CHRISTINA BARRASSO  
Faculty Advisor: Jennifer Block-Lerner  

Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Practice at the Curriculum Level: Examining Receptivity in Higher Education  

There has been empirical support for interventions that emphasize a mindful and accepting stance toward the range of human experience in the service of promoting psychological flexibility and values-consistent actions. Importantly, mindfulness and acceptance-based behavioral interventions have been evidenced as useful for both clinical and nonclinical populations. Among these populations, college students facing the task of balancing academic and personal responsibilities stand to benefit greatly from such practices. However, in general, research consistently shows that mental health services are underutilized among the college population. Thus, an important and novel contribution of the current study lies in its implementation of a brief curriculum-based mindfulness- and acceptance-based intervention. There is little research to date that has explored the utility of such brief interventions that can be integrated into the classroom. Similarly, it has yet to be discovered which individuals are initially drawn to and are receptive to such practices. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess receptivity to a brief curriculum-based mindfulness-and acceptance-based intervention among college students, as well as to identify predictors of receptivity toward these approaches. Psychological flexibility is proposed to moderate the relationship between symptoms of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety) and receptivity to mindfulness-and acceptance-based exercises. Results will be discussed in terms of the value of a curriculum-based preventative approach toward mental health difficulties at the systematic level in university settings.

MELISSA DETTORE  
Faculty Advisor: Donald Marks  

DSM-5 Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder: Diagnostics for Anger Pathology in a Violent Offender Population  

Individuals experiencing clinical anger and the resultant aggressive/violent behavior often present challenges across multiple settings including healthcare, occupational, and forensic settings. Currently, individuals with clinical anger are classified under a multitude of psychiatric diagnoses, yet these patients exhibit similar symptoms and behaviors. Creating a diagnosis that accurately captures the nature of clinical anger will ultimately provide the ability to identify members of this population, thus enabling more efficient and effective treatment in children and adults. As such, conceptualizing DSM-5 Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) as a disorder that extends into adulthood in the form of clinical anger will provide greater continuity in care. Study 1 will screen court-mandated individuals exhibiting clinical anger for the DSM-5 DMDD diagnosis. Results are expected to show that DSM-5 DMDD accounts for a significantly greater proportion of the clinical anger population than any other single diagnosis included within the sample. Study 2 will explore the trauma history and psychological traits in individuals who meet the criteria for DSM-5 DMDD. Results are expected to exhibit moderate early aversive histories, high levels of anger arousal, high susceptibility to anger provocation, high levels of difficulties in emotion regulation, and high levels of experiential avoidance. Results and implications to be discussed.
MIKE GROSS  
Faculty Advisor: Frank Gardner  

Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Program for the Prevention of Mental and Behavioral Health Issues among Student-Athletes

This study investigated the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) intervention as a vehicle for primary prevention of mental and behavioral health issues, increasingly noted in student-athletes. Previous MAC research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving performance and reducing emotional distress. We hypothesized that when compared to a traditional psychological skills training approach, MAC participants would demonstrate a greater reduction in behavioral issues, emotional distress, and psychological symptoms, while improving performance as rated by coaches. Participants were 22 women’s basketball players at an NCAA Division III university in the northeastern U.S.. Participants were randomized into the MAC or PST group. Intervention groups were led by a doctoral-level clinician, once per week for seven weeks. Assessments at pre-intervention, post-intervention, and 1-month follow-up included: Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms-62 (CCAPS-62), Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Coaches Rating of Performance Scale (CRPS), and Sport Performance Classification Questionnaire (SPCQ). Mixed-model ANOVA tested the differences across time within and between the two groups on a number of measures. The MAC intervention had a statistically significant effect on the total score on CCAPS-62 Distress Index, a measure of overall psychological distress. Post-hoc analyses revealed statistically significant decreases from post-treatment to follow-up among MAC participants on the Distress Index, Anxiety, and Hostility subscales of the CCAPS-62; and significant decreases among MAC participants from pre-treatment to follow-up on CCAPS-62 substance use scores. For the PST group, statistically significant decreases were found from pre-treatment to post-treatment only on CCAPS-62 Hostility scores. CRPS findings indicated that MAC enhanced athletic performance from pre- to post-test, while PST did not. Finally, significant decreases were found among the MAC group from post-intervention to follow-up on the AAQ-II, and from pre-intervention to follow-up on the DERS, supporting a theorized mechanism through which MAC achieves its results.

DASA JENDRUSAKOVA  
Faculty Advisor: Adrienne Garro, Jennifer Lerner

Factors Related to Practitioner Attitudes Regarding Discipline Practices

Regardless of the limited empirical evidence for effectiveness of the use of corporal punishment (CP), this disciplinary method is widely used with great public support. From a historical standpoint, the prevalence rate of CP appears to have decreased, though it is still quite high. Despite families’ continued use of CP as a discipline method, relatively little research has looked at CP from the perspective of mental health professionals who work with children, parents, and families. The aim of this study is to examine the attitudes and beliefs of practitioners with respect to the use of certain parenting practices, particularly corporal punishment. In addition, this study will examine factors that may influence these attitudes and beliefs. Identification of potential factors that influence professionals’ attitudes and beliefs related to CP may increase understanding of how they approach
recommendations and psycho-education with families. It may also highlight issues and needs in the training of mental health professionals who work with children, parents, and families.

KAROLINA KOWARZ
Faculty Advisor: Jennifer Block-Lerner

Background Music in Mindfulness Practice: Effects on State Mindfulness, Emotional Arousal and Relationship with Psychological Flexibility

Current research indicates that prevalence of psychological distress within college populations is substantial (Eisenberg et al., 2011). Meanwhile, dispositional mindfulness has been demonstrated to be associated with healthier psychological functioning amongst college students (Sirois & Tosti, 2012). In light of these research findings, mindfulness practice is proposed to serve as a preventative intervention for mental illness within this population. Although potentially powerful, opening up to aversive private experiences (e.g., difficult thoughts, feelings, and emotions), a key element of many mindfulness-based interventions, may turn certain individuals away from the approach. Meanwhile, others may find it difficult to contact internal stimuli through traditional mindfulness practice (i.e., a meditation script).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the impact of incorporating background music into a mindfulness exercise conducted as part of an acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT-) based workshop protocol addressing values, present moment awareness, and experiential acceptance. Participants include students attending a university in northeastern United States. It is proposed that students will report more powerful reactions toward the mindfulness exercise incorporating background music. Specifically, it is hypothesized that the degree of experienced emotional arousal will be significantly higher in the music group. Additionally, it is hypothesized that levels of state mindfulness will be significantly higher in the music group immediately post intervention. Levels of psychological flexibility are expected to be positively associated with levels of state mindfulness and emotional arousal. Lastly, correlations are expected to be stronger in the non-music group as it is proposed that background music will compensate for lower levels of psychological flexibility in the music group.

BARBARA PREMPEH
Faculty Advisor: David Brandwein

Exploring the Association Between Bullying and Life Satisfaction

There has been growing concern that youth violence has expanded beyond the scope of simple name-calling. The prevalence of bullying appears to increase in late elementary school, peak during middle school, and decline in high school (Eliot & Cornell, 2009). Although bullying is a major issue within school violence, there is still considerable controversy over the best way to address the issue. In previous literature, bullying has been examined in respect to its impact on an individual’s psychological and physical well-being. In addition, an individual’s psychological and physical well-being can lead to the demonstration of bullying behaviors (Wilkins-Shurmer, O’Callaghan, Najman, Bor, Williams, and Anderson, 2003). Another construct that can be used to gain a better understanding of the impact of bullying is quality of life and/or life satisfaction. Research is emerging on the relationship between bullying and quality of life and/or life satisfaction. Studies have shown the impact of quality of life on involvement in bullying and the consequences of being bullied (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderezeer, and
Sink, 2009; Suldo and Huebner, 2004; Valios, Zullig, Drane, and Huebner, 2001). The current study will investigate the association between bullying and life satisfaction in middle and high school students in a sample of public and private schools. Students will be administered two self-report measures; one will assess engagement in bullying behaviors and the other measure will assess life satisfaction. Multiple regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be conducted to examine the relationship between bullying and life satisfaction.

NICOLETTE RITTENHOUSE
Faculty Advisor: Daniela Colognori

Emotion Regulation Development: Does Parent Emotion Regulation and Parenting Style Play a Role in Adolescent Emotion Regulation and Psychopathology?

Emotion regulation is the process used to change one’s own emotional state, to prevent or initiate emotional responding, to modify the significance of the event one’s self, and to modulate the behavioral expression of emotion (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Learning how to effectively regulate emotion facilitates healthy and adaptive psychosocial and emotional functioning (Bridges et al. 2004), while overuse of maladaptive emotion regulation skills have been linked to both externalizing and internalizing problems in early childhood and adolescence (Buckner et al. 2003; Eisenberg et al. 2001a; Sheeber et al. 2000; Silk et al. 2003). Parenting and family experiences have been documented to play a fundamental role in children’s emotional development (Repetti et al. 2002). This project seeks to examine the relationship between parent emotion regulation skills, adolescent emotional regulation skills and adolescent psychopathology. A sample of at least 111 parents will complete measures assessing parenting style, their own emotion regulation skills, and their child’s emotional and social functioning. Additionally, their children will be asked to provide a self-report of emotion regulation skills. We hypothesize that parental factors such as parental emotion regulation skills and parenting style play a role in the adolescents’ emotion regulation development. Furthermore, this study will investigate whether parenting style mediates the relationship between parent emotion regulation and adolescent emotion regulation.

KAREN SUROWIEC
Faculty Advisor: Daniela Colongori

Parentification, Parent Psychopathology, and Infant Development

The infant-parent relationship is one of the most important components of early child development (Lieberman, 2007; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Early interactions within the dyad contribute to the quality of bond created. This bond, also known as attachment, has been shown to influence the trajectory of emotional growth and development (Guajardo, 2009; Raphael, 2010). Discontinuity in the infant-parent relationship has the potential to influence child development across numerous developmental domains, such as communication, problem-solving abilities, and personal-social skills (Sameroff et al, 1982; Paulson, 2009). Research on child development suggests parental psychopathology, such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is associated with an increased risk for disruptions in the infant-parent relationship (Cicchetti et al, 2000; Duch & Rodriguez, 2010; Epiks & Heckler, 2011; Johnson & Flake, 2007). Parent-child roles are an important component of
functional parent-child relationships. When parent-child roles are not clearly defined and a parent has developmentally inappropriate expectations for the child, role-reversal—also referred to as parentification—has occurred. Review of literature suggests that role reversal has the capacity to contribute to developmental delays in children (Macfie, 2005, 2008; Hesse & Main, 2006; Fivaz-Depeursinge et al, 2007; Hooper, 2007). The current study examines court-referred infant-parent dyads as characterized by varying levels of parent psychopathology, child developmental delays, and role-reversal. It is important to understand the complex nature of the infant-parent relationship in hopes of learning new ways to identify and prevent ruptures early in the relationship. This study aims to discover whether infant-parent role-reversal moderates the relationship between parent psychopathology and child developmental outcomes. Once ruptures are discovered, it is important to access infant-parent relationships and provide parent psychoeducation on appropriate parent-child roles in an effort to bolster healthy child development.