

# Welcome to the TSS Lab

Fall 2004  
Volume I

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your interest in and support of the Traumatic Stress Studies (TSS) Lab at the University of Denver.

The TSS Lab was established just a little over two years ago. As you will read, this past year has been an exciting year with many "firsts." We are eager to let you know about these milestones, as none would be accomplished without the support of our community partners.

In the following pages, we will also let you know about some of our current research projects involving community participants. As always, we are grateful for your help in spreading the word about our research.

On behalf of the TSS Lab, we look forward to finding ways to work with you. And **we thank you** for all of the work you do on behalf of victims and survivors of traumatic events.

Best regards,

Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.  
Director

## MEET THE TSS LAB!

Visit us on the web at  
[www.du.edu/~adeprinc/lab.html](http://www.du.edu/~adeprinc/lab.html)

Questions?  
We look forward to hearing from you!

Phone: 303-871-7407

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## FIRST TSS LAB CONFERENCE SUPPORTED BY ROSENBERY FUND



With a financial contribution from the *University of Denver Rosenberry Fund*, we are proud to present our first conference: **Returning Research to our Community**. The goal of this conference is to build bridges between researchers and community & social service agencies. Provided at no cost to conference participants, current research on child and adult victimization will be presented, followed by a wine and cheese reception. Researchers from the TSS Lab will be joined by other Denver area researchers from the *Kempe Center for Child Abuse and Neglect* and *Invest in Kids*.

## NEW NIH SUPPORTED RESEARCH PROJECT

We are pleased to announce our first federally supported research project. Sponsored through the National Institute of Mental Health, we will develop a self-report measure of posttraumatic emotions in adults as part of the *Development of the Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire Project*.

While we have long known that how people feel and think about traumatic events relates to coping, researchers and clinicians have lagged behind in finding ways to measure these posttraumatic appraisals. Several emotions are identified as important by the way we diagnose posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The PTSD diagnosis requires that people feel intense fear, helplessness or horror. However, we have not had the tools to assess and define the presence and severity of these emotions. Nor have we had measures to assess other emotions that seem to be important to understanding posttraumatic distress. For example, work in our lab points to the importance of feelings of betrayal in predicting PTSD symptoms and dissociation. This new research project will allow us to develop a reliable and valid measure of post-traumatic appraisals, such as fear, loss, shame, betrayal, and anger.

**Interested participants  
may call our lab at  
303-871-7407  
to find out more about any  
of our ongoing studies.**

## NEW DU SUPPORTED RESEARCH PROJECT

### ATTENTION AND TRAUMA EXPOSURE

Project Name: **CHILDREN'S ATTENTION RESEARCH (CAR)**

**Who:** Mothers and children (9-12 yrs.) who *have and have not* experienced any type of trauma or violence.

**What:** 2 sessions. Participants are compensated \$25/session (\$50 total)

An estimated 896,000 children were determined to be victims of abuse and neglect in 2002 (USDHHS, 2004). For 80% of these children, at least one parent was identified as the perpetrator (USDHHS, 2004). Maltreated children are at risk for a host of psychological and social problems, particularly lower levels of school achievement (e.g., Shonk &

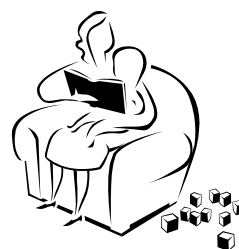
Cicchetti, 2001; Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993; Erickson, Egeland, & Pianta, 1989; Kendall-Tackett & Eckenrode, 1996) and higher rates of disruptive behaviors in the classroom (e.g., Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001; Eckenrode et al., 1993). The current research will test the prediction that maltreatment by a caregiver is associated with alterations in basic attention and memory abilities; such alterations increase maltreated children's risk for school-related problems. Children who have been exposed to a range of traumas (e.g., maltreatment by caregiver, natural disaster, community violence) and control children (no trauma) will be tested on measures of attention, memory, and school achievement. Study results will be applied to developing cost effective interventions to help maltreated children succeed in school.

**What is it like to participate in this study?**  
Children will be asked to play games that assess their attention and academic achievement, such as solving puzzles and playing computer games. As with all studies in our lab, we work hard to make this a fun experience for the children involved. The parent is asked to complete questionnaires about her/himself and the child.

## ONGOING COMMUNITY RESEARCH

### EMOTION UNDERSTANDING/COMMUNICATION AND PARENTING

Dissociation is a clinically important outcome associated with early family violence. Highly dissociative people report a host of difficulties, including memory problems (particularly problems remembering autobiographical events), depersonalization (a sense that one's body is not real), and derealization (a sense that the world is not real). Highly dissociative children often appear as if



they are daydreaming or in a trance; they complain of problems such as profound forgetfulness (e.g., forgetting their own names or name of friends/teachers) or unusual periods in which they lose track of time (e.g., are confused as to whether it is morning or afternoon; Putnam, 1997). In spite of the clinical importance of dissociation, little is known about how dissociation develops.

Project Name: **DEVELOPMENT OF DISSOCIATION (DOD)**

**Who:** Mothers and children (7-11 yrs.) who *have and have not* experienced any type of trauma/violence.

**What:** 1 session at the University of Denver. Participants are compensated \$30 for their time.

**What is it like to participate in this study?**

Mothers and children are asked to complete an emotion communication task together and play a computer game that examines biases to different types of emotions. Children play other games that are used to assess emotion understanding. For example, they listen to stories and try to guess what the characters in the story were feeling. Mothers are asked to complete questionnaires that assess dissociation, trauma exposure, parenting practices, and communication styles.

We are interested in whether factors such as emotion understanding and emotion communication, as well as parenting style, are involved in protecting children against the development of problematic dissociation. We are also interested more generally in how either a mother's or child's trauma exposure relates to emotion understanding, communication and processing.



**EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:  
ONGOING RESEARCH AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS!**

Project Name: **COGNITION AFTER TRAUMA (CAT)**

**Who:** Mothers and children (7-11 yrs.) who *have and have not* experienced domestic violence.

**What:** 1 session at the University of Denver. Participants are compensated \$25

We are interested in the impact that exposure to domestic violence (DV) has on children's academic achievement. We are continuing a study that examines how children's symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) relate to problems with attention and memory

(two of the basic skills needed for academic success). Memory for neutral verbal information is assessed in both neutral and DV-relevant contexts (i.e., after watching a 1-minute video of a man and woman having a verbal disagreement).

**Preliminary results.** Initial data collected with more than 30 participants suggests that children exposed to domestic violence show mild deficits in several areas of verbal memory, particularly in the DV-relevant context (i.e., poorer total learning scores, poorer delayed recall and recognition scores, and more false positives). Earlier onset and greater chronicity of DV is associated with poorer performance on memory tasks. It is our hope that by continuing this research, we can learn more about the mechanisms through which learning and memory may be disrupted in children exposed to DV.

**What is it like to participate in this study?**

Mothers are asked to complete a series of questionnaires. Children are asked to complete several tasks that assess their attention and memory. While completing some of these tasks, children are asked to wear monitors to measure their heart rate and other physiological markers of emotional reactivity.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM THE TSS LAB

Reprints of some articles are available at [www.du.edu/~adeprinc/pub.html](http://www.du.edu/~adeprinc/pub.html)

Becker-Blease, K. & DePrince, A.P. (in press). Child victimization, cognitive functioning and academic performance. In K. Kendall-Tackett & S. Giacomoni (Eds.) *Child Victimization*. Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute.

Chu, A. & DePrince, A.P. (in press). Review of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Children and Adolescents. *Journal of Trauma Practice*.

DePrince, A.P. (in press). Social cognition and revictimization risk. *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*.

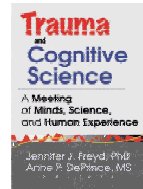
DePrince, A.P. & Freyd, J.J. (2004). Forgetting trauma stimuli. *Psychological Science*.

DePrince, A.P., Allard, C., Oh, H., & Freyd, J.J. (in press). What's in a name for memory errors? Implications and ethical issues arising from the use of the label "false memory" for errors in memory for details. *Ethics & Behavior*.

Freyd, J.J. & DePrince, A.P. (Eds.). (2001). *Trauma and Cognitive Science: A Meeting of Minds, Science, and Human Experience*. New York: Haworth Press.

Rea, J. G., & Rossman, B. B. R. (in press). Children exposed to interparental violence: Does parenting contribute to functioning over time? *Journal of Emotional Abuse*.

Rossman, B. B. R. & Rea, J. G. (in press). The relation of parenting styles and inconsistencies to adaptive functioning for children in conflictual and violent families. *Journal of Family Violence*.



## THANK YOU NOTES

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