about possible causes for the betrayal (*i.e.*, internal vs. external causes) were used as an independent variable, however. results for coping stategies were not significant. Next, coping strategies were analyzed to determine if attributions made using Weiner's (1986) categorization scheme were reliably associated with choices of coping strategies following betrayal. Measures of coping were used as dependent variables in a series of MANOVAs where participant ratings of whether the betrayal was due to a) global internal vs. external causes, b) stable vs. unstable causes, and c) intentional vs. unintentional causes were each used as independent variables. Results indicated that participant ratings using the three judgements according to this categorization scheme were not associated with their self-reported choice of coping strategies following the betrayal.

Measures of attributions made concerning the betrayal (open-ended responses and forced-choice responses) were analyzed to determine if they were related to victims' emotional reactions to recalling and describing their experience with betrayal as a part of participation in the study. MANOVAs were performed using the ten Differential Emotion Scales as dependent variables and attributions as the indpendent variables, and alpha levels were corrected to .0125. No significant effects were observed. In addition, similar procedures were conducted to test the effects of attributions on psychological/relational outcomes such as anxiety, trust, optimism, self-esteem,

and fears about intimacy following betrayal. No significant effects were observed for these variables based on attributions about the betrayal.

Demographic Differences in Betrayal Experience, Coping, and Outcomes

To determine the impact of demographic information provided by the victim on the nature of the betrayal experience, the choice of strategies used to cope with betrayal and/or the psychologial outcomes of betrayal, the gender of the victims and information about where the victims were raised (*e.g.*, in a rural setting, small town, medium-sized town/city, or large city) were assessed. It is important to note that a large discrepancy exists in the sample between the number of females and males who volunteered to participate. Chi square analyses were performed using a corrected alpha level of .0083 to determine whether the gender of the victim was associated with the kinds of betrayals or with other characteristics of the experience that were reported by the participants. Results indicated that the gender of the victim not related to any characteristics of the betrayal report. Chi square analyses were also conducted to test whether where the victim was raised impacted the type of betrayal that was reported, who perpetrated the betrayal, beliefs about why it occurred, and changes in the relationship between the victim and perpetrator or within the victim. Results indicated one significant effect for where the victim was raised. Whereas most victims reported negative changes in themselves following betrayal, those who reported a positive change or growing experience from the event were most likely to be from a rural area (67%), χ^2 (df = 6) = 19.66, p = .003.

Next, a series of MANOVAs was conducted using COPE and the WOC as dependent variables and gender or where the victim was raised as independent variables. Due to the number

of analyses conducted using these dependent variables, alpha levels were corrected to .025.

Neither gender nor where the victim was raised were related to choices of strategies for coping.

Similarly, gender and where the victim was raised were used as independent variables in

MANOVA procedures to determine whether they impacted emotional experiences at the time of

recall of the betrayal experienced by participants. Dependent measures for these analyses

included measures of emotions experienced at the time of recall as measured by the ten

Differential Emotions Scales. No gender-related differences or differences in where victims were

raised were observed for emotion reactions to recalling the betrayal. Finally, gender and where

the victim was raised were used as independent variables in MANOVAs to determine whether

they impacted outcomes of coping with interpersonal betrayal. Dependent measures for these

analyses included anxiety levels following betrayal, fears about future intimacy, trust levels, life

satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism. No significant effect was observed for the gender of the

victim or for where he/she was raised as related to these outcome variables.

Age was also analyzed to determine if it was related to betrayal experience characteristics,

choice of coping strategies to deal with the betrayal, emotional experiences, or outcome variables.

A series of oneway analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to detemine if age was

related to the type of betrayal reported, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator,

beliefs about why the betrayal occurred, and changes in the relationship or the victim following

the event. Alpha was correctd to the .01 level due to the number of analyses conducted. A

significant effect was observed for the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, F (1,82)

= 14.67, $p < .001$, but no other significant effects were observed. Victims who believed that the

betrayal was caused by something internal to the perpetrator were older on average $(M = 34.82)$

than those who believed the betrayal was caused by situational factors ($M = 26.94$). Next, to assess relationships between age and coping strategies, emotional reactions, and outcome measures, correlational analyses were conducted. Age was not related to choice of any coping strategy after betrayal as measured by COPE or the WOC, and was not related to emotional reactions at the time of recall as measured by the Differential Emotions Scales. Of the psychological outcome measures which were assessed, age was related only to life satisfaction ($r = -.25, p < .05$) and fears about intimacy ($r = .25, p < .05$).

Discussion

Little research to date has been conducted to investigate experiences of victims of interpersonal betrayal. Thus, this relatively exploratory study provides valuable insight into strategies used by victims to cope with their experiences and the outcomes that follow.

Results indicated that the types of betrayal reports and the levels of anxiety reported at the time of betrayal were reliably associated with choices made about which coping strategies to utilize following betrayal. High levels of anxiety at the time of betrayal were associated with reports of utilizing self-control and escape-avoidance strategies, and focusing on and venting emotions in order to cope. Low levels of anxiety produced by the event were associated with the use of humor following the betrayal. In addition, victims who had been abandoned or romantically/sexually betrayed were more likely to choose planning as a strategy to cope than victims of a failure respect feelings; victims of romantic/sexual betrayals were more likely than victims of abandonment to choose alcohol and other drugs to help them cope; and victims of failures to respect feelings or romantic/sexual betrayals were more likely to use humor as a

means of coping than those who had been abandoned. Finally, those who experienced betrayals of information were more likely to distance themselves in order to cope than victims of abandonment or romantic/sexual betrayal. Surprisingly, however, no other characteristics of the report were associated with choices of how to cope with the betrayal.

In addition, results from the study suggest that a victim's choice of strategies to cope with interpersonal betrayal experience was reliably associated with a number of psychological or relational outcomes. For example, as victims recalled their experiences with betrayal, emotional reactions to describing the experience varied depending on which strategy they had reported using to cope. Victims who had positively reinterpreted the experience in an attempt to grow from it reported low levels of anger, distress, and fear, and relatively high levels of enjoyment as they described the experience. Victims who reported focusing on and venting their emotions to cope with the situation experienced high levels of anger and distress. Those who attempted to use self-control as a means of coping following betrayal reported that they experienced high levels of fear and anger as they recalled the event, and those who suggested they had taken responsibility for the event's occurrence reported high levels of guilt as they decribed their experience.

Other outcomes were reportedly influenced by coping strategies used following betrayal. Victims who reported that they had used self-control to cope with the betrayal indicated that they had low levels of trust, self-esteem, and life satisfaction at the time of participation. On the other hand, victims who positively reappraised the situation reported high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. High levels of anxiety at the time of participation were predicted by having focused on and vented emotions as a means of coping, and fears about future intimacy were predicted by

having mentally disengaged from the coping process. In addition, low levels of life satisfaction was reported by victims when they had attempted to suppress competing activities during the coping process, and low levels of self-esteem were reported when victims had tried to cope by denying that the betrayal had occurred.

Interestingly, some variables that had been hypothesized were not found to be predictors of coping and outcome after betrayal. For example, characteristics of the betrayal report were not reliably associated with psychological outcomes for the victim. In addition, attributions that the victims made about the betrayals they described did not appear to be related to their choices of coping strategies to use after the betrayal, or to the psychological outcomes they experienced after coping. Their beliefs about the stability of the causes of the betrayal were, however, related to their impressions of how the relationship with the perpetrator changed as a result of the experience.

These data clearly suggest that situational aspects of interpersonal betrayal are implicated in one's decisions about how to cope with the experience. They also clearly suggest that the strategies one uses for dealing with betrayal may influence outcomes that he/she experiences as a result. However, situational aspects of the betrayal were not shown to directly impact outcomes after coping. This pattern obviously leads to an important question of mediation. It seems likely, given these results, that the relationship between the situational characteristics of betrayal and the psychological outcomes the individual experiences may be mediated by his/her choice of coping strategies. Certainly, further research is needed to assess this mediation hypothesis, however, another important question may also be raised. As discussed above, most scholars believe that coping is an important dimension of personality that one brings to any stressful situation. These

data do not directly investigate the role of coping as a personality style, but it is conceivable that if coping mediates the relationship between the betrayal situation and psychological outcomes it may do so as an aspect of personality; that is, one's personal coping style may interact with the situation to lead to various psychological outcomes for him/her. Future research is also needed to assess personal tendencies toward coping with stressful events. In particular, since it is unclear whether individuals cope with betrayals in the same ways that they cope with other stressors, tendencies in the ways that individuals cope with repeated exposures to betrayal may provide valuable information.

Another important consideration for future research concerns the assumptions that were made in this study about how to measure outcomes following betrayal. It was assumed, for example, that successful coping would be related to high levels of trust, optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, and low levels of anxiety and fear about future intimacy with important others. Whereas this assumption may be true, and these data have provided interesting results, future research should attempt to measure these variables longitudinally, so as to detect changes which occur from before the betrayal, to immediately following knowledge of the betrayal, to a point in time after which some coping has occurred. In addition, other measures of psychological health or success with coping after betrayal may provide more insight into these relationships. In particular, an index of psychological resolution of the event may provide a better gauge of coping than the measures included in this study.

Finally, the underrepresentation of men and ethnic minorities in the study may have lead to biased results. Further investigation of the characteristics of betrayal experiences of men and minority individuals, as well as the strategies they use to cope with betrayal would be prudent.

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Table 1

Proportion of the Betrayal Victims (n = 89) Who Endorsed Each Category of Betrayal Experience Characteristic Analysis.

Category of Narrative Analysis	Percentage of Sample
Type of betrayal	
Abandonment	17.2%
Romantic or Sexual Betrayal	41.4%
Betrayal of Information	18.4%
Failure to Respect Other's Feelings	19.5%
Other	3.4%
Relationship of the Perpetrator to the Victim	
Romantic Partner	58.3%
Family Member	40.5%
Friend or Other	1.2%
Gender of the Perpetrator	
Male	58.6%
Female	41.4%
Beliefs about Causes for the Betrayal	
Internal Causes (in the perpetrator)	49.4%
External Causes (situation)	43.8%
Reported Change in the Relationship After the Betrayal	
Relationship Ended or Turned Sour	92.0%
Relationship was Difficult to Maintain, but then improved	2.3%
Relationship was Better	5.7%
Reported Change in the Victim After the Betrayal	
Negative Change	65.1%
Gained Perspective on Relationships	12.8%
Positive Change	22.1%
Feelings about Others Knowing about the Betrayal	
Felt Good	11.0%
No Feelings or Neutral	7.3%
Felt Bad or Uncomfortable	81.7%
Reasons for Telling Others About the Betrayal (if the victim told others)	
Personal Characteristics of the Listener	2.4%
To Seek Help or Support	86.6%
Anger	4.9%
To Make an Impact on the Listener	6.1%

Table 2

Coping Predictors for Emotions of Anger Upon Recall of Betrayal

Variable	β	t	p
Positive Reinterpretation & Growth[a]	-0.530	-5.47	.0000
Focusing on & Venting of Emotions[a]	0.309	3.33	.0013
Self-Controlling[b]	0.311	3.22	.0019

Note: R^2 (Adjusted) = .326; a = Measured by the COPE Inventory; b = Measured by the Ways of Coping Scale.

Table 3

Coping Predictors for the Victim's Self-Esteem at the Time of Participation

Variable	β	t	p
Self-Controlling[b]	-0.439	-4.33	.0000
Positive Reappraisal[b]	0.344	3.36	.0012
Denial[a]	-0.263	-2.74	.0077

Note: R^2 (Adjusted) = .275; a = Measured by the COPE Inventory; b = Measured by the Ways of Coping Scale.

Table 4

Coping Predictors for Life Satisfaction at the Time of Participation

Variable	β	t	p
Suppression of Competing Activities[a]	-0.240	-2.36	.0211
Positive Reappraisal[b]	0.396	3.82	.0003
Self-Controlling[b]	-0.328	-3.02	.0034

Note: R^2 (Adjusted) = .243; a = Measured by the COPE Inventory; b = Measured by the Ways of Coping Scale.

Appendix A

Open-ended Items from the Betrayal Narrative Form Used to Assess Characteristics of the Victim's Experience with Interpersonal Betrayal.

Betrayal is defined as any act committed by a person that violates the relational expectations of a partner or harms them in any way. Think about the worst case in your life in which you were betrayed by another.

1) Briefly describe the incident in which you were betrayed by another.

2) What is/was your relationship with the person that betrayed you (*i.e.*, friend, romantic partner, co-worker, etc.)?

3) How long ago did this incident occur?

4) What was the gender of the person that betrayed you?

5) How did this incident change the relationship, if at all?

6) Why do you believe this event occurred?

7) Do you believe that the betrayal was.... (choose one in each of the following categories):

    a)   ____   due to the other person's character/personality?
            ____   due to the situation

    b)   ____   caused by something temporary (*i.e.*, the cause went away after
                    the betrayal occurred)
            ____   caused by something stable (*i.e.*, the cause will always be
                    there)

    c)   ____   intentional
            ____   unintentional

8) To your knowledge, how many people know about the betrayal besides you and the person who betrayed you?

9) Did you tell these people, did the other person tell, or both?

10) If you told the others about the betrayal, why did you choose to do so?

11) What feelings did you have about the possibility of others knowing about the betrayal?

12) Do you feel that the betrayal has changed you? If so, how?

Appendix B

Instructions for Meausres of Coping and Descriptions of Strategies for Coping with Betrayal as Measured by the COPE Inventory and the Ways of Coping Scale.

Instructions for both measures:

We are interested to know how individuals cope with various kinds of betrayals. Please indicate below how you reacted to or coped with the betrayal experience you described. Use the following scale to respond: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Strategies measured by the COPE Inventory

Active Coping:	Taking action or exerting efforts to remove or circumvent the stressor
Planning:	Thinking about how to confront the stressor or planning one's active coping efforts
Seeking Instrumental Social Support:	Seeking assistance, information, or advice about what to do
Seeking Emotional Social Support:	Getting sympathy or emotional support from someone
Suppression of Competing Activities:	Suppressing one's attention to other activities in which one might engage in order to concentrate more completely on dealing with the stressor
Religion:	Increased engagement in religious activities
Positive Reinterpretation ang Growth:	Making the best of the situation by growing from it or viewing it in a more favorable light
Restraint Coping:	Coping passively by holding back one's coping attempts until they can be of use
Acceptance:	Accepting the fact that the stressful event has occurred and is real
Focus on and Venting of Emotions:	An increased awareness of one's emotional distresss and a concomitant tendency to ventilate or discharge those feelings
Denial:	An attempt to reject the reality of the stressful event
Mental Disengagement:	Psychological disengagement from the goal with which the stressor is interfering through daydreaming, sleep, or self-distraction
Behavioral Disengagement:	Giving up or withdrawing effort from the attempt to attain the goal with which the stressor is interfering
Alcohol/Drug Use:	Turning to the use of alcohol and other drugs as a way of disengaging from the stressor
Humor:	Making jokes about the stressor

Strategies measured by the Ways of Coping Scale (for Community Samples)

Confrontive Coping:	Confronting the stressor or fighting for a satisfactory solution to the problem
Distancing:	Attempts to psychologically avoid the situation or to make light of the stressor
Self-controlling:	Attempts to control one's feelings and urges to quickly deal with the situation, and to manage the impressions of others during coping
Seeking Social Support:	Seeking information and solace from friends, relatives, or professionals about coping with the stressor
Accepting Responsibility:	Believing one's actions or character were related to the stressor and scolding oneself for it or apologizing for it
Escape-Avoidance:	Attempting to wish the situation away through fantasies or actions (such as eating, sleep, drinking, smoking, etc.) or to avoid being around others
Planful Problem-solving:	Developing a plan of action to deal with the stressor
Positive Reappraisal:	Attempt to find something good or useful about the situation