

TSS GROUP NEWS



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Spring Updates

By Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

As the academic year winds down, we are pleased to update you on recent research accomplishments and new studies. In this issue, we also feature an important update on a potential new diagnosis for children – Developmental Trauma Disorder. Building on this article, we have added relevant electronic resources to the Denver Trauma Pages – you can read about these updates below.

As announced in our last newsletter, we are also inviting women (ages 18–40) who experienced abuse in childhood into a study examining emotional and physiological consequences of abuse. To learn more about this **Violence against Women Study** or to help spread the word, please

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email vawstudy@psy.du.edu or visit www.du.edu/~adeprinc/study.html.

On behalf of the TSS Group, thank you for all of the work you do.

Best regards and thanks,
Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

Director, TSS Group
Assistant Professor, University of Denver

Featured Electronic Resources

By Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

In our last newsletter, we announced the launch of the Denver Trauma Pages (www.du.edu/psychology/traumapages.html), a website intended to serve as a resource for Denver-area professionals working on issues related to trauma and violence.

Building on our feature article on Developmental Trauma Disorder (see page 3), we are pleased to feature relevant updates to the Denver Trauma Pages. In particular, you will now find links to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network

(www.nctsnet.org), which provides online resources for professionals, parents, teachers, media and others related to child trauma exposure.

You can also read more about calls for changes in diagnoses for children exposed to chronic trauma in Dr. Bessel van der Kolk's article, "Developmental Trauma Disorder: A new rational diagnosis for children with complex trauma histories" available at <http://www.traumacenter.org/PsychiatricAnnals3a.pdf>.



PLEASE VISIT THE TSS GROUP AT
WWW.DU.EDU/~ADEPRINC/LAB.HTML
FROM THIS SITE, YOU CAN ALSO
ACCESS THE DENVER TRAUMA PAGES

Getting to know us:

Undergraduate Research Assistants (RA)

Our research depends on the important contributions of an extremely talented team of undergraduate research assistants (RAs). We are pleased to introduce **Julio Alas**, a junior Spanish and Psychology major (with a minor in sociology), who was generous enough to answer questions about his experiences in the TSS Group and at DU.

How long have you worked with the TSS Group? I started working in the TSS Lab this past Fall 2006 Quarter... I am looking into pursuing a career in psychology one day, so I figured that working in the lab would give me a good glimpse as to what the psychology field may be like.

What do you enjoy about your work as an RA? First and foremost, I enjoying being apart of such a great team



Our research offices are located in Frontier Hall on the University of Denver campus.

that consistently works together to ensure that all goes well in the lab and with the research. Along with that, I enjoy being able to see how research in psychology is carried out and being able to help drive the process... I am glad to have been able to have the opportunity to be involved with research so that later on in life when I get into my own research I will be more prepared.

You were involved in DU's Tunnel of Oppression event - what is this? For the past two years, I have been apart of the leading team in putting together DU's Tunnel of Oppression. This is an amazing event that tries to educate the DU community about the prejudice, sexism, racism, discrimination, and overall oppression that continues to take place in our society. Many people think that oppression is a thing of the past and that it no longer exists. This is clearly not the case seeing how different minority groups continuously experience hateful remarks, attitudes, and abuse from day to day.

In the Tunnel of Oppression, different minority groups on campus come together to make this event happen. The different student organizations put together 3-5 minute skits that depict oppression. Guests of the event walk through a tunnel-like setting and see these intense skits along with other stations in the Tunnel of Oppression such as the Wall of Hate, the Wall of Hope, and a debriefing session at the end.

Please see *RA cont'd*, page 4.

TSS Group Achievements

By Kristin Weinzierl, MS & Anne DePrince, Ph.D.

The *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* recently published a book review by two members of the TSS Group. **Kristin Weinzierl** and Anne DePrince reviewed the book, *The Dissociative Mind* by Elizabeth F. Howell. Howell provides a thorough description of historical theories of dissociation, using case studies throughout the text to illustrate her thoughts. Look for a copy of the review on our website soon.

Undergraduate researchers team members **Amy Chianese** and **Reilly Anderson** presented at the University of Denver's Undergraduate Research Conference on May 10. **Amy** reported that posttraumatic appraisals predicted PTSD symptom severity in a community sample of adults exposed to different types of traumas. **Reilly** reported on a new task we've been developing to assess inhibitory control - which is an important part of our attention system - in people exposed to crime.

Developmental Trauma Disorder: A New Diagnosis?

By Lindsay Smart, MA

Approximately 3 million abuse and neglect reports are made to child protective services in the United States each year, with approximately 1 million of those cases being substantiated (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, 2003).

Maltreated children are often diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is characterized by reexperiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal symptoms. However, clinicians and researchers have begun to question whether PTSD truly captures the constellation of reactions and distress maltreated children experience. In particular, concerns have increased about the use of the PTSD diagnosis to describe reactions to single, acute, traumatic incident and multiple, chronic interpersonal traumas (e.g., sexual abuse).

Indeed, research on children's reactions to trauma suggests we have good reason to worry that PTSD (and treatments based on that paradigm) do not address the complexity of children's responses. For example, children exposed to chronic interpersonal trauma show difficulties with affect regulation and attention. Multiple, early interpersonal traumatic experiences also appear related to children's cognition, problem-solving abilities, and impulse control.

In response to the growing recognition of the diverse ways that maltreatment can interrupt typical development, the diagnosis of Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) was drafted by a working group from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network for consideration for the 2011 revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5*. DTD strives to better capture the reactions that chronically

maltreated children may develop than those captured by the current PTSD diagnosis.

The importance a new DTD diagnosis cannot be understated. To the extent that the diagnosis of PTSD does not accurately capture the responses of chronically traumatized children, treatments developed based on the PTSD model may fail.

Proposed Criteria for Developmental Trauma Disorder (*Psychiatric Annals*, 2005, pp. 410-408)

Exposure: Exposure to one or more forms of developmentally adverse interpersonal traumas such as abandonment, betrayal, physical or sexual abuse and emotional abuse. May also experience subjective feelings in relation to this trauma, such as rage, betrayal, fear, resignation, defeat, and shame.

Dysregulation: Dysregulated development in response to trauma cues, including disturbances in emotion, health, behavior, cognition, relationships and self-attributions. Behavioral manifestation could be self-injury, for example; cognitive manifestation might appear as confusion or dissociation.

Negative Attributions and Expectations: Negative beliefs in line with experience of interpersonal trauma. May stop expecting protection from others and believe that future victimization is inevitable.

Functional Impairments: Impairment in any or all areas of life, including school, friendship, family relations, and the law.

While the future of DTD is still unknown, at the very least the discussion and debate surrounding its existence have brought to light important public health issues related to the developmental effects of maltreatment on children. Such a debate will surely inform future research questions that seek to better understand the nature and effects of childhood trauma.

New Research with Victim Assistance Unit Funded

By Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D.

The TSS Group received funding from the **University of Denver PROF Award** to begin a collaborative study on revictimization risk with the Denver Police Department's **Victim Assistance Unit (VAU)**.

This new research tests links between executive function (EF) performance and revictimization risk. EFs include a range of cognitive skills involving attention (the ability to shift, inhibit and focus attention), self-monitoring, and planning and execution of behaviors. We will examine the relative contributions of EF abilities and other risk factors to

revictimization. To date, there are no published studies examining EF problems as a risk factor in revictimization, though alterations in EF are implicated following certain types of violence exposure and in common forms of posttraumatic psychiatric distress (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder, depression).

"This sort of novel and timely research focusing on risk factors associated with revictimization will serve as an invaluable tool to guide and assist with the development and implementation of programming within the Denver Police Department and possibly the field of victim services, crime prevention and public education. The partnership between the Denver Police Department and the TSS Group further demonstrates an innovative collaboration with other future possibilities designed to increase our understanding of those factors that contribute to victimization and revictimization."

Scott Snow, VAU Director

New Study Launched with Denver Children's Home

By Kristin Weinzierl, MS

A new collaborative research effort is now underway with the Denver Children's Home (DCH). Reflecting our joint commitment to better understanding the consequences of trauma in adolescence, the new Stress and Cognition is designed to learn more about teen's problem-solving and risk-behaviors following trauma. As a part of this research effort, Kristin Weinzierl, visits DCH regularly to conduct study sessions with teens and help with assessment procedures. DCH staff has been instrumental in describing the study to families and in providing study questionnaires to parents.

Thanks to DCH staff, parents, and teens for their invaluable help with this important research. Stay tuned for research findings over the next year!

RA cont'd from page 2

This event is very powerful and leaves a huge impact on those who walk through it. People are forced to think about these hateful and oppressing issues and shown that they are real.

This year we had about 150 guests attend...we hope to continue the success of the Tunnel of Oppression in upcoming years. Our Tunnel of Oppression Committee would like for this event to be put on every year and become a tradition for the DU campus.

What else would be good to know about you? I have big plans and goals for myself. I am the first generation in my family to go to college and I don't plan to stop here. I want to obtain a PhD in either Psychology, Education, or Social Work. I want to help as many people as I can in whatever profession it is that I decided to go into. Whether it is helping children as a child psychologist, working with students in the Denver Public Schools system, or helping the lives of families as a social worker, I will be happy knowing that I am trying to help other people.