

# TSS GROUP NEWS



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## Summer News Highlights

Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.  
TSS Group Director

In April, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend a Summit on gender-based violence sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with Health and Human Services as well as the Department of Justice in Washington DC (obligatory cherry blossom picture on page 3). The meeting brought together multiple stakeholders, including (but not limited to) researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and youth, from across the country.

The resounding theme of the 2-day Summit was a phrase reportedly coined by Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan: **No school can be a great school until it is first a safe school.** Drawing on a combination of panel presentations and working groups, the summit focused on safety in young people's lives broadly – from school to home and everywhere in between. The participants (and Summit leaders) recognized that youth cannot sit in a classroom and learn their ABC's and 123's effectively after exposure to family or community violence the night before. Thus, the Summit leaders made clear that violence is the concern of communities broadly – educators, law enforcement, mental health professionals, and so forth.

The Summit was energizing and practical – with meaningful dialogue about how to develop next steps at federal, state, and local levels that can have sustainable impacts in communities. I look forward to sharing more about the concrete outcomes of the Summit as they emerge.

While April temperatures are now a distant memory as the heat of July sets in, it's obvious that many things move more slowly than Colorado seasons...particularly data collection! You guessed it – we continue to invite young women to participate in the Healthy Adolescent Relationship Project (HARP). HARP is designed for teen

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girls and young women (ages 12-19) who have had contact with the child welfare system (currently or in the past). The project tests two approaches to revictimization prevention. We anticipate that this study will provide important information about effective ways to work with youth around revictimization risk. **We'll have a new round of HARP groups starting in early August.** To learn more about HARP, please visit <http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/harp.html>. Thank you for helping us get the word out about this study.

We are also continuing to spread the word out about two other studies. First, Latina mothers are invited to participate in the SALUD DE LA FAMILIA, a study focused on understanding the impact of acculturative stress and domestic violence on Latina women and their children. Second, our colleagues at the University of Colorado Boulder are inviting adult women (ages 22-30) to participate in the CU BRAIN STUDY, a project examining child abuse exposure in relation to attention and memory performance. To learn more about either study, please visit <http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/study.html> or see the flyers at the end of this newsletter.

Thank you for all you do to address violence in our community.

Best,  
Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.  
Director, TSS Group  
Associate Professor, University of Denver



## Relationships between patterns of attention, intimate partner abuse, and distress

*Ryan Matlow, 4<sup>th</sup> year Graduate Student*

Where and how we use our attention affects our everyday lives. Previous research shows that individual variability in where and how we direct our attention is linked to differences in levels of psychological distress. For example, individuals diagnosed with depression spend more time looking at negative information (such as sad faces) relative to individuals without depression. In addition, anxiety symptoms and phobias are thought to be related to a “vigilance–avoidance pattern of attention” in which individuals initially look at negative or threatening information, but then subsequently avoid looking at such information because it can be distressing or upsetting. In these examples, researchers infer something about attention by looking at where people’s eyes are focused.

We are currently conducting research to further understand attention processes following intimate partner abuse (IPA). In collaboration with Dr. Rob Roberts (DU Department of Psychology), we are using state-of-the-art, noninvasive eye tracking technology to follow and record participants’ eye movements as they view images on a computer screen. Using this technology, we can measure what types of emotional information (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral) catches people’s attention as well as how long they spend looking at such information. This eye tracking technology provides an advantage over reaction time tasks commonly used in previous research on attention processing because eye tracking offers a direct and continuous measure of attention processing.

Using eye tracking, we are investigating relationships between patterns of attention and experiences of IPA and IPA–related distress (such as posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms). We are excited to have the opportunity to continue our work with participants from the Denver Triage Project, comprised of women exposed to IPA. In this new study, women are asked to view still images of couples from movies. The movie images show positive interactions (e.g., where the couple is smiling or showing affection), negative interactions (e.g., where the couple is arguing or fighting), and neutral interactions

(e.g., where the couple is just talking or eating dinner). We are measuring participants’ patterns of attention while they view these images and we are interested in whether patterns of attention are related to exposure to IPA and other traumas, and to PTSD and other trauma–related symptoms. It could be the case that specific patterns of attention to relationship information (such as the “vigilance–avoidance” pattern) is related to how people respond to and cope with IPA and trauma, and that such responses are associated with psychological distress. In addition, previous research suggests that rates of victimization might be related to individuals’ tendency and ability to detect risk in their environment. In our research, we will build on these hypotheses to examine whether participants’ patterns of attention to risk cues (in the negative relationship images) is related to IPA and victimization history.

In conducting such research with victims of IPA, we do not intend to imply that victims are at fault or responsible for abuse or psychological distress. Rather, this research is intended to inform efforts to provide help and support to women exposed to IPA. For example, links between specific patterns of attention and IPA–related symptoms would imply avenues for intervention. In particular, the “vigilance–avoidance pattern of attention” implies that interventions should focus on building coping skills so that individuals can view negative information without experiencing high levels of avoidance or distress.

We are very excited to be conducting this research and look forward to sharing the results of our work. We continue to be grateful to our partners on the Denver Triage Project as well as the women who have so generously participated in this research!



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ARTICLES FROM THE TSS GROUP  
WEBSITE. VISIT US AT  
[HTTP://MYSITE.DU.EDU/~ADEPRINC/PUB.HTML](http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/PUB.HTML)



## TSS Group Achievements

**Becca Babcock** received the Lawrence Miller Award from DU's Department of Psychology. This award will support **Becca** to attend a day-long training on legislative advocacy presented by the American Psychological Association in Washington DC in August.

**Jenna Lindsay-Brisbin** received the Trowill Award for Meritorious Work in Psychology from DU's Department of Psychology. This prestigious award recognizes Jenna's research accomplishments as well as her student leadership in addressing gender-based violence. In June, **Jenna** graduated with a bachelor's degree and accepted a position with Massachusetts Campus Compact.

**Claire Hebenstreit** received the Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. Consumer Recovery Provider Award for her work as an extern at Aurora Mental Health Center. **Claire** also received a Teaching Award from DU's Psychology Department.

**Courtney Mitchell** received a Teaching Award from DU's Psychology Department.

**Jane Sundermann** received the Lawrence Miller Award from DU's Psychology Department. This Award supported Jane to attend a week-long advanced statistics training. **Jane** also received an Inclusive Engagement Award from DU.

**Kristin Weinzierl** (PhD, 2010) accepted a position with the Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services in the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (Vancouver, BC, Canada)

In May, **Anne DePrince** gave the Livingston Lecturer for DU's Division of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. This lecture brought together staff, faculty, students, and alumni to learn about community-engaged research on violence against women and children. Anne also presented findings from the Denver Triage Project to the Domestic Violence Research Action Committee in June.



### Information on the Healthy Adolescent Relationship Project (HARP)

**NEXT ROUND OF GROUPS TO START IN EARLY AUGUST! PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION!**

We are pleased to invite teen girls (ages 12-19) who have come to the attention of the child welfare system to participate in the HARP study.

- Teens participate in a prevention group at no cost.
- Food is provided during group meetings.

Are teens compensated for their time?

- Teens receive \$40/research evaluation for up to 4 research evaluations (up to \$160 total).

What about transportation?

- Study activities take place at DU. DU is accessible by light rail and multiple bus routes (e.g., 21, 24).
- Teens receive \$10/appointment to offset transportation costs.

For more information:

- Call 303.871.4103 or email [harp@du.edu](mailto:harp@du.edu).
- To download study flyers, please visit: <http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/study.html>



Before the gender-based violence summit began in Washington DC in April, the Cherry Blossoms put on a show across from the Jefferson Memorial.



## Preliminary Findings: Links between Childhood Betrayal Trauma, Self-Blame, and Ongoing Victimization

By Becca Babcock, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Graduate Student

Revictimization is a serious and prevalent public health concern in the United States (DePrince, Combs, & Shanahan, 2009). Extensive research documents that abuse (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect) during childhood places survivors at increased risk for victimization during adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Arata, 2000; Arata, 2002; Arata & Lindman, 2002; Cook et al., 2005; DePrince, 2005; Gobin & Freyd, 2009; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2004; Messman-Moore & Long, 2000; Messman-Moore, Long, & Siegfried, 2000; Zurbriggen, Gobin, & Freyd, 2010). Identifying the factors that increase risk for revictimization among survivors of child abuse is crucial to developing effective interventions. To further research in this area, we conducted a study which tested two major hypotheses. First, we predicted that experiences of abuse high in betrayal (called high betrayal trauma) would increase women's risk for ongoing victimization in their current adult relationships following an incident of intimate partner abuse (IPA). Second, we predicted that childhood experiences of high betrayal trauma would increase the likelihood that women would tend to blame themselves for experiencing IPA.

Betrayal trauma (BT) occurs when people or institutions on which a person depends for survival violate that person's trust or well-being; abuse by someone the child has a close relationship with is a primary example of BT (Freyd, 1996). For example, high betrayal trauma is abuse perpetrated by an immediate family member like a parent; medium betrayal trauma is abuse perpetrated by an extended family member or trusted adult such as a teacher; whereas low betrayal trauma is abuse perpetrated by an acquaintance or a stranger. Research has shown that women who have experienced childhood trauma high in betrayal are 4.3 times more likely to be victimized during adolescence and 5.4 times more likely to be victimized during adulthood than women who have not experienced high betrayal trauma during childhood (Gobin, & Freyd, 2009).

To examine links between childhood betrayal trauma and

IPA, we turned to data collected as part of the Denver Triage Project. Women from Denver, CO were invited into the project based on having experienced an incident of police-reported IPA. We interviewed women within approximately one month of the IPA incident and again six months later. Among 159 women who participated in both interviews, we assessed for childhood betrayal trauma as well as reports of continued violence exposure between the two interviews. We also asked women to evaluate various thoughts and feelings associated with the police-reported IPA incident, including self-blame.

Preliminary results indicate that 56% of women reported exposure to trauma high in betrayal during childhood, 7% to medium childhood BT, 4% to low childhood BT (e.g., abuse by a stranger), and 32% reported no childhood betrayal trauma experiences. Similar to the results of previous researchers (Gobin, & Freyd, 2009), we found that women IPA survivors exposed to high betrayal trauma in childhood were more likely to report ongoing victimization in their relationships during the six months between interviews. In fact, women who had experienced childhood betrayal trauma (compared to women who did not experience childhood betrayal trauma) were significantly more likely to experience severe forms of ongoing victimization from their partners, like physical aggression, sexual coercion, or events resulting in bodily injury. Furthermore, women who experienced high levels of childhood betrayal trauma were more likely to blame themselves for the IPA incident that was reported to the police.

**...women who experienced high levels of childhood betrayal trauma were more likely to blame themselves for the IPA incident that was reported to the police.**

These preliminary findings underscore the detrimental

consequences that child abuse can have on women's interpersonal relationships as well as on the ways that women evaluate abuse in intimate relationships. We hope that this research will inform intervention strategies, particularly around addressing women's beliefs about self-blame in abusive relationships.

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Interested in participating in a study about the brain, attention, and memory?

All Participants will be compensated!!



We are conducting a brain imaging study (called fMRI) to see how stressful events affect attention and memory.

Contact Kristen Mackiewicz via e-mail @ [cubrainstudy@gmail.com](mailto:cubrainstudy@gmail.com) or phone (303) 735-5421

Female participants aged 22-30 wanted for a study examining brain activity while you pay attention to pictures and words. We are looking for female participants who either have or have not experienced very stressful events in childhood, such as child abuse. The study will take place on the Fitzsimons campus of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Aurora. The study involves up to 2 sessions (2.5 hours each). Individuals will be paid for their participation. Principal Investigator: Marie Banich, Ph.D., Protocol No. 04-0809

[cubrainstudy@gmail.com](mailto:cubrainstudy@gmail.com)  
(303) 735-5421

To learn more about ongoing research studies, including one with colleagues at CU-Boulder, please visit our website:

<http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/study.html>

# Family Health Study

For Latina or Hispanic mothers  
with at least one child between  
the ages of 8-12.

We are studying how stress affects Latino families.

The study lasts 2 hours.

You will receive \$20 cash for your participation.

Call (303) 871-7407  
for more information.



*Study conducted in the DU Psychology Department under the direction of Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D. This study was approved by the University of Denver Internal Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects on March 8, 2010.*

# Estudio de la Salud de la Familia

Para las madres latinas o hispanas que tienen por lo menos un hijo/a entre las edades de 8 a 12 años.

Estamos investigando el impacto del estrés en las familias latinas o hispanas.

El estudio dura 2 horas.

Usted recibirá \$20 por su participación.

Llame al (303) 871-7407 para mas información.



*El estudio esta conducido por la Universidad de Denver y dirigido por la Dra. Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D. Este investigación fue aprobado por la Universidad de Denver Internal Review Board para la Protección de los Sujetos Humanos en 8 de Marzo 2010.*