

A quarterly newsletter for our community partners...

Research Notes

...from the Traumatic
Stress Studies Group



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Director's Note

Greetings from the TSS Group. As you will read, we are busying analyzing data from ongoing projects as well as starting new work.

I wanted to highlight a hot-off-the-presses research publication that has significant practice implications. Click [here](#) to read about work from our Triage Project, in which we asked women experiencing intimate partner abuse about lifetime head injury occurrences. As you will read, the vast majority of women (80%) reported a lifetime head injury. More than half (56%) of women reported at least one instance in which they experienced a change in consciousness or a period of being dazed and confused as a result of a head injury, which may be indicative of a mild traumatic brain injury. These startling prevalence rates point to the importance of screening for head injuries among women seeking services following intimate partner abuse.

As always, thank you for the work you do on behalf of survivors. We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with you.

Anne

Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D., Professor



Alcohol-Related Sexual Assault and Bystander Behaviors Among College Students

Michelle Seulki Lee, M.A.

An estimated 20% of women and 6% of men are sexually assaulted as college students (Fisher et al., 2000; Krebs et al., 2009), and at least 50% of these sexual assaults are associated with alcohol use (Abbey et al., 1996). Three factors may be key to advancing our understanding of alcohol-related sexual assault, described next.

Beliefs about Alcohol and Sex. Research demonstrates that automatic expectations about alcohol and sex (e.g., beliefs that alcohol use leads to sex) and expectations about sex and aggression (e.g., beliefs that men should initiate and sometimes force sexual contact) increase risk of sexual assault among college students (Abbey et al., 1998; Abbey & Wegner, 2015; Lisco, Parrott, & Tharp, 2012; Wilson, Calhoun, & McNair, 2002). However, most of these studies utilize explicit self-report measures, which are subject to participants answering in socially desirable ways. Self-report measures also may not capture implicit expectations and beliefs about sex, alcohol, and aggression that are often automatic and outside of conscious awareness. Researchers have utilized implicit measures to examine associations relevant to alcohol and sexual violence outside participants' awareness. For instance, Zurbriggen (2000) found that stronger implicit associations between words that had to do with power and words that had to do with sex in men predicted sexual aggression. However, no research to date has examined implicit associations between alcohol, sex, and aggression and their role in alcohol-related sexual assault among college students.

Executive Function. Stronger executive function (EF) may decrease the likelihood that people perpetrate sexual assault. EF refers to processes of cognitive control that influence behavior, such as attention and inhibition. Perpetrators of alcohol-related sexual assault often demonstrate low impulse control and decreased attention to social cues – deficits of skills related to EF (Abbey et al., 2004). Though research has demonstrated cognitive deficits related to drinking, less is known about how cognitive skills such as EF may be protective in regards to alcohol use and sexual assault.

Bystander Behaviors. Finally, most research examining alcohol-related sexual assault among college students has measured sexual assault victimization and/or perpetration; however, emerging research is also addressing bystander behaviors as a critical consideration in research and prevention efforts. The bystander approach recruits communities, rather than individuals, in intervening in situations of sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2004; Banyard et al, 2007). Research indicates that alcohol expectations and alcohol use are associated with decreased willingness to engage in bystander behaviors in sexually coercive situations (Fleming & Wiersma-Mosley, 2015). Given the importance of the bystander approach in campus sexual assault prevention, we will examine not only victimization/perpetration of sexual assault, but attitudes regarding and engagement in bystander behaviors as well. My hope is that better understanding risk and protective factors of alcohol-related sexual assault among college students will inform prevention and intervention efforts.

A New Study: For my dissertation research, I am examining implicit associations between alcohol, sex, and aggression as a risk factor for victimization and perpetration of sexual assault. I am also interested in the role of executive function as a protective factor. Finally, in addition to assessing victimization and perpetration of sexual assault, I will assess students' engagement in bystander behaviors during potentially threatening situations. I will examine these variables at two time points, which are four months apart, in order to evaluate change across time and predict how one factor (e.g., alcohol use) may impact another (e.g., bystander behaviors) four months later.

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What We're Up To: Project Highlights

Women's Health Project. In October 2016, we finished the final interviews with women enrolled in the Women's Health Project, a research study focused on understanding what kinds of social reactions women receive after sexual assault. We were successful in following up with most women 3– (80%), 6– (73%), and 9– (75%) months after the initial interview. We are currently examining the open-ended portions of the

interviews, during which women shared positive and negative experiences as well as advice for victim service providers. We are also analyzing women's responses to measures of health, wellbeing, engagement with the criminal justice system, and more. We are tremendously grateful for the partnership of members of the Sexual Assault Interagency Council (SAIC). Stay tuned for findings soon!

Older Adult Research Project. Working closely with colleagues from the Denver Forensic Collaborative – particularly in the City Attorney's Office, District Attorney's Office, Denver Police Department, and Adult Protective Services – we continue to invite older adults at risk for abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation to participate in the OAR Project. To date, we have interviewed 35 older adults who reported a broad range of stressful experiences. We continue to hear from older adults that they are experiencing a broad range of stressful experiences, such as emotional abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation, both recent and throughout their lives. To date, these experiences are most frequently perpetrated by family members and close others, such as older adults' children and grandchildren. When we ask about service needs, we hear from older adults that the need help across a wide range of domains, such as social support, mental/physical health care, knowing about and obtaining services (e.g., transportation), or no longer being eligible for services (e.g. income) etc. This is important to consider in combination with the fact that half of the older adults reported that their financial resources were not sufficient to meet emergencies. In addition to talking with older adults, we are gathering input from caseworkers and victim advocates about experiences of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation among older adults. Finally, we are analyzing police incident reports to extract information about the characteristics of older adult abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation in Denver. We will continue data collection over the coming months.

LINC ([Legal Information Network of Colorado](#)). The Legal Information Network of Colorado (LINC) is a collaborative network that provides confidential, no-cost, comprehensive legal information for crime victims in the Denver metro area. The Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center ([RMVlc](#)) and other Denver-area agencies have developed LINC as a new approach for providing legal services to crime victims. Our research team at the University of Denver has aided with LINC in several ways. First, we undertook a needs assessment to identify gaps and challenges in providing legal services to crime victims in Denver. Drawing on the needs assessment data, LINC was created to address four main categories of needs: 1) information and knowledge about legal issues, 2) resources and funding, 3) trauma-informed, victim-sensitive, and victim-centered approaches, and 4) system coordination. Second, our research team is

currently involved in helping evaluate the effectiveness of LINC in addressing these needs. We have developed and distributed surveys that assess three key indicators of effectiveness: 1) decreases in reported legal needs, 2) decreases in reported barriers to legal services, and 3) satisfaction with various components of LINC, including the helpline and website. The surveys assess these indicators from the perspective of key stakeholders, including crime victims served by LINC-affiliated agencies, and providers at these agencies. Third, our research team is also involved in helping develop web-based materials (see <http://www.coloradolinc.org/>) and trainings, with content areas that address legal needs identified by the needs assessment.

Title IX Working Group. Since the previous year, we have been observing and examining the development of Denver's Title IX Working Group (Working Group), a multidisciplinary group seeking to develop coordinated procedures across criminal justice and institutions of higher education (IHE) responders to support the investigation and adjudication of campus sexual assault cases. This form of action research allows us to document emerging practice. A subgroup of the Sexual Assault Interagency Council, the Working Group brings together diverse members such as the Denver Police Department, campuses around Denver, the Sexual Assault Interagency Coalition (SAIC), the Blue Bench, the District Attorney's Office. As researchers, we attend and observe the ways in which the multidisciplinary collaborators navigate responding to campus sexual assault in order to improve responses to victims. In addition to observing the group, we have conducted interviews with some of the participating members to learn about their experiences in the multidisciplinary collaboration. We have taken initial steps to analyze data from this collaborative project. Over the coming months, we will seek identify themes and actions that advance effective collaboration.

TSS Group Accomplishments

Since we last wrote, new papers from the TSS Group are available! As always, please visit our [website](#) to access full-text articles or email anne.deprince@du.edu if you can't find what you're looking for.

- **Michelle Lee** (4th year) received the 2016 University of Denver Department of Psychology Research Grant.
- In August, **Rebecca Babcock Fenerci** (PhD, 2016) will join the faculty at Stonehill College as an Assistant Professor.
- In April, **Ann T. Chu** (PhD, 2016) will join the faculty Department of Psychiatry at Zuckerberg San Francisco General in the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco as Assistant Director of Dissemination for Child-Parent Psychotherapy.