

TSS GROUP NEWS

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Director's Welcome: May News Highlights

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

Just as Spring arrives, we start winding down the academic year. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous work of our undergraduate **Research Assistant (RA) Team**. The RA Team works diligently during the year to help make our research possible. You can meet this year's RA Team by visiting us at <http://mysite.du.edu/lab.html>. Thank you to this terrific team!

We will also say goodbye to 3 graduate students this summer. **Ann Chu, Kristin Weinzierl, and Lindsay Smart** will leave the TSS Group to complete one-year clinical internships. As they finish their dissertation research, we'll look forward to updating you on findings in future newsletters. Please join me in wishing them well!

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In spite of impending goodbyes, we are gearing up for a busy summer. Our NIJ-funded evaluation of system- and community-based responses to domestic violence is in full swing. We anticipate starting a treatment-development project with Dr. Stephen Shirk and our community partners at the Aurora Community Mental Health Center this summer as well. Please look for updates on both projects in future newsletters.

We look forward to keeping you posted and finding new ways to work with you. Thank you for all of the work you do on behalf of victims and survivors.

Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

Director, TSS Group
 Assistant Professor, University of Denver

Electronic Resource Update

In each newsletter, we provide links to electronic resources that we hope will be of use to professionals working with survivors of trauma and violence. These links are also published on our Denver Trauma Pages, a website dedicated to disseminating trauma-related research to system- and community-based professionals (www.du.edu/psychology/traumapages.html).

Interested in the ethical principles and guidelines that influence research? Check out two often-cited sources for research ethics:

- American Psychological Association Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html>)
- Belmont Report (<http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html>)

What types of electronic resources would you like to see? Please email adeprinc@du.edu with ideas!



Bringing Trauma Research into the Classroom through Community Partnerships

By Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

One of the courses I teach regularly at the University of Denver is Research Methods, a required course for undergraduate psychology majors. Year-to-year, students report frustration that they are required to take a research methods course when their career goals focus on more applied clinical work. In short, students seemed to believe that the course simply wasn't relevant to their lives.

I have a strong commitment to engaged scholarship that connects academic resources (e.g., dissemination of research knowledge, application of research skills) with community partners whose work addresses violence and trauma. While my research has long involved community partners, the students' consistent choruses of "how does this apply to my career goals" encouraged me to begin incorporating principles of engagement into my teaching.

With the support of DU's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (<http://www.du.edu/engage/index.htm>), I have been working with Graduate Student **Sarah Priebe** to develop a service learning component for Research Methods that will both support students' learning and connect the resources of the university with a community need. Service learning seemed like an ideal way to show students that research skills are relevant to answering applied questions that community-based partners face.

In Winter Quarter (2008), my Research Methods class partnered with the WINGS Foundation (<http://www.wingsfound.org/>) and Anne Guarnera (Executive Director). WINGS, a non-profit that provides resources to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, needed help analyzing intake data to better understand the needs of their clients.

Based on the research needs identified by WINGS, the *Classroom*, continued p. 4



Traumatic Brain Injuries

By Kristin Weinzierl, MS
4th Year Graduate Student

March was Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month. Did you know that concussions are actually a form of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)? Although we generally think of a concussion as being a mild injury, concussions and more severe TBIs can result in problems with attention, memory, and reasoning.

Unfortunately, TBIs can result from a wide variety of causes, including falls, motor-vehicle accidents, and assault. Children can sustain TBIs from physical abuse, including being shaken as infants

(whether or not the infant's head strikes an object, the brain can be injured from movement inside the skull). Further, experiencing TBI in conjunction with other posttraumatic symptoms (PTSD, posttraumatic memory and attention problems, etc.) may exacerbate the impact of trauma exposure on school performance and social and occupational functioning.

For more information, see the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's TBI Awareness page (http://nctsn.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_aware_brain).

Also, our colleagues at DU's Graduate School of Professional Psychology will host a conference on TBI on May 16 (see <http://www.du.edu/braininjury/index.html>).



Examining Research Ethics: Procedures and Data

By Ann Chu, MA

5th year graduate student

The TSS Group has had a long tradition of focusing on participants' rights and experiences in the research process. For example, we use several standard procedures to protect adult and child research participants, such as a comprehensive informed consent process and close monitoring of responses to research participation.

In our consent process, participants receive a written consent form; hear a verbal review of the consent information; and take a consent 'quiz' to evaluate understanding of consent information prior to participating.

At the end of the research study, participants are asked to complete the Reactions to Research Participation Questionnaire (RRPQ; child or adult version). Some studies also include follow-up calls in the weeks after participation.

Recently, we analyzed data from more than 500 child and adult participants' responses to participating in our research (Chu, DePrince, & Weinzierl, 2008; DePrince & Chu, 2008). In general, we found that both adults *and* children report that they perceived greater benefits than costs to participating. We call this a stable benefit-to-cost ratio. Both children and adults also appeared to understand the consent information.

In addition, we found among adults that:

- trauma-related symptoms were unrelated to perceptions of costs and benefits of participation;
- those who completed interviews during which they discussed their traumatic experiences reported greater benefits than adults who only completed questionnaires.

Among children, we found that:

- trauma (none, interpersonal, or non-interpersonal) exposure type was unrelated to perception of costs and benefits in research participation;
- trauma exposure type was unrelated to understanding of informed consent

These findings replicate and extend previous research with adults. For example, adults generally report favorable cost-benefit appraisals about having participated in trauma-relevant research (Newman & Kaloupek, 2004). A minority of adults report negative emotions, more distress than expected, or more distress than encountered in day-to-day life (Newman & Kaloupek, 2004). Among the participants who report distress, the majority report benefiting from research and do not regret participation (Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006)

Our findings challenge some assumptions about children's participation in research. For example, trauma-exposed children have been described as "doubly vulnerable" in research because 1.) children may not understand consent procedures; and 2.) trauma-exposed children specifically may have behavioral and emotional challenges that make them vulnerable in the research process.

In spite of these assumptions, our results indicated that children generally make positive appraisals about research participation, regardless of trauma exposure. Further, children answer questions in a way that suggests they understand the consent information. For example, they generally answer questions about limits to confidentiality and their rights as participants (e.g., to stop the research at any time; to skip questions) correctly.

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class had the opportunity to learn about research design principles as we analyzed the data for our community partner. For example, the class learned to evaluate questions such as: 1.) given certain non-experimental designs, what inferences can and cannot be made about causal relationships; and 2.) given certain relationships between psychological variables in a treatment-seeking population, what can we generalize to non-treatment seeking populations?

Each student wrote a complete manuscript for the research, including introduction and discussion sections that placed the analyses of the WINGS database in the context of the larger empirical literature on adult survivors. Under the close supervision of me and Sarah Priebe, the top 4 papers were submitted to our community partner. My hope is that this real-world project demonstrates to students that the skills they acquire in Research Methods are applicable to

"We're very grateful to the research methods class...for realizing the research value in what we do every day and the survivors who we serve in our program. The results and papers are going to help us in targeting our outreach and making sure that our program is relevant to the issues survivors of childhood sexual abuse are experiencing."

*-Anne Guarnera
Executive Director, WINGS*

important social issues. Further, I hope that students will continue to embrace opportunities to partner with community agencies working on a pressing public health issue – violence and trauma. This quarter, a new class of students is fast at work developing research proposals for partners at the **Denver District Attorneys' Office** and **SafeHouse Denver**. We look forward to sharing the outcomes with you down the road!

Research Spotlight

The TSS Group invites parents and teens (aged 12-17) to participate in a one-hour session about *teens' problem-solving approaches*. Teens will complete several short problem-solving activities and parents will complete two questionnaires. Each person will receive a \$10 Target Gift Card as a token of our thanks for participating in the study.

Please call Kristin 303-871-7407 to find out if your family is eligible to participate in the study. This study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

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Data from these ethics studies were recently published in the Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics. Please visit <http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/pub.htm> to access pdf copies of these articles.



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