



2019 Scholars



Toyin Ajisafe, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, Texas. My PhD in Kinesiology and Health (with a concentration in Biomechanics) is from Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. My MS is in Movement Sciences from Barry University, Miami Shores, Florida.

Broadly, my research aims to understand facilitators and impediments to recurrent movement behaviors in children and youth to the extent they may impact regular physical activity and mitigate the risk of obesity and related chronic diseases. Previously, my research centered on novel movement-enhancing interventions in children with intellectual disabilities. Considering that Hispanic/Latino children are less active and more affected by obesity, more recently, I am exploring questions like associations between early exposure to movement competence determinants (e.g., leg stiffness regulation) on physical activity behavior. Additionally, I am exploring ways to more accurately track physical activity structure and content using techniques like machine learning. My other work focuses on identifying tractable physical fitness surveillance tools, so that parents and clinicians can routinely gain insight into children's physical fitness and potential risk of related adverse health outcomes.

In my current role as an assistant professor, I teach undergraduate-level courses, including Biomechanics and Kinetic Anatomy. Additionally, I teach a graduate-level course in Biomechanics. Email: toyin.ajisafe@tamucc.edu



Susan Andreae, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I earned my MPH in Health Behavior and PhD in Health Education/Health Promotion from the Department of Health Behavior, School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). I completed my postdoctoral work in the Division of Preventive Medicine, UAB. My research interests are to develop and evaluate multi-generational programs using peer support and storytelling to improve health outcomes in individuals with diabetes and their families living in rural communities. My newest project is to develop and pilot test a family-centered program to increase physical activity and decrease sedentary levels in working mothers and their children. Email: sandreae@wisc.edu



Alana Biggers, MD, MPH, FACP

I am an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) College of Medicine where I received my MD degree. I completed residency training in Internal Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, obtained a Master of Public Health in chronic disease epidemiology from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and completed a public health fellowship at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I have interests in health disparity research and achieving health equity. I have experience in breast cancer research, winning

research awards while still in residency and as a featured researcher at the National American Society of Clinical Oncology Conference and Quality Care Symposia in 2014. Currently, I have a NIH NIDDK diversity supplement for research in diabetes mellitus and sleep. I am conducting an observational study evaluating sleep habits with African-Americans and Latinos with Type 2 diabetes mellitus. I am interested in developing behavioral interventions to improve sleep health in African-Americans with increased cardiovascular risk. Recently, I submitted a NIH career development award and am looking into other career development awards to develop skills to become an independent researcher. I also aim to improve diversity among faculty at UIC College of Medicine as the Co-Chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force in the Department of Medicine. I am a consultant for the Bias Reduction in Internal Medicine (BRIM) Initiative, another NIH funded grant to address bias in academic medicine. Lastly, I enjoy teaching students and residents about best practices in urban medicine for underserved populations as the Population Health curriculum lead in the College of Medicine. Email: abigger2@uic.edu



Kristin Black, MPH, PhD

I am a first-year, tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Education and Promotion at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. I received my MPH (2011) and PhD (2016) in Maternal and Child Health from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. My career commitment is to utilize community-based participatory research and mixed methods approaches to understand and address inequities in chronic disease and reproductive health outcomes. Currently, my research focuses on addressing the sexual and

reproductive health needs of breast cancer survivors, utilizing an anti-racism lens to drive systems-level change in cancer care, determining how the current racial climate impacts childbearing and childrearing decision-making, and exploring racial inequities in maternal morbidity and mortality trends. Email: blackkr18@ecu.edu



Aishia Brown, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Public Health and Information Sciences at the University of Louisville. I earned my PhD in Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences with a concentration in Youth Development from Texas A&M University. I completed my postdoctoral training, focused on health equity, at the University of Louisville's Youth Violence Prevention Research Center and the Louisville Metro Government Department of Public Health and Wellness Center for Health Equity.

My research examines the connections between community youth engagement, youth-adult partnerships, and cultivating healing spaces for youth that influence community change. I also work closely with community-based youth serving organizations and local government entities to strategize innovative ways to include youth voices in decision-making. Email: aishia.brown@louisville.edu



Jonathan Butler, PhD, Mdiv

I am a research scientist in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, a social epidemiologist, and a minister with interests in the role of religion, childhood experiences and adversity (psychological stress) on health outcomes.

The overarching objective of my research is to develop precision-based behavioral and therapeutic implementation strategies for at-risk individuals and populations across the lifespan. For children, particularly those from U.S. minority groups, there remains critical need to study determinants of advantaged educational and health outcomes beyond the first two years of life when the brain is rapidly developing. However, arguably more important is an understanding of how potential interventions such as organized sports activities and mentoring interact with adverse and other childhood experiences to influence educational and health outcomes. Thus, in collaboration with a sports program and my research, I have helped to launch a pilot study called DiverseCity Health. DiverseCity Health intends to longitudinally evaluate intergenerational social, behavioral, biological and psychosocial factors that potentially impact chronic CVD risk and educational outcomes. Adversity is also associated with obesity and cardiovascular disease in adults. Hence, in collaboration with the YMCA in San Francisco, my work seeks to incorporate social determinants of health into clinical trials aimed at obesity and cardiovascular risk reduction. Email: Jonathan.Butler@ucsf.edu



Leslie Cofie, MPH, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor of Health Education and Promotion in the College of Health and Human Performance at East Carolina University. My research focuses on disparities in cancer prevention and control among underserved populations. I examine factors associated with differences in the health preventive behaviors of foreign-born and US-born individuals. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, I explore the lived experiences of these immigrants in order to gain insights into how salient socioecological factors, such as social network characteristics, may be mobilized to improve their

use of preventive healthcare and engagement in health promoting behaviors. Currently, my research projects include the use of a National level data (e.g. the National Health Interview Survey) to examine cancer screening among foreign-born, and a pilot study to examine the cancer preventive behaviors of black immigrants in North Carolina. Email: Cofiel18@ecu.edu



Yendelela Cuffee, MPH, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor at the Penn State College of Medicine in the Department of Public Health Sciences. I earned my PhD in Clinical and Population Health Research from the University of Massachusetts Medical School and an MPH in Epidemiology from New York Medical College. My postdoctoral research fellowship at New York University Langone College of Medicine focused on cardiovascular disease research and community-based participatory research. During my postdoctoral fellowship, I was awarded an NHLBI supplement to examine spirituality and social support as correlates of medication nonadherence.

My research focuses on examining the psychosocial and behavioral correlates of medication adherence and cardiovascular disease among African Americans and Latinos. Currently, I am investigating the relationship between experiences of race and gender-based discrimination, and emotional and physical well-being among African American women with hypertension. I am conducting two research projects with a Federally Qualified Health Center in Harrisburg, PA; the first examines health literacy, medication adherence, and use of technology among African Americans and Latinos with hypertension. The second project was funded by the Penn State Clinical and Translational Science Institute KL2 program, the objective of this project is to develop a narrative-based intervention to promote healthy behaviors and lifestyle change for African Americans with hypertension. Email: ycuffee@phs.psu.edu



Jennifer Edgoose, MD, MPH

I am an Associate Professor in the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health's (UWSMPH) Department of Family Medicine and Community Health (DFMCH). I completed my MD, MPH from Columbia University and my family medicine residency at the University of Washington. After practicing full-spectrum family medicine for over a decade at a federally qualified health center serving the uninsured and underserved of Tacoma, WA, I joined the UW-Madison DFMCH residency faculty and now serve as director of the department's Office of Community Health. I also

direct the UWSMPH Diversity and Inclusion Advocates program training other medical faculty and senior administrators to serve as mini-chief diversity officers for their departments and divisions. I have most recently served nationally on the Health Equity Team for *Family Medicine for America's Health* where I led development of the Health Equity Curricular Toolkit with 40 interprofessional thought-leaders and educators around the United States and Canada. My research interest is to promote the integration of primary care and public health from a lens of social accountability and health equity. Currently, I am collaborating with the Center for Patient Partnerships and the Population Health Institute Evaluation Research Team to evaluate a patient resource navigator program to address social determinants of health. Email: jennifer.edgoose@fammed.wisc.edu



Deonna Farr, DrPH, MPH, CHES

I am an Assistant Professor in Health Education and Promotion at East Carolina University. Primarily, my research focuses on multilevel influences on chronic disease prevention in Black communities with an emphasis on the adoption of cancer prevention behaviors. Additionally, I am interested in refining existing public health theories and intervention strategies to account for the contexts and experiences of Black communities and developing approaches to improve the racial and ethnic diversity and generalizability of public health research.

My current research includes the: 1) application of advanced mixed-methodologies towards the development of a multilevel intervention to improve the diagnostic resolution of abnormal breast cancer screening results and 2) use of dissemination and implementation science to understand the processes associated with a multilevel intervention to improve colorectal cancer screening rates. My ultimate goal is to build a research program which includes community and investigator-driven interventions to increase the rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer prevention behaviors in Black populations through the use of culturally appropriate evidence-based strategies.

I received my DrPH in Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior from the University of South Carolina, my MPH in Community Health from the George Washington University, my BS in Human Development from Cornell University. Email: farrd17@ecu.edu



Nickolas Frost, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling Psychology in the UW-Madison School of Education. My research and clinical foci converge on my current research path, where I seek to understand the unique mechanisms of effective psychotherapy for underserved populations and develop systemic methods to decrease treatment barriers. I have spent my graduate and post-graduate career developing specific skills in psychotherapy research and practical clinical knowledge with underserved groups to effectively carry out this research program.

In collaboration with colleagues, I helped develop a flexible counseling intervention and institutional method to enhance service utilization for underrepresented college students I completed my PhD in counseling psychology at UW-Madison, clinical internship at the University of Southern California and postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University and Palo Alto VA. Email: ndfrost@wisc.edu



Tanya Funchess, MPH, DHA

I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi in the College of Nursing and School of Health Professions Department of Public Health in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Prior to my appointment at USM, I served the last 17 years in various roles at the Mississippi State Department of Health; Director of Health Equity, Director of the Office of Health Disparities Elimination, Director of Chronic Disease Bureau, Assistant Director of the Office of Tobacco Prevention. I also served as an adjunct professor at Holmes Community College, and the University of Phoenix, Flowood, Mississippi. Under my

leadership at the Mississippi State Department of Health, I have led efforts to release the agency first Health Disparities and Inequalities Report in 2015. In addition, I sought to bring in sustainable programs such as the Mississippi Community Research Fellows Program (CRFT). The CRFT program exists to assist community members to become better consumers of research while encouraging them to use the knowledge and skills learned to identify problems and implement solutions in their communities. I finished my undergraduate degree at the University of Southern Mississippi in Business Administration. I have a Master's in Management from Belhaven University in Jackson, Mississippi; a Master's in Public Health with an emphases on Policy and Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi, and a Doctorate in Health Administration from the University of Phoenix. My research focus is on health disparities and health equity related to obesity, language access, and hepatitis B. I live in Magee, Mississippi with my husband, Chaucer Funchess and son Chanse Funchess. Email: tanya.funchess@usm.edu



Farah Kaiksow, MD, MPP

I am an Assistant Professor (Clinical Health Sciences Track) at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH), where I also completed medical school in 2012. Prior to returning to Madison to join the UWSMPH faculty in 2016 I did my internal medicine residency training at Tulane University in New Orleans. During my four years at Tulane I had the opportunity to work in the Charity Hospital System, one of the oldest medical systems in the country that has provided continuous care for medically indigent people. In addition to my medical training I have a masters degree in Public Policy from the UCLA Luskin School of

Public Affairs. I am an early career health services and care researcher. My interests include health inequities and how public policies (health and other) can be used to reduce or worsen those inequities. I am currently working on projects in two major areas: first, the difference in financial burdens faced by Medicare beneficiaries as it relates to socioeconomic status, and second, cancer care and outcomes in formerly incarcerated patients in Wisconsin. Email:

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Mi Hwa Lee, MSW, PhD

I am an Assistant Professor of School of Social Work at the East Carolina University. I earned my PhD in Social Work from University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. My research focused on understanding the scope and nature of cancer screening disparities in racial/ethnic minority immigrants living in the U.S., as well as developing interventions to increase their screening participation. I seek to understand the impact of social, cultural, and physical environment factors on cancer screening behavior in foreign-born individuals, which will lead to the development of a

culturally appropriate community-based intervention to promote screenings. My work represents an intersection of social work, nursing, and public health approaches, community-based participatory research, and prevention science. The ultimate goal of my research is to inform the development and implementation of relevant public policies and practices for reducing cancer screening disparities in foreign-born populations. Email: leemih17@ecu.edu



Laurel Legenza, PharmD, MS

I am serving as the Interim Director of Global Health at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy and an Assistant Scientist in the Sonderegger Research Center. I am currently conducting research in Cape Town, South Africa and Wisconsin. My research attempts to create practical healthcare tools that allow healthcare providers to make real-time decisions that have an immediate impact on patient care and an improvement in health outcomes. I initiated these projects during my Comparative Health Systems Global Pharmacy Fellowship at the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy. My current South Africa

research includes *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI) quality improvement work, particularly in populations with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and tuberculosis. My research team is now preparing to examine the effects and adaptive behaviors of the recent severe drought on health in Cape Town. In Wisconsin, I am leading geo-spatial mapping of infectious disease data and will incorporate large datasets to build a predictive forecast of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) for a clinical decision support tool. I look forward to meeting the HELI scholars, mentors, and potential collaborators. Email: Legenza@wisc.edu



Kaleea R. Lewis, MSPH, PhD

I am a Preparing Future Faculty for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Missouri- Columbia. I have a joint appointment in the Department of Health Sciences and Women's and Gender Studies. I received my Master of Science and Doctorate of Philosophy in Public Health, with a concentration in Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior from the University of South Carolina. As a scholar trained in the social and health sciences, my research explores how race and racism intersect to produce health inequities among Black Americans. I draw from

critical race theory (CRT) and a social determinants of health framework to help me gain a better understanding of how systems of power and oppression adversely impact health. I use qualitative methods to understand, confront, and challenge the ways in which race and racism operate as a social determinant of health for Black Americans. My newest project will investigate how multiple actors within the campus community conceptualize and promote mental health for Black students. Using situational analysis, this project will explore the complex interplay between the social factors, discourses, and systems of power that shape how the mental health of Black students is conceptualized and promoted at a PWI. Email:

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Jenil Patel, MBBS, MPH, PhD

I am a postdoctoral research fellow at the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention, housed at Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Having grown up in India, I have my undergraduate training in medicine and surgery (MBBS) from Gujarat University (2011). I received my MPH in Health Education and Health Promotion from Western Kentucky University (2013), and PhD in Epidemiology (2018) from The University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston. My doctoral training was

focused on occupational epidemiology and was based on a CDC/NIOSH funded R01 study on occupational asthma that examined the prevalence of work-related asthma, associated risk factors and asthma burden among healthcare professionals in Texas. Additionally, through a separate pilot project grant I conducted an independent study on occupational asthma among understudied group of certified nurse aides in Texas. I also developed my dissertation under the R01 and pilot project grants.

My newest research projects on birth defects focus on studying occupational exposures, as well as genetic and non-genetic risk factors among pregnant women and their associations with birth outcomes using novel statistical techniques. I am currently designing a study on occupational exposures to asthmagens (biological or chemical agents causing asthma) in pregnant women of disparities in Arkansas. With a unique focus on addressing racial/ethnic disparities, the study will involve development of a population-specific job exposure matrix that is intended to measure the maternal exposures to asthmagens in the workplace and resulting birth outcomes.

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Phoutdavone "Noy" Phimphasone-Brady, PhD

As an emerging independent clinician-scientist in the field of implementation (D&I) science, my career goals are to evaluate and examine the implementation, adaptability, and sustainability of evidence-based interventions to address health disparities and promote health equity for chronic disease management. I am currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Family Medicine, the Adult and Child Consortium for Outcomes Research and Delivery Science (ACCORDS), and the Center on Aging at the University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Campus.

My program of research involves understanding the dynamic relationship between socio-cultural, system level, and individual factors associated with obesity and other comorbidities and translating and adapting evidence-based interventions to different health service settings. I received my PhD in health psychology, clinical concentration, from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte in 2017. Much of my previous research has focused on adapting evidence-based interventions (EBI) and examining the effectiveness of adapted EBIs on diverse chronic disease issues (diabetes, obesity, binge eating disorder) across a range of populations (American Indian youth, Latina women, older adults). Complementing my research area, my training as a clinical health psychologist informs my future research investigations in

chronic disease management by providing a unique perspective of the patient experience.
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Maria D. Politis, DrPH, MPH

I am a perinatal/birth defects epidemiology postdoctoral fellow at the Arkansas Center for Birth Defects Research and Prevention in the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. I am a first-generation Greek-American and a first-generation college student in my family. I earned my DrPH in Epidemiology from the University of Kentucky, an MPH in Epidemiology from Georgia Southern University, and a BS in Biology from Campbell University. While pursuing my DrPH, I was a Central Appalachian Regional Education and Research Fellow, funded by NIOSH, which

expanded my knowledge in environmental health and agricultural populations. My dissertation examined the association of atrazine exposure in ground and surface water and birth defects for the state of Kentucky.

My research focuses on perinatal and birth defects epidemiology and understanding the different causes and risk factors of birth defects, with a focus on certain populations-at-risk and environmental exposures. My current projects include an international comparison of mortality rates among children with diaphragmatic hernia based on geographic regions and access to healthcare, a project that investigates racial and ethnic differences in severity of types of congenital heart defects in children, and a study examining racial/ethnic differences in neurodevelopmental outcomes in children with congenital heart defects. Email:

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Kimberly Reynolds, MD

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. My research interests focus on how to better teach medical students to deliver effective cross-cultural patient care, as well as how parent engagement improves pediatric patient outcomes. I am also interested in Quality Improvement in asthma management in the primary care setting.

Medical education can have a profound effect on health delivery to African-Americans by understanding how these biases are being reinforced in medical school education during the training of physicians. Once we understand how unconscious biases enter our medical education system, we can devise evidence-based teaching methods to reduce or eliminate these biases. My long term goal is to devise an integrated, effective, and sustainable curriculum that medical schools across the country can implement to address the role of unconscious biases toward African-Americans in medical education. Specifically, I hope to develop curricula that address biases and measure the impact

that it has on pain management in the Pediatric intensive care unit. Email: kreynolds@med.miami.edu



Erica Spears, PhD

I recently completed my postdoctoral research fellowship in the Center for Health Ecology and Equity Research (CHEER) in the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University. I am assigned to the Center's NIAMS/NIH R01 grant entitled "Psychosocial Factors and Lupus Progression among African American Women." My research on this project focuses on the social-environmental determinants of health among African American women with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a disease characterized by significant disparities along both gender and

racial lines.

I earned my doctorate in health education at Texas A&M University and my work focuses on promoting health equity and chronic disease prevention in the African American community. My dissertation examined knowledge gaps and perceptions of risk surrounding Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in African Americans and I employed a mixed-methods approach and incorporated geographic mapping tools, like ArcGIS and Google Earth, to identify health promoters and barriers within the built environment. Prior to my doctoral studies, I worked as a public health practitioner. I began my career as a health educator and transitioned into grant writing, management, and program development. As a practitioner, I oversaw projects from nine unique funding sources, ranging from foundations to the federal government. I hold an undergraduate degree from Louisiana State University in Mass Communication and a Master's in Speech Communication, with a concentration in health, from the University of Houston. Email:

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Shaila Strayhorn, PhD, MPH

I am a postdoctoral fellow with the T32 Cancer Education and Career Development Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. I completed my bachelor's in biology at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA and my master's in epidemiology from the University of Michigan School of Public Health at Ann Arbor, MI. In August 2018, I graduated with my PhD in social and behavioral sciences from the University of Memphis School of Public Health. My current research interests focusing on creating survey tools designed to assess the type and source of social support among African American cancer survivors. I am also interested in the

implementation and evaluation of community-based participatory research programs designed to reduce racial health disparities among African Americans. Email: sstray2@uic.edu



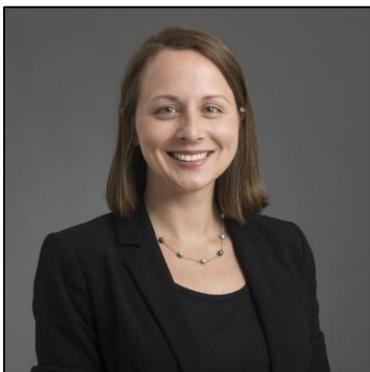
Maranda Ward, EdD, MPH

I am an Assistant Professor in the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences where I design, evaluate, and teach health equity curriculum for undergraduate students that integrates my growing Soundcloud #EquityMatters podcast. As the Training Director for the GW Academy of Health Sciences I ensure that the professionals across the public-private partnership have the requisite support they need to support the dual enrolled high school students in the GW pipeline program. However, when asked, I describe myself as a community educator, curriculum

developer, and youth builder.

I have strong commitments to service-learning, equity, community legacy, youth development, and honoring youth voice. As an affiliate faculty for the GW Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service, I translated my participatory action research on youth identity into a youth-led canvas-based mural on preserving D.C. legacy. My research is further converted into practice as the Co-Founder and Executive Director of [Promising Futures](#) - a youth development pipeline for D.C. youth ages 11-24 that integrates a social justice approach to positive youth development using edu-tainment to invite youth to explore their civic and social identities, social inequities, and health seeking behaviors. I am also a certified trainer for three Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) evidence-based interventions: Focus on Youth + ImPACT, [VOICES/VOCES](#), and [Project AIM](#). I authored a curriculum based on the Social Change Model of Leadership for undergraduate GW business school students to implement a citywide social entrepreneurship venture with D.C. youth.

I earned my Doctorate in Education from GW, my Master's in Public Health from Tulane University, and my Bachelor's degrees in Sociology and Anthropology from Spelman College. For more information, visit www.marandaward.com



Dominika A. Winiarski, PhD

I joined Rush University Medical Center as an instructor and postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and will transition into an assistant professor role in July 2019. I completed my undergraduate degree in Psychology at Northern Michigan University and my MA in Developmental Psychology (with a concentration in risk, resilience, and prevention) at Teachers College, Columbia University. I earned both an MA and PhD in Clinical Psychology from Emory University. As a licensed psychologist and clinical scientist, my research and clinical interests primarily focus on increasing access to mental health services

among historically underserved populations. I am also interested in the development and implementation of evidence-based treatments for emotion dysregulation among youth who are at increased risk for impulsive behavior and substance abuse problems. My current research focuses on the physiological and behavioral mechanisms by which early life stress contributes to the development of aggressive behavior among unstably housed young adults. Email:

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