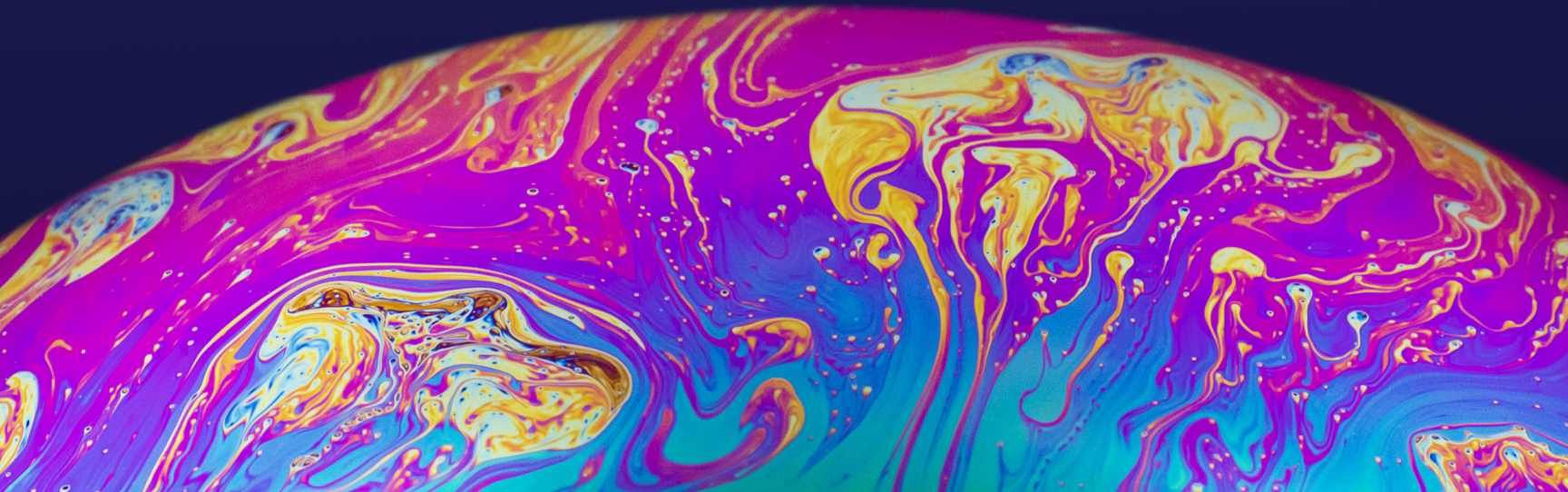


Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

FOCUS

SPECIAL EDITION

DIVERSITY
EQUITY
INCLUSION
BELONGING



Focus

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Focus

A special publication of the
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Spring 2021, Vol. 1

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the Yale School of Public Health.



New Publication Focuses on Issues in Public Health

Welcome to Yale School of Public Health *Focus*, the first in an annual series of special publications produced by the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH).

We chose the name because we intend to *Focus* on important issues in public health and within the YSPH community. These special communications will bring into focus such compelling issues as climate change, cancer research, the opioid epidemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental justice as we see and respond to them through the YSPH lens. We also seek to highlight facets where we, as a school, are most uniquely excellent, including our interdisciplinary programs, modeling expertise, and the many innovative opportunities for students to apply their knowledge through internships, community engagement, and public health practice.

This first issue focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, or DEIB. The YSPH community is committed to embedding a diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist culture as part of our 2023 strategic vision and plan. We continue to build upon the foundational efforts of our Association of Yale Alumni in Public Health leaders and its Emerging Majority Affairs Committee (EMAC), as well as those of the YSPH DEI Committee and the Emerging Majority Students Association (EMSA). Together, we will seek to further integrate related values, policies, and practices throughout the fabric of our community. While 2020 was an arduous year for healthy equity and racial justice, our goal to further advance diverse and inclusive research, education, and impact is stronger than ever.

In this issue, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mayur Desai describes school activity to help realize our vision of an inclusive and equitable space for all. This includes a recent survey that asked YSPH staff members to confidentially share their experiences and perspectives on DEIB

at YSPH. Survey data are being collected by our new DEIB administrator, Leigh Roberts, who will also be conducting focus groups and one-on-one conversations with select constituents at our school.

In this issue you will also find a timeline providing the latest summary of what our researchers, students, staff, and alumni are doing to help stop the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes innovation in curbing transmission, testing, contact tracing, advancing health equity, educating vaccine-hesitant persons, forecasting the pandemic, and assessing its medical and social costs.

I encourage you to read the feature articles that highlight what we like to call our “hidden stars” within the YSPH community – people who are pursuing their passion projects and making a difference as students, researchers, and public health professionals, often without public recognition. Alumna Kathryn Finney is helping Black and brown businesswomen secure the support they need as innovators and entrepreneurs. Student Emmanuella Asabor (MD-PhD program) is examining the disproportionate impact the coronavirus has had on vulnerable communities. YSPH staff member Eduardo Reyes deploys his language skills and health system knowledge to help individuals navigate the health care system as part of the Yale Cancer Disparities Firewall Project.

Finally, I invite you to take a moment to meet the wonderful leaders of our affinity groups and our YSPH student diversity ambassadors at the Roundtable. These energized and dedicated individuals represent all that YSPH envisions in a supportive, inclusive, and diverse institution.

I would like to thank all who have shared their stories with us to make this special publication possible. I hope that you will find the stories that follow as informative and inspiring as I did.

Sten H. Vermund
Dean, Yale School of Public Health

Amy C. Justice, M.D. '88, Ph.D., C.N.H.



Use of Anticoagulants May Reduce Death in COVID-19 Patients

Medications that prevent blood clots, or anticoagulants, may be effective in treating patients with COVID-19.

Research published in the *The BMJ* in February shows that patients put on preventive doses of anticoagulants within the first 24 hours of being hospitalized with COVID-19 are about 30% less likely to die than those not put on anticoagulant medication.

The findings are based on a review of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs hospitalization data from March 1, 2020, through July 31, 2020. Of the 4,297 patients who were hospitalized with confirmed COVID-19, 14.3% of patients who received prophylactic anticoagulation medication and 18.7% of patients who

didn't receive the medication died within 30 days of hospital admission, the study found.

Amy C. Justice, M.D. '88, Ph.D., C.N.H. Long Professor of Medicine (General Medicine) and professor of Public Health (Health Policy) served as co-principal investigator of the study.

"This study is an outstanding example of the use of electronic health record data from the national Veterans Affairs health care system to rapidly address urgent problems in health care," Justice said.

Phyllis Mugadza, YC '21, M.P.H. '22



YSPH Student Wins Global Competition

A Yale School of Public Health student's ambitious proposal to create upcycling maker spaces for recycling in developing nations with high waste mismanagement has won the Reimagine Challenge 2020 Global Competition.

Phyllis Mugadza, YC '21, M.P.H. '22, a student in the five-year BABS/MPH program, said her proposal is an effort to bring dignity and better working conditions to areas that have been continually exploited by world businesses in the global waste crisis. Mugadza is one of just 20 entrepreneurs worldwide to win the competition — and a \$25,000 tuition scholarship funded by Schmidt Futures. The total award is \$50,000. Yale will receive the other \$25,000.

Her proposed maker spaces would be part of larger centers that provide foundational academic courses, supplies, tools, and a source of income for grassroots innovators to make crafts and sell them on the international market. Mugadza is one of two Yale students to win the Reimagine Challenge. The other, School of Management student Manas Punhani '21, proposed the creation of a learning platform for migrant and refugee communities.

Robert Rosenkranz, '62



Online MPH Program Receives Significant Gift

The Yale School of Public Health's new online executive master's degree in public health program (Executive MPH) has received a significant boost with a \$600,000 gift.

Robert Rosenkranz, '62, philanthropist and chairman of Delphi Financial, donated to the school to augment the online program, which officially gets underway this summer. The gift will be used to support the development of the program's online courses, including working with faculty to develop the content, filming the course, and post-production editing. This new gift intention is part of Mr. Rosenkranz's \$1.6 million commitment

for online education at Yale University. Rosenkranz said he was motivated to make the gift because of the power and potential of online education and the need for a well-trained public health workforce, as the current pandemic has made clear to everyone.

"This is an investment in the future," Rosenkranz said. "The need could not be greater, and the Yale School of Public Health has created the program to help meet this need. I am excited about its potential."

Emily Saadi, M.P.H. '21, and Ryan Saadi, M.D., M.P.H. '95



YSPH Alum Pursuing Novel COVID-19, Cancer Treatments

Tevogen Bio, a clinical stage biotechnology company led by Yale School of Public Health alum Ryan Saadi, M.D., M.P.H. '95, is seeking permission from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to begin clinical trials for its novel COVID-19 treatment using proprietary antigen-specific T-cell technology.

The company's investigational new drug application is under review. Saadi, a YSPH-trained infectious disease epidemiologist, is chairman and chief executive officer of Tevogen Bio. Neal Flomenberg, a nationally known bone marrow transplant specialist and chair of the Department of Medical Oncology at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, is overseeing testing of the targeted T-cell technology to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

In the proposed trials, T cells that have been programmed and

grown in a lab will be studied for their ability to recognize and destroy COVID-19 infected cells. Tevogen is also investigating use of the technology to treat different types of cancer.

The Saadi family has more than one connection to the Yale School of the Public Health. Ryan Saadi's daughter, Emily Saadi, M.P.H. '21, is a second-year student in the Department of Chronic Disease Epidemiology. Ryan Saadi credits YSPH Professor Emeritus Curtis Patton with inspiring her to pursue a career in public health during the times she visited the school with her father on alumni days and other occasions.

Leigh Roberts



New Administrator Supports Dean's Office and Office of DEIB

Leigh Roberts joined the Yale School of Public Health on Nov. 2, 2020, as a new administrator for both the dean's office and the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB).

She is responsible for the operational management of DEIB and Advanced Professional M.P.H. programs. In the Office of the Dean, Roberts will lead special projects, process correspondence, and prepare briefings, reports, and presentations.

Roberts brings over 20 years of experience working in various roles in community and nonprofit organizations and several institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and University System. Most recently, she was director of

Career Services at Gateway Community College in New Haven, where she developed programming on social justice reform, diversity, inclusion, equity, and community engagement. She also served as the adviser for the Black Student Association, where she helped to secure grants to address disparities for diverse students, among other efforts. Roberts also developed pipeline programs that created opportunities for underrepresented individuals and wrote and secured a grant (STEM Girls Rock) to provide exposure to female students of color in the city's most at-risk high school.

Susan Shur-Fen Gau, M.D., Ph.D. '01



Alumni Appointed to Top Posts in Taiwan

Three Yale School of Public Health alumni have been appointed to top leadership posts in Taiwan.

Susan Shur-Fen Gau, M.D., Ph.D. '01, took office as vice superintendent of National Taiwan University Hospital (NTUH) on August 1, 2020. She is the first female vice superintendent in the 125-year history of the hospital, which is Taiwan's top university hospital with 3,000 beds and six branch hospitals including Taiwan's first cancer hospital. Shur-Fen Gau is a psychiatrist, professor, and researcher specializing in medical psychology, epidemiology, preventive medicine, occupational therapy, and brain and mind sciences. Prior to her appointment, Shur-Fen Gau served as the director and staff psychiatrist for the Department of Psychiatry at NTU Hospital. She is nationally known for her dedication to pediatric psychiatry and is a staunch defender of the rights of children and adolescents with

Nai-Wen Kuo, M.P.H. '92



mental illness. She earned her Ph.D. in epidemiology at YSPH. Shur-Fen Gau said former YSPH Professor Kathleen Ries Merikangas, currently chief of the Genetic Epidemiology Research Branch at the National Institute of Mental Health and her mentor at YSPH, was instrumental in fostering her academic and research success.

Nai-Wen Kuo, M.P.H. '92, took office as the dean of the College of Management at Taipei Medical University on Jan. 1. He previously served as the university's dean of the College of Public Health (2016-20) and dean of the Office of International Affairs (2011-16). As dean of the College of Public Health, Kuo established new partnerships with several world-renowned universities and the school provided critical support to the Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare. As dean of the College of Management, Kuo will focus on information integration and innovative

Shou-Hsia Cheng, Ph.D. '93

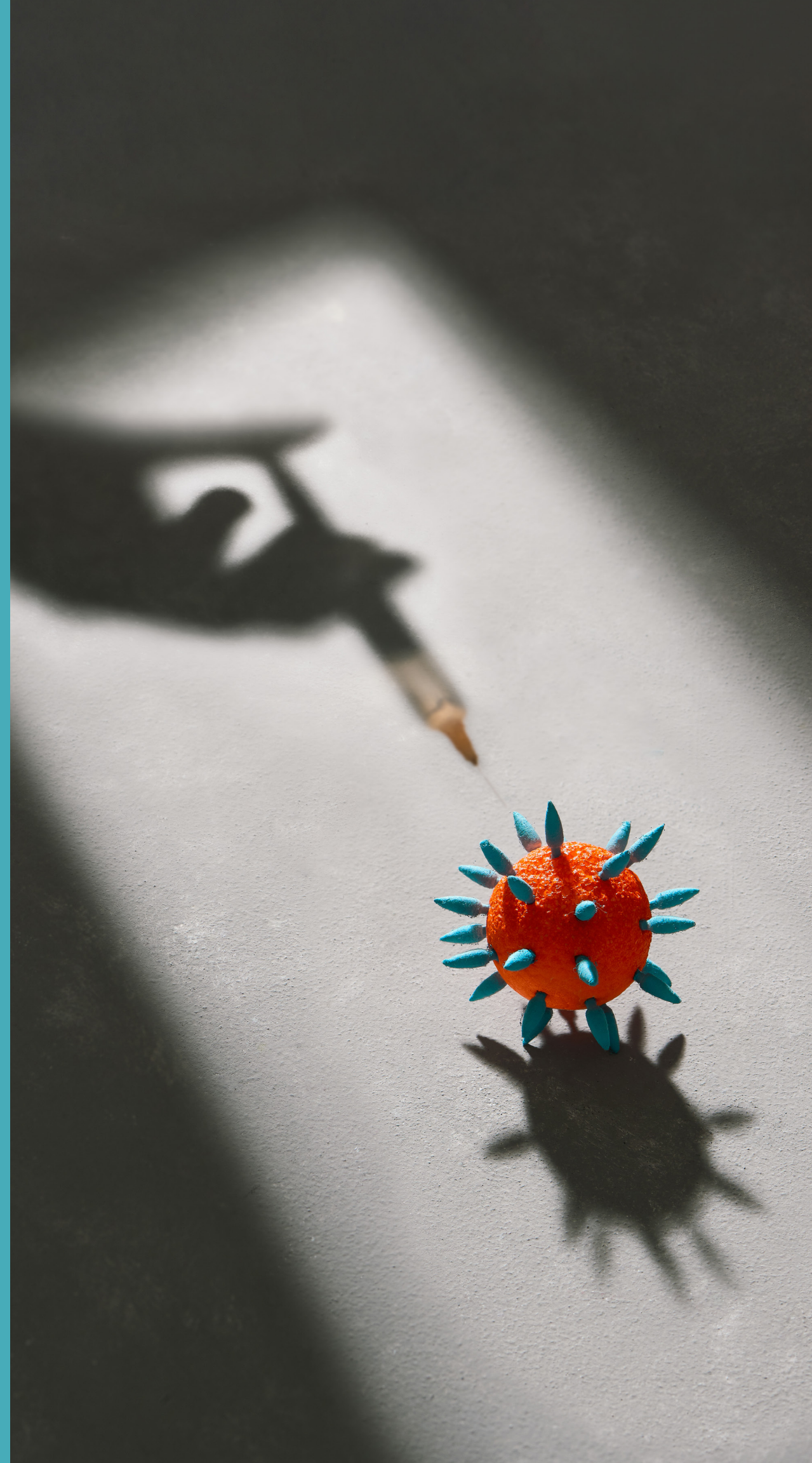


technologies to rapidly respond to continuously developing social needs. Kuo graduated from YSPH with a degree in health care administration and management.

Shou-Hsia Cheng, Ph.D. '93, took office in August 2020 as the 10th dean of the National Taiwan University College of Public Health, the first and only CEPH-accredited public health college in Asia. Earlier, Cheng served as a professor at the NTU College of Public Health is the first and only CEPH-accredited public health college in Asia. Prior to being appointed dean, Cheng served as a professor at the NTU Institute of Health Policy and Management at the College of Public Health (2004-present) and the institute's director (2006-08, 2010-16). Cheng is considered an expert on Taiwan's national single-payer health care system. He graduated from YSPH with a degree in health policy and resource management.

COVID-19 timeline

Yale School of Public Health Responds to COVID-19 Pandemic



JULY 2020

YSPH Assistant Professor Krystal Pollitt, an environmental and chemical engineer, develops guidelines for schools and arts venues to follow to maximize air purity and reduce COVID-19 transmission risks.

World Health Organization announces that COVID-19 can be transmitted through the air after more than 200 scientists sign a letter urging the agency to revise its recommendations. WHO notes that the virus may linger in the air in crowded indoor spaces and emphasizes that the virus may be spread by asymptomatic individuals.

AUG. 31 – Schools in Connecticut reopen for the first time since they were shut down in March. Less than one-third of schools reopen fully for in-person learning; most use a mix of online and in-person learning.

YSPH staff assist city of New Haven in a variety of service capacities including: conducting outbreak investigations and COVID-19 testing in city's Learning Hub network, volunteering at local food banks and grocery delivery programs through United Way of Greater New Haven and serving on city's COVID-19 Risk Communication Committee.

AUGUST 2020

AUG. 15 - The FDA issues an Emergency Use Authorization for SalivaDirect, a test developed by Yale School of Public Health researchers that is less invasive than standard nasal swabs. The tests report results quickly, are less costly to perform and produce results that are as accurate as those using nasal swabbing.

Dean Sten Vermund and Assistant Professor Krystal Pollitt tour 14 CT schools to provide guidance on indoor air quality, engineering decisions.

Assistant Prof. Caroline Johnson, working with colleagues at the Yale School of Medicine, discovers a likely metabolic difference between men and women that may explain worse COVID-19 health outcomes in men, opening up a new therapeutic research option.

Please note: This timeline is a continuation of the timeline featured in the Yale Public Health Fall 2020 magazine that ended in June 2020.

SEPTEMBER 2020

SEPT. 8 – Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, speaking at a YSPH event, cautions that a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is anticipated in the fall as more people congregate inside. “We’re not out of the woods yet,” Lamont says.

SEPT. 16 – The Trump administration releases a vaccine distribution plan. The plan aims to make a COVID-19 vaccine free for all Americans, with the vaccine being rolled out in January 2021.

YSPH researchers, working with colleagues at the Yale School of Engineering & Applied Science, show that daily wastewater testing can provide early detection of changes in COVID-19 transmission rates in local communities.

First three independent labs authorized to perform YSPH-developed SalivaDirect tests, making the new testing protocol available to patients in New York, Florida, and Minnesota.

OCTOBER 2020

OCT. 8 – Connecticut’s third phase of reopening allows increased indoor capacity at businesses including restaurants, and the limited use of indoor performing arts venues. As more of Connecticut’s economy reopens, the virus begins to have a resurgence, with an uptick in cases, positivity rates, and hospitalizations.

YSPH researchers, working in tandem with colleagues at Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health, develop Covidestim, a series of models showing real-time COVID-19 levels county by county in the United States.

Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont taps four YSPH experts – Dr. Albert Ko, Assistant Prof. Jason Schwartz, Dr. James Hadler, and Assistant Prof. Tekisha Dwan Everette – to serve on a state COVID-19 vaccine advisory committee.

An interdisciplinary team of researchers at Yale and Columbia universities, including experts from the Yale School of Public Health, create a national interactive map to guide policymakers in deploying health care workers to communities hit hard by COVID-19.

A study by YSPH Associate Professor and Yale Associate Dean for Health Equity Research Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith and others shows Black people are 3.5 times as likely to die of COVID-19 as white people and Hispanics are nearly twice as likely to die, highlighting the pandemic’s devastation of Black and Latino communities.

NOVEMBER 2020

NOV. 2 – Gov. Lamont announces that the state will retreat from the third phase of reopening and restrict indoor dining at restaurants and social gatherings, while also asking all residents to remain home between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.

NOV. 9 – Dr. Nunez-Smith is chosen by President-elect Joe Biden to co-chair a new COVID-19 Advisory Board with former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, M.D. ’03, M.B.A. ’03, and David Kessler, former dean of Yale School of Medicine and past commissioner of the FDA.

A YSPH study suggests that the coronavirus pandemic is taking an extreme psychological toll on health care workers around the country and the effects on them could be long lasting.

A team of investigators led by YSPH Prof. A. David Paltiel finds that a COVID-19 vaccine program’s success will depend more on its implementation and factors related to manufacturing, distribution, and public acceptance than the efficacy of the vaccine itself.

The Yale School of Public Health creates special Rapid Response Fund – a donor-driven initiative to provide urgent funding to YSPH researchers working on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic.

Connecticut experiences its second surge, with hospitalizations and deaths increasing.

DECEMBER 2020

President-elect Biden appoints Dr. Nunez-Smith to lead a new White House task force on health equity.

DEC. 14 – The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrives in Connecticut. State officials aim to vaccinate the entire state by early fall 2021.

DEC. 15 – A study by YSPH Professor Jeffrey Townsend and others suggests a weeklong quarantine with conditions could be just as effective as the standard 14-day quarantine when it comes to preventing transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus causing COVID-19.

As of Dec. 31, over 300,000 Americans have died from COVID-19.

JANUARY 2021

JAN. 8 – Yale School of Public Health postdoctoral fellow Tara Alpert discovers mutations in COVID-19 test samples that confirm a new UK variant of the virus is present in Connecticut.

JAN. 28 – Official death toll attributed to COVID-19 surpasses 7,000 in Connecticut, just two months after the state eclipsed 5,000 deaths.

FEBRUARY 2021

Researchers at Yale and Columbia universities, including Professor Amy Kapczynski, co-director of the Yale Global Health Justice Partnership, create an interactive map that helps policymakers determine the most equitable and effective way to distribute COVID-19 vaccinations in every county in every state in the U.S.

Dr. Amy Justice, professor of public health (health policy), serves as co-principal investigator on a study that finds anticoagulants used to prevent blood clots may be effective in treating patients with COVID-19 when they are administered within 24 hours of patient hospitalization.

MARCH 2021

MAR. 1 – SalivaDirect, the innovative COVID-19 testing protocol created by the YSPH Grubaugh Lab, hits a milestone with 100 labs in 36 U.S. states approved for use of the fast, low-cost, easy, and accurate testing method.

A study led by YSPH Professor A. David Paltiel published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* finds that total SARS-CoV-2 infections and COVID-19 mortality could be greatly reduced if people used rapid home-based COVID-19 antigen tests once a week to check for possible infection.



THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

the DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & BELONGING *issue*

In this edition, we share inspiring stories from members of our diverse YSPH community, highlighting their personal journeys, passion projects, and feelings about the importance of DEIB and racial equity.

At the Yale School of Public Health, we are committed to fostering a culture rooted in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. These core values are at the heart of our teaching, scholarship, community, engagement, and advocacy.

While the work of advancing DEIB is everyone's responsibility, I'd like to share some of the key resources we have in place at YSPH. Dean Sten Vermund created the leadership position of associate dean for DEI in July 2019, and I am honored to serve as the inaugural officeholder and lead the school's efforts in these critical areas. In November 2020, YSPH welcomed Leigh Roberts as our first DEIB Administrator. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with and learn from Leigh, who brings two decades of experience in higher education and DEI to YSPH. Our efforts cannot be successful without the active engagement of individuals across the YSPH community. Thus, Leigh and I work closely with YSPH's DEI Committee, which I chair and includes students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Representing alumni on the DEI Committee are Kathe Fox, Ph.D. '81, president of the Board of Directors of the Association of Yale Alumni in Public Health (AYAPH), and Lynne Rosenwald-Bannister, M.P.H. '77, a member of the AYAPH's Emerging Majority Affairs Committee (EMAC). Student members of the DEI Committee include our YSPH Diversity Ambassadors and Graduate School liaisons. These students and the members of YSPH's various student affinity groups play a key role in building community and supporting students from minoritized backgrounds. In addition, we work closely with YSPH's Office of Public Health Practice, which, among its many responsibilities, helps to develop and sustain equitable partnerships with community-based organizations whose work is grounded in antiracism and health equity. Finally, our efforts have been bolstered by a new endowed DEI fund, made possible by a generous donation from Dr. Pilar Vargas and her husband, YSPH Dean Vermund.

In October 2020, Yale President Peter Salovey announced the next phase of the Belonging at Yale initiative, which will "delve into our history, assess and build on our current actions, support members of the university community, and create a stronger Yale for the future." At YSPH, we are developing a five-year action plan that aligns with President

Salovey's vision and the recommendations of the President's Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging. In addition to this action planning, we are engaged in a variety of DEIB-related activities, four of which are highlighted here. First, this year, we successfully launched two new academic concentrations focused on health equity and social justice: U.S. Health and Justice (led by Associate Professor Danya Keene) and Climate Change and Health (led by Professor Robert Dubrow). Second, we are continuing to investigate and adopt best practices for recruiting and retaining students, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds. This includes reaching out to and developing relationships with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions, as well as professional organizations, such as the National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE), which support the careers of people of color. Third, we are hiring an outstanding scholar and teacher in the area of racism and health. The individual selected for this faculty position will have expertise in how racism is embedded in our institutions and systems and the deleterious effects this has on health. Fourth, we are engaged in an effort to study YSPH culture as it relates to issues of DEIB. We have begun by surveying staff, which will be followed up by focus group and one-on-one interviews. We will then move on to studying how YSPH is experienced by students and faculty. Findings from these studies will inform our efforts to identify areas of improvement and actions that we can take to help strengthen the DEIB culture at YSPH.

It is my hope that through these collaborative activities, and many more to come, the Yale School of Public Health will firmly establish a culture in which diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are infused in all aspects of our community, our curriculum, and our work in public health research and practice. I invite you to join me in furtherance of this goal.

Mayur M. Desai, '94 M.P.H., '97 Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM IS HER BUSINESS—AND OURS

BY COLIN POITRAS

Elyse Galloway, M.P.H. '17, Is On the Front Lines



As the country struggles to address the public health crisis of systemic racism, many are turning to the business community to help lead the way.

A recent survey by Edelman, the world's largest PR firm, found that 61% of Americans expect corporations to speak out against racial injustice.

As an Edelman account supervisor and a fellow at CEO Action for Racial Equity, Elyse Galloway, M.P.H. '17, is on the front lines of this effort, helping advance racial equity through public policy and developing corporate engagement strategies that address systemic racism and social injustice in the realm of health.

"It's really great to see industries across the board, regardless of what sector they're in, engaging not only in conversations about racial equity but also providing resources to advance racial equity in this way," said Galloway.

At Edelman, Galloway uses her public health knowledge to inform and counsel corporate and organizational leaders from hospitals and health care providers to governments and nonprofit organizations.

CEO Action for Racial Equity is a subgroup within CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion, which is a coalition of more than 1,600 CEO signatories from some of the world's leading companies who are leveraging their individual and collective voices to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Edelman is one of those signatories and sponsors Galloway's Fellowship, allowing her to spend 50% of her time working directly on racial equity initiatives.

"It's an immense honor being in the fellowship," Galloway said. "I work with a lot of really inspiring individuals who have innovative ideas in regard to racial equity, health equity,

and the opportunities we have to dismantle these disparities overall."

Galloway isn't just helping corporations find innovative solutions to addressing systemic racism — she's also launched an initiative of her own.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2019, Galloway launched the This Is Well Collective, which seeks to eliminate health disparities experienced by Black women by establishing a Black wellness culture that allows them to thrive. The Collective does this by creating empowerment spaces where Black women can gather to share their wellness journeys, successes, and struggles with others in a safe and supportive environment.

"This workshop is such a therapeutic and much-needed space for Black women," one participant says on the Collective's website. "It was inviting, trusting and safe. We were able to share and be vulnerable with one another. I felt heard, seen, and valued."

Galloway said the well-rounded education she received at the Yale School of Public Health was perfect training for her career at Edelman and beyond. Her responsibilities at Edelman vary widely, from helping the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Economic Forum with pandemic preparedness and immediate corporate COVID-19 response to preparing communication strategies for American pharmaceutical companies.

"One thing that was incredibly unique and impactful for me at YSPH was how the faculty encouraged me to think of public health from a diverse lens," Galloway said. "I took

classes at the Law School; I took classes in the sociology department and the School of Management, and I think having such a robust perspective really prepared me for what I'm doing now."

Now that she's transitioned from public health student to public health professional,

Galloway says she has come to realize just how imperative diversity is within the field.

"If you look at public health practitioners and advocates, a lot of times they don't resemble the diverse populations they serve, and that can leave people feeling excluded by a system that seems distant or uncaring to them,"

she said. "Public health as a profession has to keep pace with changing demographics. There is a huge need for diversity in the health sector in general, from hospital and care facilities to management and academia, because a greater diversity of experiences and perspectives supports greater innovations for public health."



"PUBLIC HEALTH AS A PROFESSION HAS TO KEEP PACE WITH CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS."

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

BY COLIN POITRAS

Ffyona Patel, M.P.H. '14, Highlights Importance of Diversity in Public Health

As a first-generation Black woman in America, Ffyona Patel, M.P.H. '14, says her racial and cultural background is an important asset in her international public health work, both in terms of connecting with local partners and in reflecting the diversity of the places where development occurs.

“In my experience, it makes a real difference to local stakeholders to feel like implementers ‘get’ the context and are personally motivated to work side-by-side toward advancements,” Patel said. “It is doing development with and not for, or to, beneficiaries. And seeing yourself reflected in your partners is an important way of bridging relationships equitably.”

At the same time, when working in her U.S. teams, Patel said she is often the only African American in the room. “There’s so much to do

to increase diversity in international development and to invest in the growth and leadership of Black and brown professionals – and women – within international development organizations,” she said. “Women are incredibly essential to advancements in public health worldwide, as they make up the majority of front line health workers, but there’s still much to do to elevate women to leadership positions throughout the sector.”

Highlighting an important aspect of the call for diversity, Patel continued, “Just as important to note, conversations around diversity often focus on race or gender, leaving Black and brown women out of the running for key leadership roles. I’m committed to staying connected to YSPH through mentorship and recruitment efforts to help build a diverse pipeline for the next generation



Ffyona Patel leads a work planning session for the USAID Zimbabwe Assistance Program in Malaria in 2019. The program, led by Abt Associates, provided malaria prevention and control technical assistance including case management, net distribution, and social behavior change.



“SEEING YOURSELF REFLECTED IN YOUR PARTNERS IS AN IMPORTANT WAY OF BRIDGING RELATIONSHIPS EQUITABLY.”

of international development leaders.”

As an associate/scientist at Abt Associates, Patel has worked with stakeholders in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Togo and other developing countries to advance their health systems and improve health outcomes. She is currently regional program manager for the United States Agency for International Development’s Integrated Health Program in the DRC, one of USAID’s largest bilateral programs in maternal, newborn, and child health.

Patel’s collaborative approach to international health was influenced by a course she took early in her career at the Yale School of Public Health. The interdisciplinary course focused on improving health care sustainably in Haiti following the devastating earthquake there in 2010.

As part of the course – Sustainable Development in a Post-Disaster Context – Patel traveled to rural Haiti and worked directly with staff at Hôpital Albert Schweitzer. She and her classmates carefully

designed and implemented technical-assistance projects based on the hospital’s priority needs.

“We worked hand-in-hand with staff to ensure our support was context-specific and realistic, key to any intervention,” said Patel, who is Haitian American and passionate about seeing Haiti – and countries like it – evolve out of development assistance. “That experience set the tone for how I approach every project in my international health career.”

Today, Patel works with health care leaders around the world, bringing her expertise in health-systems strengthening, adaptive management, and evidence-based programming to countries where populations are vulnerable, financial and human resources are limited, and access to quality health care is a challenge. Such realities only serve as motivation for Patel.

“To me, this is where development actors should want to be,” she said. “If it was easy, it would have been done already. It is very rewarding working with local leaders to develop systems and stimulate good governance

that leads to improvements that are sustainable and country-led.”

Patel credits the YSPH with providing her the essential training required to analyze and support complex and fragile health systems, ultimately to improve population health outcomes.

“YSPH gave me an incredible foundation in health politics and policy, health care management, and international health,” said Patel. “Being at YSPH gave me access to top scholars who cared about engaging student minds and developing leaders, not just lecturing or publishing.”

Her advice for current and future YSPH students: “Go for what you’re passionate about, even if it’s outside of your concentration. At Yale, you have an opportunity to take classes across the university and collaborate with professors and students from every school of thought. Multidisciplinary approaches are highly valuable and further set the stage to amplify diverse voices. There are so many possibilities!”



GIRLS' EDUCATION AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

Pavita Singh's Path to Public Health

Pavita Singh, M.P.H. '14, always wanted to do well in higher education. But because of her childhood struggles with anxiety and depression, she worried that perhaps she wouldn't succeed.

It was only after she had a panic attack during her first year at New York University that she was able to come face-to-face with a mental health issue that affects many girls and young women of color.

In going through that experience of intense anxiety, Singh said she learned that mental health stigma can get in

the way of adequate recovery. Realizing other girls and young women were struggling with similar issues, she dedicated her future to changing societal narratives about mental health and female empowerment.

"The stigma that I experienced got me thinking that people should not have to grapple with shame and stigma in addition to the issues with which they are already grappling," Singh said. "People should be encouraged to share their stories, because that facilitates healing and plays a role in breaking the stigma surrounding mental health issues."

Singh currently serves as the acting executive director of Girls Health Ed, a global effort to advance gender equality and foster healthy, informed, and empowered decision-making in adolescent girls and young women through comprehensive health and sexuality education. From speaking at the White House to leading global summits, Singh has made it her life's mission to promote mental health awareness, especially for girls and women of color.

She credits her time at the Yale School of Public Health for much of her success.

"I loved my time at Yale and the opportunities to get involved in the New Haven community," Singh said. "YSPH is one of the best decisions I made."

For her thesis, Singh investigated the interactions between intimate-partner violence and cyberbullying among adolescent girls. Female empowerment has always been a subject that was close to her heart, but after doing research at YSPH, she realized just how important it was. She joined Girls Health Ed as a volunteer while a student at YSPH, gradually rising through the ranks over the years to become its acting leader.

Her Yale education helps her with other projects as well. Singh contributes articles about mental health, wellness, and self-improvement to a variety of publications as a freelance writer. She also has her own writing and editing business called pavEDITa, and serves as the director of content and communications for a virtual knowledge-sharing platform

called *Konversai*. In addition, her first poetry book, *To All the Magic in Me*, is coming out this year.

Beyond her long list of experiences and accomplishments, Singh said that one of her biggest goals in life is to spread four things: "light, love, learning, and laughter."

"I know that I will always be doing that in some way, shape or form," she said about her future. "But the exact way that that looks? You know, I think that's a bit hard to say."

For Singh, however, one thing is certain: That future will include the important work of uplifting girls and women. "When we get girls and young women to realize their own power," she said, "we are really changing the world."



"WHEN WE GET GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TO REALIZE THEIR OWN POWER, WE ARE REALLY CHANGING THE WORLD."

ADDRESSING HEALTH CARE INEQUITIES

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

Eduardo Reyes Helps Patients Seeking Cancer Care



Eduardo Reyes didn't speak English when he arrived in the United States from his home in Honduras at the age of 19. Despite the language barrier, he went on to earn both an associate's and a bachelor's degree while simultaneously helping his parents grapple with the complexities of immigrant life.

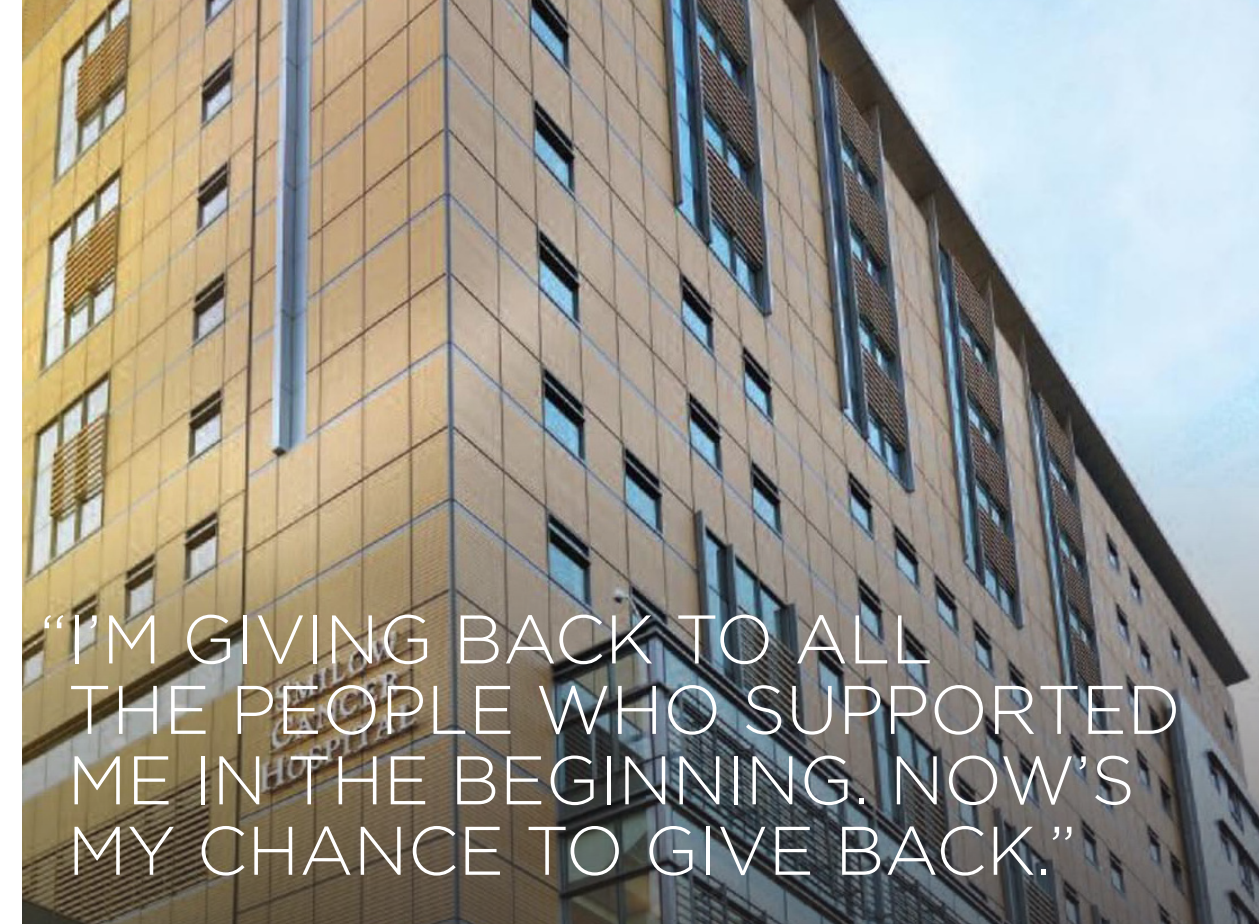
Now a health navigator for the Yale Cancer Disparities Firewall Project (CDF), Reyes is assisting Spanish-speaking patients at the Yale Cancer Center (YCC) and Smilow Cancer Hospital using many of the same skills that he once used to help his parents.

"I've had that feeling of not knowing the language," he said. "I'm giving back to all the people who supported me in the

beginning. Now's my chance to give back."

The Yale Cancer Disparities Firewall Project aims to address disparities among minorities and people of low socioeconomic status.

"Our intention is to work across the continuum of cancer care," said Beth Anne Jones, Ph.D. '93, M.P.H. '86, a research scientist and lecturer at the Yale School of Public Health and associate director for engagement at the Center for Community Engagement and Health Equity at YCC and Smilow. Minorities and people of low socioeconomic status, Jones said, are often lost along the continuum of prevention, cancer screening, early detection, treatment, and clinical research.



"I'M GIVING BACK TO ALL THE PEOPLE WHO SUPPORTED ME IN THE BEGINNING. NOW'S MY CHANCE TO GIVE BACK."

In New Haven, where this is a growing minority population and 27% of the city's residents live below the federal poverty line, the task is particularly urgent, said Jones, who is co-principal investigator for the CDF project. The project was made possible through a \$1 million award from the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation.

Reyes hopes his efforts will make things a little easier for those needing cancer care. And while he is currently a staff member at the Yale School of Public Health, he hopes to someday enroll as a student.

In the meantime, he said, working at Yale has been a great way to use his bilingual capabilities to help others. Just being at the university is a dream he once only imagined.

Growing up in Honduras, Reyes believed Yale and other universities were out of reach. Not long after he graduated from college, though, he began volunteering as a translator for Yale-New Haven Hospital's language services department. It was there, Reyes said, that

he learned how important interpreting and translating are in addressing health equity and ensuring adequate care. When the opportunity arose to work with YCC, Reyes seized it.

"Yale Cancer Center and the Yale School of Public Health are taking steps to address health inequities that are happening in cancer detection," he said.

Sakinah Carter Suttiratana, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.B.A. '04, coordinator for the Firewall Project, is Reyes' immediate supervisor. In addition to his role as a health navigator, Reyes works as a research assistant for the Yale School of Medicine's Psychiatry Department, supporting outreach efforts to Spanish speakers and research candidates.

Working at home during the coronavirus pandemic, Reyes feels his work has taken on even greater importance because certain groups have been hit harder by the pandemic than others.

"It's a wonderful feeling to support the community during this difficult time," he said.

As for his future goals?, Reyes said that after getting a master's degree in public health, he wants to continue doing what he does now – meeting new people, helping with translations, and serving as a source of reassurance and comfort. But his future role will be of a much broader scale – supporting minority groups not only at Yale-New Haven Hospital and Yale Cancer Center, but in the entire city of New Haven as well.

Above all, Reyes hopes that Yale continues to be a place where he can grow, achieve his goals, and help other immigrants.

"Just to have the opportunity to work at an institution like Yale University is amazing," he said. "It's just a dream come true for me."

LISTENING TO HER INNER VOICE

BY COLIN POITRAS

Kathryn Finney, M.P.H. '00 — Changing the Face of Entrepreneurship

When Kathryn Finney learned that Black female entrepreneurs and small business owners were struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic, she did what she does best – she launched a startup.

On April 5, 2020 (her birthday), she took \$10,000 of her own money and created The Doonie Fund, a nonprofit foundation named for her enterprising grandmother, Kathryn “Doonie” Hale. The fund provides no-strings-attached “micro investments” (under \$1,000) to encourage Black female entrepreneurs to continue their businesses throughout the pandemic.

As the story goes, one Medium post, a few emails and six weeks later, the fund swelled to more than \$150,000. It has since provided investments to more than 1,600 Black female entrepreneurs across the country.

“As a public health person, I knew back in April 2020 that it was going to be bad, and I was feeling pretty helpless,”



said Finney, M.P.H. '00. “The Doonie Fund was something I realized I could do, and it made me feel empowered by empowering other people.”

Finney has been described as an entrepreneur, investor, businesswoman, visionary, author, pioneer, researcher, and innovator. She is fearless when faced with an obstacle and has an almost sixth sense for building things that blossom. *Inc.* magazine named her one of the most influential women in tech.

In 2012, Finney created digitalundivided (DID), a social enterprise that develops innovative programs and initiatives to support Black and Latinx female entrepreneurs. What started as a bold concept grew into a major nonprofit organization that today has a seven-figure budget and partnerships with industry giants Google, Microsoft, UBS, and Pivotal Ventures, a Melinda Gates investment company.

How and why Finney chooses certain ideas to pursue is somewhat of a mystery.

“For me, in my life, I do things because there is an inner voice that tells me I have to do it,” she said. “It’s not for money. It’s not for fame. Something inside of me says, ‘You just gotta do it.’ And I usually do it way early and it becomes a big thing.”

She credits her time at the Yale School of Public Health with giving her the courage to think big. She’s currently focused on her latest enterprise, Genius Guild, an innovation lab and venture fund that invests in innovative market-driven solutions to racism.

“To be a woman of color and know that I can think that way, that there’s support for me to think that way, a lot of that comes from my time at Yale,” Finney said.

A Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Creed Scholar at Yale, Finney graduated with honors with a master’s degree in international epidemiology. She received the Weirnerman Fellowship for her work on HIV/AIDS and violence on women in South Africa.

Finney says her YSPH education also contributed to the success of her pioneering research initiative, ProjectDiane, the first research on startups led by Black and Latinx entrepreneurs. Named for Diane Nash, a pivotal but underrecognized leader of the civil rights movement, the survey’s initial 2016 report highlighting the enormous struggles facing Black and Latinx entrepreneurs garnered widespread national attention.



“TO BE A WOMAN OF COLOR AND KNOW THAT I CAN THINK THAT WAY... A LOT OF THAT COMES FROM MY TIME AT YALE.”

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, between 2013 and 2017, only 1% of the founders of U.S. startups that received venture capital were Black; 77% were white. While more investors have started supporting Black and Latinx entrepreneurs, the numbers are still bleak. According to ProjectDiane’s 2020 report, median seed funding for Black female founders is only 5% of the median seed funding for all startups in the U.S. — \$125,000 out of \$2.5 million.

Reminiscing about her time at Yale, Finney spoke fondly of YSPH Professors Gregory Tignor, D.Sc. (Epidemiology of Microbial Diseases, now emeritus), and Elizabeth Claus, Ph.D. '88, M.D. '94 (Biostatistics, Director of Medical Research). She said their support and inspiration made a lifelong impression.

“Elizabeth Claus was one of the best professors I’ve ever had,” Finney said. “She’s a neurology resident, a brain surgeon, and she’s teaching year-one biostats in her free time. That’s pretty impressive. You could tell she loved biostats and she wanted others to love biostats, too.”

But it was Finney’s entrepreneurial instincts, rather than her epidemiology background that led her to initial success. She launched a lifestyle blog called “The Budget Fashionista” in 2003, when blogs were just emerging on the national scene. What started as an online hobby sharing tips on saving money while looking great exploded into a national sensation. She appeared on “Good Morning America”, NBC’s “Today”, CNN, and a slew of other major media outlets. Her bestselling book, *How to Be a Budget Fashionista: The Ultimate Guide to Looking Fabulous for Less*, is in its 13th printing.

Finney has accumulated a raft of honors and awards in the years since Budget Fashionista. A White House Champion for Change, she served as a member of the National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship during the Obama administration. She is an Echoing Green Fellow, Eisenhower Fellow, and recipient of the Grace Hopper Celebration Able Award, given to distinguished women in

technology. Finney received an honorary doctorate from Mount Holyoke College in 2017.

Finney attributes her success as an innovator and pioneer to her upbringing.

“My parents never once told me I couldn’t do something and I came up with some pretty crazy ideas,” she said, laughing. “Not many African American children get that. That was my parents’ gift. They just told me to think it through and encouraged me to do it if I could figure it out.”

That perspective of boundless innovation became her superpower.

“I can see through walls and even through the wall after the wall,” Finney said. “For me, I can see things before they become a thing. Budget Fashionista happened before anyone was talking about budget shopping. That was always a dirty word. Now everyone is doing it.”

PASSION MEETS PURPOSE

BY COLIN POITRAS

Marina Marmolejo's DreamKit Mobile App is Helping Homeless Youths Stabilize Their Lives

Marina Marmolejo would like nothing better than to see some of the homeless youths she's helped through her DreamKit mobile app someday take over the operation.

After all, who else is better suited to understanding the needs of housing insecure youths than those who have lived the experience?

"My success story would be having them lean into their power and know how incredibly valuable their experience is to the success of this organization," said Marmolejo, M.P.H. '19. "They know way more about this than I do ... I tell young people all the time that we're building this nonprofit together."



That core philosophy of empowerment and opportunity is the driving force behind DreamKit, a novel mobile app that Marmolejo co-founded with Yale School of Public Health Assistant Professor Yusuf Ransome, M.P.H., Dr.P.H., in 2018.

The app connects youths struggling to secure stable housing to mentorship and employment opportunities in their local communities. It also rewards them with DreamKit points when they engage in tasks that build professional, social, or educational skills. DreamKit points can be converted into \$5 gift cards the youths can use to buy food or address other immediate needs.

"DreamKit is an app-based nonprofit that is reimagining how we support young people experiencing homelessness," Marmolejo says in an introductory video on the organization's website. "Basically, DreamKit is what happens when you equip youth with both the skills and resources needed to create their own solutions-driven innovations."

With on-site programs and services restricted this past year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DreamKit team developed a virtual curriculum within the app that helps youths learn both the hard and soft skills needed to reach stable employment.

"We then pay young people for learning these new skills and connect them with local employers, to escalate them out of homelessness," Marmolejo says in the video. The DreamKit team also builds profiles for youths reflecting their progress. Those profiles are shared with landlords, employers, and mentors.

Since the app went live in August 2019, more than 40 young people have engaged with the program. Tailon Penn, a DreamKit youth specialist involved in outreach, described Marmolejo as caring, empathetic, and, most importantly, "real."

"Marina has gathered together a group of real people and encourages us, as youths that have been through the exact things DreamKit was made to end, to always come to her if



"DREAMKIT IS AN APP-BASED NONPROFIT THAT IS REIMAGINING HOW WE SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS."

we have any ideas to share or complications to overcome," said Penn. "I've always respected that she's so embedded in DreamKit. She makes herself completely available to us and the youth that use DreamKit."

When she arrived at the Yale School of Public Health, Marmolejo initially worked with her thesis adviser, Danya Keene, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health (Social and Behavioral Sciences), in crafting a research study that would test her ideas for a novel intervention for youth homelessness. But those plans changed somewhat when she received an email from Ransome, who happened to be looking for someone to take on the challenge of homelessness. Marmolejo responded to the email immediately and showed up at Ransome's office the next day.

"When I met Marina, I knew it was her destiny to do something great for this population, and it was such a pleasure to see," said Ransome, an assistant professor

of public health (Social and Behavioral Sciences). "You know, students are coming to Yale to change the world, and it was such a pleasure to be able to provide whatever support I could to help her achieve her purpose in life."

The more Marmolejo and Ransome fleshed out the ideas for a research project, the more they realized they might have something larger on their hands.

"As we pitched our idea to folks outside academia, we received feedback that this was kind of a business project," Marmolejo said. "Sure, it could start off as research, but DreamKit could be used for something far more than a publication, it might really change people's lives."

Diving into the entrepreneurial space can be scary. Marmolejo credits Ransome, Keene, Yale's Tsai Center for Innovative Thinking, and a host of other people and organizations at Yale and beyond for helping her make DreamKit possible.

Over the past year, Marmolejo has fully stepped into her role as DreamKit's executive director. She's learned how to manage a nonprofit that at times has as many as 50 student volunteers and staff helping with operations. She learned about building apps, websites, fundraising, and how to speak to potential investors.

She admits the long hours and seven-days-a-week demands of DreamKit can be stressful at times. But then she remembers the people who are counting on her — especially the youths.

"I'm just so happy that the community believes in me, because that's my fuel during the chaos," Marmolejo said.

You can learn more about DreamKit by visiting dreamkitapp.com or donate at dreamkitapp.com/donate.

PUBLIC HEALTH & PUBLIC SERVICE

BY COLIN POITRAS

Krysten Thomas, M.P.H. '18, Is Getting it Done

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States, Krysten Thomas was working for Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby at the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. She was also taking a full load of evening classes at the Georgetown University Law Center and teaching street law at the District of Columbia Jail.

Having graduated from the Yale School of Public Health two years before, she was well on her way to fulfilling her goal of practicing health care law and focused on building the legal skills she would need to do so. But as the pandemic worsened, Thomas, M.P.H. '18, knew she could not sit idly by.

Despite her busy schedule, Thomas took on two new jobs to put her public health knowledge to use. To this day, she conducts COVID-19 research for the Georgetown Center for Global Health Science and Security, and she conducts COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS

research for the Georgetown O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law.

"I got into those roles because I wanted to help," she said. "The Yale School of Public Health gave me this incredible toolbox of public health skills and I was like, 'How can I not do something?' I just had to pitch in."

One would have thought, at this point, that there was little room for Thomas to take on anything new. But her life was about to get a whole lot busier.

Frustrated by the government's fumbled response to the pandemic, Thomas decided to run as a Democratic National Convention delegate for the District of Columbia.

"The fact that [the federal government] handled the pandemic horribly was apparent to everybody, but it was especially apparent to someone like me who had practiced in public health," said Thomas.



"We needed new leadership and I wanted to be a part of making that happen."

A fifth-generation native of Washington, D.C., Thomas got the second-highest vote total of all women in her district and was elected to represent residents in Wards 3, 4, 5, and 7.

Moreover, while COVID-19 was wreaking havoc in the spring and summer of 2020, people were pouring into the streets to protest racial injustice, health inequities, and police brutality. This also compelled Thomas to act.

Six years prior, she was working in the office of Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill when 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Thomas remembers having a range of emotions watching the protests on national television and being unable to participate. Thomas was in a difficult position. As a staff member of a U.S. senator representing the constituents of the state in which the incident happened, Thomas felt it was her responsibility to remain neutral. At the time, she was

working on health and judiciary issues, which included those related to civil rights and criminal justice.

When events flared in the U.S. last summer, Thomas knew she was going to participate. She grew up attending rallies and protests with her father, an attorney and an advisory neighborhood commissioner in Washington, and she knew the importance of people gathering together in order to be heard.

Initially, Thomas simply showed up and participated in the different protest events. But she was soon inspired to do more, and she and a friend started bringing snacks, drinks, hand sanitizer, masks, and gloves to those demonstrating. The objective was to help everyone be safe while they were being civically involved.

Once that operation was running smoothly, she looked for another purpose and started registering people to vote — first with her dad at protests, and later with friends and family at protests and in various parts of the D.C. metropolitan area. She was asked to lead local

voter registration drives, too, and many joined in to support and assist. Around that same time, Thomas heard that formerly incarcerated people in Florida were being prevented from voting unless they paid outstanding fines and fees, and she started raising money to help them.

"Whenever I see an opportunity to help, I'm going to help to the best of my ability," Thomas said. "I'm going to use my time and use my resources to get it done."

Sometimes, getting it done means registering individuals to vote. Other times, it means working to pass and uphold laws that improve the lives of millions. It was the latter that compelled Thomas, a Georgetown juris doctorate candidate, to pursue a career at the intersection of law and public health.

"I am trying to merge health care and the law because I feel like I can be most effective that way," she said. "I've had a lot of public health jobs and seen that some of the most successful initiatives have involved public health law."

KEEPING HEALTH EQUITY AT THE FOREFRONT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

BY COLIN POITRAS

Mighty Fine, M.P.H. '05, Is Starting the Conversation



At the American Public Health Association (APHA), Mighty Fine, M.P.H. '05, oversees a variety of training and education programs and leads their injury - and violence - prevention efforts as director of the Center for Public Health Practice and Professional Development.

But if there is one underlying theme among them, it's health equity. For Fine, any discussion in the field of public health needs to start there.

"That's one of the unique things about the APHA," he said. "Considering that we're a

national organization, we still recognize the importance of a local perspective for public health."

As a graduate of the Yale School of Public Health's Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Fine said he has always been interested in social determinants of health, which are economic and social conditions that influence individual and community health. Examples of social determinants of health would be such things as lack of employment opportunity, limited transportation infrastructure, institutional racism and health care inequality.



"SO MANY FASCINATING PEOPLE ... HAVE DONE PHENOMENAL WORK IN PUBLIC HEALTH. WE'RE STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS."

While working at the APHA in 2014, Fine helped create a webinar series, Advancing Racial Equity, that included sessions entitled Racism: The Ultimate Underlying Condition and Racial Healing for Ourselves, Our Communities, and Our Future. The popular series was later consolidated into a webinar guide: The Impact of Racism on the Health and Well-Being of the Nation.

The APHA sponsored a second series of webinars dealing with racism and health inequity last year. And the organization also published a book, *Racism: Science & Tools for the Public Health Professional*, which was recently made available in digital form.

Fine said he is encouraged that people have begun to realize racism and health inequality are serious public health problems that have a devastating impact on individuals and communities across the country.

"People have started to infuse intersectionality in their conversations about racism. Using an intersectional lens allows us to openly discuss other forms of bias, prejudice and privilege," Fine said. "I think

people are slowly understanding how structural racism, the social determinants of health and inequity, impact[s] our lives. We must explicitly name these systems of oppression, call them out and discuss how they are operating within our institutions before we can hope to dismantle them."

But discussion is only the first step. Fine wants to convert the current momentum for social justice into substantive change.

"We really need to work to make things happen from the local policy level all the way to the federal level. It's not only the absence of violence, disease or whatever - there needs to be the presence of opportunity," he said. "The presence of a quality education. The presence of safe and stable housing. These, among so much more, are the fundamental needs that should be met."

Tackling enormous public health issues such as structural racism, gun violence, or health inequities can be daunting. But Fine has learned to stay focused on what he can do in his space, knowing that his contribution - in whatever form it may be - is helping address the broader cause.

He encourages students graduating from the Yale School of Public Health to do the same as they venture into their field of choice.

"Stay committed, because it's very easy to become disheartened and overwhelmed," said Fine, addressing new graduates. "And this may go without saying, but never underestimate the value of partnerships. Most of the time, it takes a collaborative effort to find innovative solutions to existing issues."

Most importantly, Fine said, students shouldn't lose sight of the bigger picture.

"Don't think of it as starting from scratch," he said. "There have been so many fascinating people who have done phenomenal work in public health. We're standing on the shoulders of giants, and as we enter our chosen fields, we are provided an opportunity to build on the foundation that those who came before us have set in place."

PART OF THE YSPH FAMILY

BY COLIN POITRAS

Yasmmy Salinas Is a Familiar Face

You might say the Yale School of Public Health is a second home for Assistant Professor of Epidemiology (Chronic Diseases) Yasmmy Salinas. At the very least, she is a familiar face.

Salinas has been present at Yale in one form or another since 2006, when she enrolled as an undergrad at Yale College.

She obtained a bachelor of science degree in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology in 2010. After spending two years as a fellow at the National Institutes of Health, Salinas returned to New Haven in 2012 as a graduate student at the Yale School of Public Health. She earned her master's degree in chronic disease epidemiology in 2014 then pursued doctoral training with Associate Professor Andrew Thomas DeWan, earning her Ph.D. in 2019. A McDougal

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Salinas was hired as an assistant professor at YSPH later the same year.

Asked what it is like to now be a colleague and peer of the very faculty whose classes she once attended, Salinas admitted it took some getting used to.

"At my first faculty meeting, I was like, 'Hi, Dr. [Harvey] Risch, Hi, Dr. [Judith] Lichtman,' and they were like, 'You can call us by our first names now,'" she said, laughing.

What she appreciated most, however, was how welcoming everyone was.

"They reminded me that my voice is important, and my perspective is important because I've gone through the program," Salinas said. "They provide space for me to speak up, and I think that's great because I



"I WAS INTERESTED IN UNTANGLING WHAT PARTS [OF OBESITY] ARE FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND WHAT PARTS ARE GENETIC."

do think that my perspective is valuable."

Salinas chose a career in public health and chronic disease epidemiology because it enabled her to merge her love of math and statistics with her interest in genetics and obesity.

She said the same level of support and encouragement she received as a new faculty member was present when she was a student, which is why she stayed at YSPH to complete her education.

"I knew the professors supported me, and I have to say that was the No. 1 driving factor for staying here as long as I did as a student," Salinas said. "And it was also why I chose to transition from being a student to being faculty here. It was because of the overwhelming support I received. I knew they were invested in me, and I felt like I was part of a family."

Salinas' interest in addressing obesity stems from her personal background. She grew up in McAllen, Texas, a community on the Mexican border that has been repeatedly named one of the most overweight and obese in America.

"We have a really high prevalence of obesity and other

co-morbidities like diabetes," Salinas said of McAllen. "I also saw it in my own family, and I've battled with weight my entire life. But obesity is just the tip of the iceberg, you know, and I was interested in untangling what parts are from the environment and what parts are genetic."

It was only recently that obesity was formally classified as a disease, Salinas said. It's her ambition to conduct research that will shed light on the underlying physiological and genetic mechanisms that may be contributing to obesity or may make some people more susceptible to the disease than others.

"The fact that it isn't well understood can lead to fat shaming, fat discrimination, and fat phobias," Salinas said. "It's damaging because it makes people feel powerless, like it's their fault they are overweight, and that's not necessarily true. If we had a better understanding of the mechanical underpinnings contributing to obesity, maybe it would change people's perception of the disease and encourage them to be kinder and more understanding."

As a genetic epidemiologist and Latina professor at YSPH,

Salinas is aware that she's a role model for students at the school. As the first member of her family to go to college in the United States and the first to obtain a Ph.D., Salinas had to convince her family that spending so many years in school was worth it.

She ultimately proved it was worth it, obviously, but Salinas said she wishes that she had someone who looked like her and who came from a similar background to talk to and commiserate with during her early academic years. That's why, as a faculty member, she always makes herself available.

"When students get to know me and know that I'm Hispanic, they're like, 'Oh my God, tell me what your life was like,' and I wish I had that," she said.

AN ADVOCATE FOR HEALTH EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

BY COLIN POITRAS

Darryl Crompton, J.D., M.P.H. '76



Any discussion about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) at Yale University or the Yale School of Public Health would be incomplete if it did not include mention of individuals like Darryl Crompton.

Crompton, J.D., M.P.H. '76, has been a leading voice in the quest for a more diverse and inclusive Yale community for more than 30 years.

As a member of the initial 2016 Yale Alumni Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Crompton helped identify ways that Yale alumni could be more effective in promoting DEI across all activities. The goal of the nearly 50-member task force was to make Yale “a beacon of DEI excellence to which other institutions can aspire.”

Later, Crompton was named to a special Yale Alumni Association Executive Director’s DEI Working Group charged with putting some of the task force’s primary recommendations into action.

Weili Cheng, '77, executive director of the Yale Alumni Association (YAA), remembers Crompton well.

“I first met Darryl when he served as a member of the Alumni Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” said Cheng. “This task force, co-chaired by Ken Inadomi '76 and Sheryl Carter '82, published its report, *Leadership In the Face of Change*, in 2017, and since that time, many of the report’s recommendations have been implemented – a credit to the task force’s great work. Subsequently, Darryl continued working to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion by serving on the YAA’s Executive Director’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group and on the YAA’s board of governors. His voice and views, especially regarding racial justice, have been invaluable as the YAA has developed its strategies around these important issues.”

For Crompton, a longtime social justice and human rights advocate, lawyer, and academic, the contributions of the 2016 DEI task force laid forth a critical blueprint for the important work that would need to be done.

“Those early days of the Yale Alumni Task Force on DEI were both inspiring and stimulating as the task force co-chairs and members engaged in meaningful and difficult conversations about race and racism at Yale,” Crompton said.

(More information about the Yale Alumni Association’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion can be found at <https://alumni.yale.edu/your-alumni-association/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>.)

Crompton’s passion for social justice was fostered in early childhood. His immigrant grandparents came from Trinidad and Jamaica. The color of their skin and their Caribbean accents made them targets for bullying and racism. His father, who immigrated from Trinidad as a teenager, also was bullied for his accent. Although Crompton’s father was a trained architect, no firm would hire him, so he did shift work in a post office to support his family until he established his architectural career.

“When I am criticized for being too intense and passionate about DEI, I never forget my family’s painful experiences,” Crompton said.

Crompton remembers accompanying his parents to civil rights marches and listening to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s powerful message of nonviolence, hope, and social change.

“It inspired me to believe that I could be part of that change,”

said Crompton. By college, he had decided to base his law and public health school and career choices on his desire to reach a point where DEI principles were everyone’s principles.

Equity and social justice are core threads winding through the fabric of Crompton’s professional and personal life. In addition to his master’s degree from the Yale School of Public Health, Crompton has a juris doctorate from the University of California, Davis, School of Law and a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Crompton taught health care law and policy as a tenured associate professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham for 13 years. He later moved on to a successful career at Tuskegee University, where he served as Tuskegee’s first general counsel and vice president for legal affairs.

While Crompton acknowledges the important work that has

been done, he said much more remains to be done when it comes to achieving DEIB excellence.

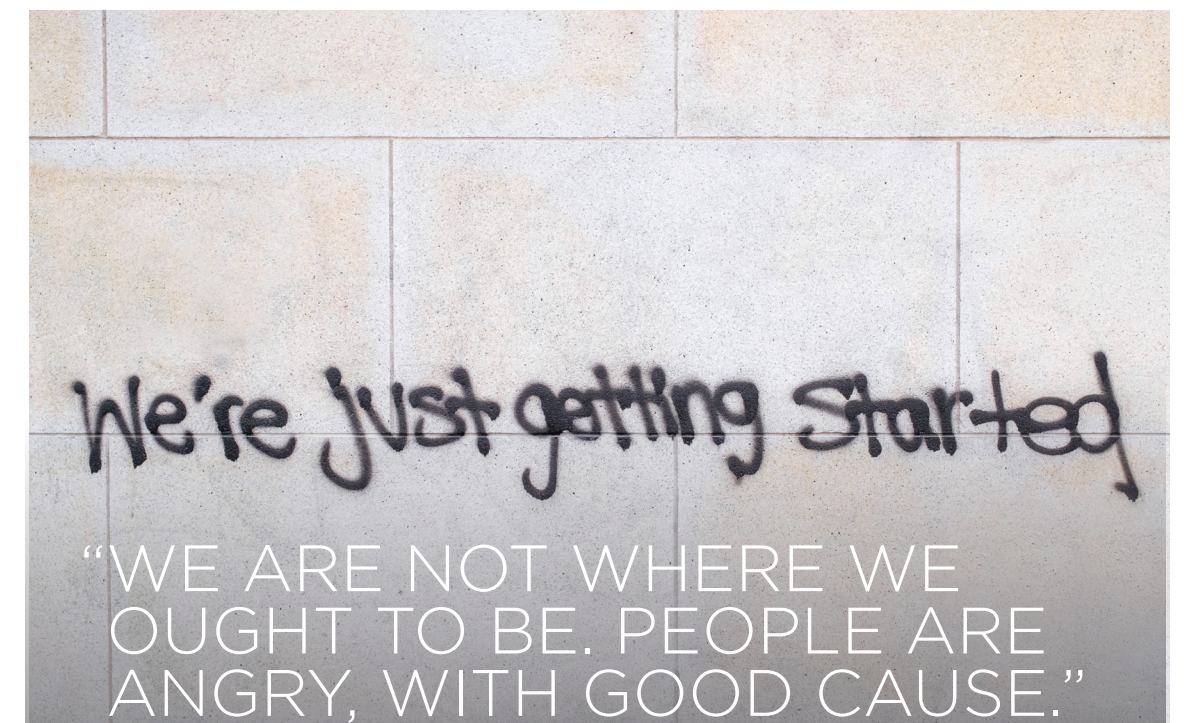
“We are not where we ought to be. People are angry, with good cause,” Crompton said in describing the situation today. “Individual and institutional racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia are still rampant in this country.

“We have all witnessed, and some of us have experienced, the horrors of police killings and gun violence against African Americans and other minority populations,” Crompton continued. “No one can forget the images of federal border patrol agents separating Hispanic parents from their babies and holding children in cages. This anger will not subside until we see real change in equity and social justice.”

Asked if he feels the current momentum toward addressing DEIB can be sustained, Crompton is guarded in his response.

“Although references to DEI are ubiquitous in the national news, and, of course, in corporate and university settings, it remains questionable whether any national, regional, or city momentum is sustainable,” Crompton said. “For example, despite frequent public discussions, communities of color continue to receive proportionately fewer COVID vaccinations. Momentum is successful when it engenders meaningful change. People of color have learned that cruel lesson over many decades.”

Crompton’s focus on diversity and equity has not lessened over the years. He remains a member of the Yale Alumni Association Board of Governors and sits on the Board of Directors for the Association of Yale Alumni in Public Health (AYAPH). He continues to advocate for the AYAPH board’s work on DEIB, which included a collaboration with Dean Sten Vermund last year to incorporate references to health equity and social justice in the school’s mission statement.





SKYLER JACKSON, PH.D.

ON THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

BY COLIN POITRAS

conversations

One of the best ways to exchange information and ideas is through simple discourse. In the pages that follow, some of the Yale School of Public Health's most intriguing individuals share their knowledge, insights and perspectives in Conversations with Focus.

Associate Research Scientist Skyler Jackson, Ph.D., is a member of the research faculty in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

He is also a diversity consultant and trained counseling psychologist who has led numerous diversity trainings with leading organizations and institutions around the country. In 2018, Jackson was awarded the American Psychological Association's prestigious Citizen Psychologist Presidential Citation in recognition of his leadership and dedication in reducing prejudice and promoting social justice.

Focus recently sat down with Skyler and asked him to share some of his advice, insights, and expertise.

Q: What should organizations focus on – and what should they avoid – in working toward a more inclusive and equitable environment?

Skyler Jackson: First, there's a real tension in this work that we rarely articulate. Achieving equity is deeply urgent, but also takes significant time. This creates dual pitfalls. Some organizations rush and don't take the time to adequately assess their environment, diagnose the problem, and establish concrete goals. Other organizations move too slowly and get lost in nuanced deliberations, leading to fatigue and demoralization. Second, many organizational leaders believe creating inclusive environments can occur through sheer effort and passion alone. But like performing a surgery or playing an instrument, creating more inclusive environments requires tangible skills. Just because a leader cares about diversity doesn't mean they can design and lead a diversity initiative – so look to human relations experts. Finally, for groups and organizations rolling out diversity trainings, listening sessions, and experiential workshops, give careful thought to the experiences of marginalized group members. For example, I often see trainings on race that are exciting and powerful for white people, but boring or even harmful for everyone else.

While many institutions are taking steps to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), there is always concern whether these efforts will have real and lasting impact. What are your thoughts on this?

I wish it weren't so, but there is good reason for this concern. Despite the good intentions, not all diversity work is effective. In fact, research suggests these efforts are sometimes far less effective than we would think – and in rare cases, can actually make environments worse.



“MANY INSTITUTIONS THINK THEY’RE ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL RACISM, WHEN IN FACT THEY’RE ADDRESSING THE SYMPTOMS OF STRUCTURAL RACISM – THEY’RE PULLING OFF LEAVES INSTEAD OF YANKING OUT ROOTS.”

Eventually, I hope this research can help identify best practices that lead to sustainable change. As this scholarship is in its infancy, there is no consensus yet – except that we desperately need more evidence-based interventions in this area.

We also need greater quality control. Remember, this isn’t a licensed or credentialed field. As a result, there aren’t many structured ways for junior diversity consultants to learn how to do this work effectively – many end up working without adequate training or support, figuring it out as they go. Even some seasoned diversity consultants have no theory of change, no knowledge of effective facilitation or curriculum design, and aren’t equipped to maintain psychological safety on these topics. If you pair this with the fact that clients often don’t know how to evaluate potential diversity consultants, it can be a recipe for disaster. That said, I still believe in this method of change. There’s some really brilliant, effective work happening – it’s just mixed in among less-effective interventions.

What challenges do you encounter as a DEIB consultant?

The challenges in this work are enormous and vary based on the type of consultancy I’m doing. When engaging in intergroup relations work where I’m promoting the self-examination of power and privilege, the biggest obstacle I face is shame. So many of us have internalized that only bad people have biases – and that those people should be ashamed of themselves. The problem is this keeps people from doing the difficult work of identifying their own areas of prejudice without sinking into shame. As any psychologist will tell

you, shame is a very difficult emotion to tolerate – thus, our brains work pretty vigilantly to avoid or reduce it. Sometimes potential clients will come to me totally fed up with the problematic dynamics in their organization. They want intensive mandatory trainings, and they want perpetrators of bias to be fixed – quickly, publicly, and aggressively. The tendency is understandable but misguided. To me, it’s not shame and punishment – but rather, truth, healing, and structural change – that best facilitate equity and justice. Shame is dirty fuel for liberation.

Conversations surrounding racial equity frequently mention “structural racism.” What is structural racism and what are your thoughts on how it can best be addressed?

To understand structural racism, we must understand racism at the ideological level. Old, enduring ideas of white supremacy – suggesting that other groups are lazy, less human, untrustworthy, less intelligent, or otherwise inferior – permeate our society. Structural racism manifests when these racist myths get embedded within laws, policies, institutions, and community norms, thereby creating powerful systems of advantage and disadvantage that organize our social world.

Many institutions think they’re addressing structural racism, when in fact they’re addressing the symptoms of structural racism – they’re pulling off leaves instead of yanking out roots. If you identify a structural inequity to fix (e.g., an unjust policy), remedy it – but also think of it as a clue, a sign of something deeper and more widespread within your organization. Otherwise the status quo will either be unmoved or eventually reassert itself. There’s a metaphor that I think

helps here: The giant squid, a mythical underwater sea creature, has shown up in books and movies across time. The narrative is almost always the same: Some heroic protagonist chops off one of its overgrown tentacles and momentarily feels triumphant, only to be grabbed around the ankle by another tentacle moments later. White supremacy is similar – ancient, agile, slippery, violent, and far beneath the surface, out of sight and immediate reach. We can’t forget this, or we’ll never fully win this battle.

“Intersectionality” is another concept that is getting a lot of attention of late. What is it and how does it relate to DEIB?

Intersectionality emerged from communities of Black feminist activists, like the Combahee River Collective, and was popularized within academia by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. The framework highlights that aspects of oppression (e.g., racism, patriarchy, and heterosexism), which we often think of as distinct, are actually interdependent and interlocking. In other words, we all sit at the intersection of multiple identities and systems of power – and this truth has implications for our everyday experiences and well-being. Intersectionality can benefit equity work by making visible the groups and experiences that are often rendered invisible. To provide just one example, without a lens of intersectionality, an effort to address anti-Black racism is likely to prioritize addressing barriers faced by Black, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied men. This happens implicitly – and as a result, the unique needs and race-related experiences of other subgroups (e.g., Black women, Black LGBTQ people, Black poor people) get obscured and overlooked. Intersectionality helps us grapple with complex ways oppression shows up between and within communities, so no one gets left behind as we make advances toward social justice.

One of your areas of research investigates the way individuals’ social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity) shape their everyday lives and influence health and well-being. What led you to pursue this area of study and does it inform your consulting work in DEIB?

As a public health researcher, diversity consultant and trained psychotherapist, the cross-pollination between the various aspects of my professional life is substantial. Although my research and clinical training undoubtedly enrich my expertise as a diversity consultant, the influence flows in the other direction as well. In fact, I have been doing diversity and inclusion work for twice as long – and it was actually this work that inspired me to pursue a research career in the first place.

Before I sought my Ph.D., I served as associate executive director of ENCOMPASS, a nonprofit organization that worked to reduce prejudice and intergroup conflict among California teenagers. Leading hundreds of human relations trainings, dialogues, and workshops on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, I saw firsthand how oppression not only limits people’s agency and opportunities, but is also harmful to their health. This led me to my current research and clinical pursuits – and serves as continued inspiration to my work in public health. Today, I not only base my study hypotheses on existing research, but also on existing people, communities, and their collective stories. I think juggling these roles simultaneously – stigma researcher, inclusive clinician, diversity consultant – keeps my perspective fresh and gives me a unique approach in each environment. It also keeps me very busy.

JOHN
NDIKUM, M.D.,
M.P.H. '18

ON THE ARTS
& PUBLIC HEALTH

BY COLIN POITRAS

If there were to be a Renaissance man in public health, John Ndikum, M.D., M.P.H. '18, would certainly be worthy of consideration for the title.

A graduate of the Yale School of Public Health's Advanced Professional Degree program, Ndikum concentrated in health policy management. He is also a pharmaceutical physician, social entrepreneur, consultant, author, writer, and poet. Based in the U.K., Ndikum has become a voice of his generation, sharing his philosophy, general knowledge, and expertise in public health and medicine through YouTube videos, guest appearances on talk shows, and interviews in print media. He often opines on the pressing issues of the day and encourages others by offering guidance in life management and personal development. In this issue of *Focus*, we discuss with John the role of the arts in public health.

“ART IS WONDERFUL IN THAT IT CAPTURES — IN A SINGLE PIECE — WHAT PREVIOUSLY APPEARED CHAOTIC AND UNRELATED.”

Q: As an author, writer, and poet, what role do you see the arts playing in public health?

John Ndikum: To my mind, the creative process that drives the production of art involves the synthesis of ostensibly disparate data streams to produce something novel. And an interdisciplinary field such as public health will increasingly require the application of creative minds to solve its multitudinous problems, which will only grow in complexity in tandem with the accelerated pace of the current age.

Art is wonderful in that it captures – in a single piece – what previously appeared chaotic and unrelated. In the sphere of public health, art will therefore serve the purpose of revealing to us the subtleties and connections hidden beneath the seeming quagmire of 'big data.' Art already is and will continue to reveal to the world of science in general, and that of public health in particular, the importance of bringing bi-hemispheric (dual-brain) thinking to bear on problems that would overwhelm the intellect alone.

You just published your second book, *Excellent While You: A Tailored Playbook for Scholastic Success*. What is it about?

Excellent While You is a distillation of what I have learned about what it takes to achieve scholastic success. As a teacher and mentor, I always marveled at just how rapidly enthusiastic students would succeed when provided with a framework within which to structure their efforts. Time and time again, I watched as students who had previously considered themselves incapable would – within a very short space of time – accomplish results inside and outside the classroom that would astonish them and their peers.

After you graduated from YSPH, you said you realized how transformative the experience was. Could you elaborate on that?

During my time at Yale, it was common to see students breaking the mold and doing incredible things to make the world a better place. You can't see this without being inspired or raising your own bar by a significant degree.

This humanitarian ethos is truly infused into Yale University, and for that I have a tremendous sense of pride. Yale pushed me to be my best and do my best in the service of humanity. And YSPH in particular was the first academic space in which I was finally able to truly be myself; the culture in that space made all the difference, gifting me with a transformational experience for which I will always be grateful.

You are general secretary of a new public health organization called *Inspirational Health*. Can you tell us more about this organization?

Inspirational Health is the brainchild of experts in their respective fields of health care, whose passion for and work in global health led to this veritable 'coalition of the willing.' Inspirational Health is dedicated to arming health care professionals in low- and middle-income countries with the knowledge, tools, and frameworks required to effect sustainable change in their own communities. We are currently forging collaborative partnerships with health care leaders in developing nations so we can tailor our approach to their specific needs.

As this issue focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), what is your perspective on the importance of DEIB in public health?

While the pandemic has been no respecter of persons, its impact has certainly shone a light on health care inequity, and the disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Society as we know it is the crystallized product of a philosophy shaped over the past few centuries predominantly by intellectual males of the Western Hemisphere. So when you have a global civilization which can be seen as the solidified conceptualization of European intellectuals of bygone eras, it becomes clear that optimizing said civilization will require the future to be approached through multiple lenses.

This is where diversity, equity, and inclusion come in: Their efforts serve as more than window dressing designed to make the current paradigm look a little more colorful (pun intended). By bringing to the fore new conceptualizations, they tacitly (and sometimes explicitly) shape discussions around philosophy, ethics, morality, sociology, and jurisprudence to produce policies that will shape laws inclusive of diverse perspectives, and which therefore are, by extension, conducive to equitable outcomes.



KATIE WANG, PH.D.

ON THE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF STIGMA

BY COLIN POITRAS

An assistant professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Katie Wang focuses on the health and interpersonal consequences of stigma among members of diverse marginalized populations, including women, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, and individuals diagnosed with psychiatric disorders. She is also interested in developing interventions that mitigate the harmful effects of stigma. Wang earned a Ph.D. in social psychology from Yale in 2014 and was awarded a K01 mentored research scientist development grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse in 2019.

In this issue of *Focus*, we discuss with Katie the results of some of her most recent work, and how and why she came into this field of research.

“AS A BLIND ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN, I KNOW FIRSTHAND THAT STIGMA CAN TAKE A SIGNIFICANT TOLL ON THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS.”

Q: You are the lead author on a paper published last August comparing depression and anxiety symptoms between sexual minority and heterosexual medical residents. What did you find?

Katie Wang: This paper was based on a national sample of 2,809 medical residents who have been followed since their first year of medical school. We found that residents who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual reported higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms than their heterosexual counterparts, in part because they experienced a lower sense of belonging in residency. These results highlight the importance of diversity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives in medical education and suggest that residency programs should play an active role in supporting the mental health and well-being of their sexual-minority trainees.

You also recently published a paper that investigated whether gender and disability type matter in terms of the consequences people with disabilities face when confronting patronizing help. Tell us what you learned.

This paper highlights the dilemma people with disabilities face when dealing with unsolicited, patronizing assistance, which is a common experience when interacting with members of the general public. Across two studies using hypothetical vignettes, we showed that, when blind individuals and wheelchair users declined help that is clearly patronizing, they were perceived as ruder and less warm after vs. before interacting with the helper, and these effects were replicated regardless of whether the disabled person is portrayed as male or female. These findings suggest that people with disabilities can encounter significant interpersonal backlash when they refuse patronizing help by engaging in direct confrontation. They also

illuminate the often-dysfunctional, awkward interaction dynamics between people with and without disabilities, thus shedding light on the challenging reality of navigating subtle yet pervasive forms of ableism.

Let’s talk some more about ableism. Many well-intentioned people aren’t aware of the potential harm they may cause when interacting with people with disabilities. Given your research and personal experience, what advice can you share on this issue?

One overarching suggestion I have, both as an ableism researcher and as a person with a disability, is to respect the agency and autonomy of people with disabilities. More specifically, rather than making assumptions about our abilities and needs, ask us whether we need help and how you might best assist, and honor our answers. Speak to us directly, not to our companions or interpreters. And lastly, do not invade our personal space by grabbing our arm or touching our mobility aids (e.g., white cane, wheelchair) without our permission. Overall, I believe that a willingness to recognize people with disabilities as experts on our own needs, along with a commitment to presume competence, is essential to combat ableism in our society.

What led to your interest in stigma and how it contributes to health disparities, particularly among socially disadvantaged groups?

As a blind Asian American woman, I know from firsthand experience that stigma can take a significant toll on the health and well-being of marginalized populations. However, stigma has received relatively little attention in the health equity literature, especially in comparison with other social determinants of health, such as socioeconomic status. My goal as a public health researcher is to not only document the multifaceted impact of stigma on mental and behavioral health, but also to develop and implement evidence-based interventions that mitigate the impact of stigma on health, both by facilitating adaptive coping among stigmatized individuals and by removing structural and interpersonal barriers that hinder stigmatized individuals from fully participating in society.

In this issue of *Focus*, we are focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, or DEIB. What is your perspective on the importance of DEIB in public health?

I believe that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are core public health principles that should guide all aspects of our work, including research, teaching, mentoring, and public health practice. While these principles are already integral to what I do as a researcher and educator, I am continuing to identify new ways to further prioritize and honor the needs of marginalized communities, including adopting an intersectionality lens when addressing many of my research questions, mentoring students from under-represented backgrounds, and establishing collaborations with New Haven community partners. Since joining the faculty at YSPH, I have been very impressed with my department’s and school’s commitment to these principles, and I am particularly excited about the U.S. Health and Justice concentration that we just started this year. I look forward to continuing working with my colleagues and students to create an inclusive, equitable environment that enables individuals with all abilities and backgrounds to thrive!



ILANA SEAGER VAN DYK, PH.D.

ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF LGBTQ CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

BY COLIN POITRAS

Ilana Seager van Dyk, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral associate at the Yale School of Public Health affiliated with the Yale LGBTQ Mental Health Initiative. She is a trained clinical psychologist who works primarily with children, adolescents, and families. Seager van Dyk's research applies experimental and longitudinal methods to understand the social and emotional mechanisms underlying health disparities in populations under chronic stress. Those populations include members of the LGBTQ community who often experience intense stress, particularly during critical developmental transitions such as adolescence. She hopes to use her clinical experience and research insights to inform and develop better treatments, supports, and interventions for LGBTQ youths and their families in clinical care. Seager van Dyk has a B.A. in psychology and history of science and medicine from Yale (2012) and an M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from The Ohio State University (2020). *Focus* recently sat down with Ilana to discuss her work.

Q: Your research explores the mechanisms underlying health disparities in populations under chronic stress. Can you please elaborate on your work?

Ilana Seager van Dyk: There is a great deal of interest in understanding the social and emotional mechanisms underlying mental health disparities within the LGBTQ community and other populations experiencing chronic stress. Yet, most research with LGBTQ folks has relied on cross-sectional, self-reported data, which limits conclusions about causality. My research addresses this gap in the literature by using experimental methods to tease apart mechanisms underlying mental illness in this population, particularly among children and adolescents. Some of my recent research projects include creating and validating novel tools for examining LGBTQ-related stress, investigating the role of emotion regulation and parenting practices in the well-being of LGBTQ young people, and most recently, translating these basic research findings into clinical practice with LGBTQ youth and families. In my longitudinal work, I conducted the first study to show that sexual-minority youth at high risk for mental health concerns diverge from their heterosexual peers with regard to anxiety and mood symptoms as early as 9 1/2 years of age.

How do you see your work being integrated into clinical care?

As a clinical scientist and psychologist, improving clinical care (particularly for LGBTQ youth and their families) is at the core of everything I do. At YSPH, my research is directly related to clinical care. I am honored to have received support from Yale's Fund for Lesbian and Gay Studies to adapt LGBTQ-affirmative cognitive behavioral therapy which was developed for LGBTQ adults by YSPH's John Pachankis, Ph.D., Susan Dwight Bliss Associate Professor of Public Health (Social and Behavioral Sciences) for use with LGBTQ adolescents ages 12-17 years. This evidence-based treatment will directly address LGBTQ youth's responses to the unique stressors they experience (e.g., discrimination, coming out), and will be the first such treatment to be tested with younger LGBTQ adolescents (ages 12-14). I also think my mechanistic research has important clinical implications – for example, by highlighting the need for certain emotional processes to be examined in psychotherapy, by designing questionnaires/measures for use in clinical care, or simply by spotlighting an important developmental period upon which prevention and intervention efforts should be focused.

Child and adolescent mental health is of critical importance within chronically stressed communities and within the LGBTQ community in particular. What are some of the issues you are most concerned about in this field of clinical psychology?

Great question! I have long been passionate about child and adolescent mental health, in part because clinical work with youth

is fun (stickers! Disney!), but mostly because there is so much potential for early intervention and the prevention of lifelong mental health concerns. Exciting research in the past few years has shown that gender-diverse children who are supported and affirmed in their identities by their families from a young age (e.g., 5-6 years) show no mental health differences from their cisgender peers. This is huge! I think that we should be focusing more research on understanding how we can best support the families of LGBTQ youth in providing supportive, affirming environments for their children. This means figuring out how we can increase acceptance in families who may hold anti-LGBTQ views, so that maybe, just maybe, we can prevent the LGBTQ disparity in mental health outcomes before it even begins.

What inspired you to get into this line of research and a career in public health?

Like many people, my career path has been a winding one. Throughout high school and college, I was fascinated with how people relate to one another and how they unite in the context of social movements. I was interested in diversity and health – my undergraduate history of science and medicine thesis at Yale focused on the HIV/AIDS epidemic and how the LGBTQ community shared health information and lobbied for new treatments to be approved by the FDA. I was captivated by the immense resilience shown by the populations most affected, and as I progressed through my studies learning about other current threats to LGBTQ well-being (e.g., bullying, discrimination), I was torn between wanting to influence societal change via public health research and wanting to help at an individual level. When I realized I could do both with clinical psychology, I never looked back.

This issue of *Focus* centers on the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. How do you self-identify and what are your thoughts on the importance of DEIB in research and public health, both as a scientist and in terms of the children and adolescents you work with?

What an important inaugural topic for *Focus*! I am a bisexual, part-white, part-Māori, cisgender woman from New Zealand who has lived in the U.S. for nearly 13 years. DEIB is a critical aspect of all of my research, teaching, and clinical work, and I firmly believe that centering DEIB in my work makes it richer, more valuable, and more meaningful. Clinically, we know that LGBTQ youth prefer diverse providers, particularly those identifying as LGBTQ and/or BIPOC. With regard to research, we have had decades of psychology research disproportionately focused on homogenous, white samples, and unsurprisingly, mental health disparities have continued to exist and worsen, particularly among LGBTQ BIPOC folks. The only way to truly begin to reduce this mental health gap is to commit to and enact DEIB in our research and public health work. We need more BIPOC and LGBTQ voices in our science. We also need to open up our science and include LGBTQ youth and community advocates in scientific and public health decision-making.



Cenjing Zhu, Ph.D. candidate, President



Global Alliance for Public Health

Global Alliance for Public Health (GAPH) strives to create a space for the academic and professional development of international students at the Yale School of Public Health and truly bring diverse and global voices to the public health field. Our mission calls us to respond to the complexities of current issues facing international students at YSPH, such as remote learning, overseas intern opportunities, COVID-19 challenges, quality access to study resources and services, and recent stressors on international students in

terms of cultural, political, and economic determinants. We are committed to sustainable programming and initiatives to serve and support international students at YSPH. The ongoing Buddy Program pairs new international students with a senior international student at YSPH to share advice/encouragement/knowledge regarding various aspects of life. We also hold the Ask An Alum Event, which invites distinguished international alumni to share their paths from YSPH to their current careers.

Morgan Buchanan, M.P.H. '21, Co-Chair



Emerging Majority Students Association

The Emerging Majority Students Association (EMSA) is committed to creating and fostering a sense of community among minority/underrepresented students and students interested in the promotion of diversity and inclusion at YSPH. Our three-fold mission is to:

- Serve as a platform for voicing the concerns and interests of minority students at YSPH.

- Promote a multicultural, professional and academic environment that enables us to address the health issues of minorities in the field of public health, with an emphasis on the New Haven community.

- Collaborate with admissions toward raising the level of underrepresented minority/underrepresented student recruitment, admission, and retention at YSPH.

roundtable

Welcome to the Roundtable, a place where Yale School of Public Health community members introduce themselves, their work, and their passion projects. In this issue, we feature representatives of YSPH Affinity Groups and our three Diversity Ambassadors.



Lily Kofke, M.P.H. '21, Co-Chair

REPROJustice

REPROJustice is dedicated to the achievement and protection of the rights of all people to fully realize and enjoy their sexual and reproductive health. Our focus centers around the Reproductive Justice framework developed in the 1990s by Black women activists who sought a more comprehensive framework for understanding the sexual and

reproductive health needs of marginalized women, families, and communities. We recognize the interdisciplinary work that must be done in pursuit of sexual and reproductive liberty, gender equity, and social justice, through community engagement, education, and advocacy.

As a student-led group, we provide a space where students can come together with their peers who are similarly committed to the tenets of reproductive justice. Through policy, education, infrastructure, and health care delivery, public health has a critical role to play in ensuring equitable access to sexual and reproductive health for all.

Madeline Nguyen, M.P.H. '21, Chair



Womxn of Color for Maternal & Child Health

Womxn of Color for Maternal & Child Health is a group led by womxn of color passionate about health justice for pregnant people, infants, children, and young people of color. Our mission is to:

- Facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue about health equity from a racial justice perspective.
- Elevate health narratives and health knowledge of people of color.
- Advocate for health policies and solutions alongside communities of color driven by their needs.

- Promote the integration of evidence-informed practices (evidence gathered from both academic and non-academic sources, including peer-reviewed articles and laypersons' experiences) and holistic healing practices.

- Provide training on combating racism as a root cause of health inequities.

- Promote equitable engagement between the Yale community, New Haven community, and beyond.

Last year, we held a weeklong awareness fundraiser campaign for Black maternal mortality in partnership with New Haven Healthy Start. All donations went to the CT Diaper Bank.

Sreeja Kondeti, M.P.H. '22, Co-Chair



Out in Public

Out in Public is the social and professional group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, otherwise identifying, and allied students at the Yale School of Public Health.

Our mission is to create educational, cultural, and social opportunities through which LGBTQ+ students can connect with each other, the larger Yale community, and New Haven. We engage in advocacy and activism around health issues specific to LGBTQ+ populations and organize gatherings for

members to discuss and share their own experiences. Our future events will focus on mental well-being, highlighting the prevalence of racism in the LGBTQ+ community and providing support for students who may feel isolated due to online schooling.

Jad Elharake, M.P.H. '21



YSPH Diversity Ambassadors

Jad Elharake, M.P.H. '21
Serving as one of the Diversity Ambassadors, I have the opportunity to work with various student organizations on planning events and initiatives that advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion on Yale's campus and in New Haven. My background as an Arab Muslim immigrant and first-generation college student has positioned me to provide a unique perspective and lens in helping build a strong, inclusive community. Additionally, my passion for addressing the needs and concerns of underrepresented students at YSPH translates across my academic involvements. My main interests in public health include access to immunization policies in low- and middle-income countries, adequate

Lakai Legg, M.P.H. '21



and affordable access to health care for refugee, displaced, and undocumented populations, and non-communicable diseases in the Middle East/North Africa. Therefore, being here at Yale, I am surrounded by infinite opportunities to work and collaborate with brilliant students, world-renowned faculty, and public health experts to highlight the need for more-inclusive policies and programs that serve all populations – whether it's at YSPH or across the world.

Lakai Legg, M.P.H. '21
I applied to become a Diversity Ambassador not to be the face of diversity, equity, and inclusion at YSPH, but rather to support and advocate for students who represent the diversity of YSPH, work toward making the campus more inclusive, and organize to

Crystal Ruiz, M.P.H. '21



Crystal Ruiz, M.P.H. '21
Working alongside my co-Diversity Ambassadors and Affinity Groups has presented me with the opportunity to engage in student- and community-serving work while encompassing unique perspectives. My experience serving as a first responder motivated a pathway to reducing debilitating health disparities present in low-income populations such as my home country. As a first generation Mexican American student, I have become accustomed to actively creating spaces that feel genuine and welcoming while attending universities that don't necessarily cater to uplifting the experiences of students of color or providing accessible resources for them. At Yale, I am surrounded by individuals who lend themselves to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion not just within academic spaces, but to our broader community environments. Together, we advocate for inclusive academic spaces for students of color, just hiring practices of diverse staff and faculty, and ensuring future public health professionals recognize the significance of promoting health equity across communities.

promote equity in all aspects of YSPH. By supporting the work of our affinity groups and representing the needs of students within the larger DEI Committee, I have learned the importance of making space for students to engage and participate in shaping the policies of YSPH and making space for students to heal and connect with one another. This was especially important for Black students and students of color at YSPH last year, as we were all watching how YSPH would respond to the calls for social justice for Black Americans. Ultimately, YSPH students' passion for health equity and social justice is what inspires me to work as a Diversity Ambassador to keep the DEI Committee at YSPH accountable for making changes to YSPH policy that will reflect our dedication to these matters.

student spotlights

Yale School of Public Health students are nothing short of amazing. In the following section, we invite you to learn more about some of our best and brightest students and their innovative and passionate pursuits in public health.



“I SAW FIRSTHAND THE EFFECTS OF GENTRIFICATION, AS IT HAPPENED CULTURALLY BEFORE IT HAPPENED STRUCTURALLY.”

SHANNON WHITTAKER

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

FROM SCREENPLAYS TO SCIENCE RESEARCH, SHE'S WRITING HER OWN STORY

Shannon Whittaker knows how to craft a good story. As an amateur screenplay writer and former film production assistant, she has dedicated years of her life to the art of storytelling.

But she also knows how some of the most essential narratives can easily get lost in the shuffle, like those of people of color living in low-income communities and the prior residents of gentrified neighborhoods.

At the Yale School of Public Health, Whittaker is working to

illuminate these stories — and write her own in the process — as she studies the intersection of place, race, and health and fights to fix historical injustices through reparations.

A third-year Ph.D. candidate in Social and Behavioral Sciences, Whittaker has taken a unique path toward a doctorate. After receiving her bachelor's and M.P.H. degrees from Brown University, she spent the next few years applying her skills to health advertising, commercial advertising, and film production in New York City. Her dream, she said, is to write a “Grey's Anatomy”-esque drama.

But her career trajectory abruptly changed after the 2016 election.

With the Trump administration entering the White House, Whittaker said she wanted to start making a difference through public health policy. She helped schools implement comprehensive wellness policies as a coordinator with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and developed a passion for neighborhood revitalization efforts in East Harlem.

“I'm from Brooklyn, New York, and I saw firsthand the effects of gentrification on the ground, as it happened culturally before it happened structurally,” she said. “I saw those same things in East Harlem when I was doing all this programming. I realized my position at the Department of Health was great ... but I wasn't really able to implement them with just my M.P.H.”

That's where the Yale School of Public Health comes in.

Whittaker said she chose YSPH

for her Ph.D. program because of its immense resources and broad research opportunities. Her studies have helped her refine her interviewing skills and improve her confidence in qualitative methodology. Her work with undergraduates and health professionals as a teaching fellow also has played a large part in her growth as an academic, she said.

“I think [those classes] definitely lit a spark in terms of my interest in place and race,” she explained.

Whittaker said her future path is in the air. But on-the-ground public health consultancy work and teaching will play some role after she receives her Ph.D., she said.

And no matter what, storytelling is going to be a part of her life.

“That's the goal,” she said. “I'm always trying to be a Shonda Rhimes hybrid.”



“I’M PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS EXPOSED THE FAULT LINES OF RACIAL INEQUITY IN OUR COUNTRY.”

EMMANUELLA ASABOR

BY CODY MUSSELMAN

EXPOSING THE FAULT LINES OF RACIAL INEQUITY THROUGH PANDEMIC RESEARCH

In the spring of 2020, when a new coronavirus spread across the globe and evolved into a full-scale pandemic, many graduate students at Yale switched the focus of their research to help explain and contain the spread of the virus. Some worked on saliva-based testing, while others sequenced the genome of the coronavirus RNA. Emmanuella Asabor, a fifth-year graduate student in the combined MD-PhD degree program at the

Yale School of Medicine and Yale School of Public Health, is examining the disproportionate impact the coronavirus has had on vulnerable communities.

“I’m particularly interested in how the pandemic has exposed the fault lines of racial inequity in our country,” said Asabor, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Epidemiology (Microbial Diseases).

Over the past several months Asabor has used a combination of methods, including statistical modeling of disease and disease patterns, working with interview transcripts from people living at the intersection of economic and racial precarity, and conducting geospatial analysis to understand how people’s lived experience in physical space shapes the impact or the toll of the pandemic.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Asabor’s research interests centered around the social, economic, and historical factors that shape people’s experience of their illness and the health care system. While many graduate students pursuing combined degrees with the School of Medicine tend to do research in the hard sciences to complement the M.D., Asabor arrived at Yale knowing she wanted to focus her doctoral research on the external factors to biomedicine, with an emphasis on vulnerable and underserved communities.

“I am a Nigerian immigrant and I have called New York City home since my early childhood. I think early experiences with homelessness and other aspects of urban poverty have definitely imbued my research with a sense of commitment to communities that are really similar to the ones I knew growing up,” Asabor said.

Asabor first considered studying social determinants of health alongside medicine as an undergraduate student at Harvard University. There, she took an introductory course on medical anthropology when a scheduling conflict prevented her from taking other pre-med courses. “I had a free slot [in my schedule], but that class ended up changing the entire trajectory of my research, because it’s where I first saw that there was this formal field of study where people looked at how social factors shaped people’s experiences with health,” she said. Asabor graduated from Harvard in 2013 with a bachelor’s degree in the history of medicine. From there, she obtained a master’s degree in African studies from the University of Cambridge.

Upon the completion of her master’s degree, Asabor moved back to the United States and worked for the New York State Department of Health where she was based at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine. “There, I worked with an emergency medicine physician who was really passionate about making care more equitable for homeless people.” Asabor felt like she was part of creating a meaningful impact through this work, and it was during this time that she began to think about some of the potential policy implications of her future research. “I had a sense that I would probably want to go on to medical school and that I might consider graduate study as part of that, but I wasn’t sure what discipline I wanted.”

Now, several months into her research on the community impact of the coronavirus, Asabor is encouraged by the openness she sees among other researchers and the broader public to thinking about the socioeconomic factors of

people’s health experiences. “I’ve found that audiences that typically have not prioritized this field of inquiry are starting to pay a little bit more attention,” she said. Asabor is optimistic about this newfound attention and anticipates that greater collaboration across fields will result in more solutions that meaningfully impact people in the most need of help, particularly in catastrophic health emergencies such as a pandemic.

“There’s been a huge coming together and there’s been a lot of rhetoric around coming together,” said Asabor. “My hope is that we actually fulfill those promises and that we genuinely do embrace partnerships between community members and researchers and between researchers in different fields to come together with solutions that really shift the locus of power and begin to give some of that power back to people who belong to structurally marginalized communities.”



“I REMEMBER THINKING, ‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT EPIDEMIOLOGY IS, BUT THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO DO FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.’”

CRYSTAL HARRELL

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

AUTHOR, LIEUTENANT, RESEARCHER, SCHOLAR: FINDING SUCCESS AT YSPH

Raised in rural Alabama with nine siblings, Crystal Harrell remembers how her family struggled to survive on government assistance.

But because her father stressed the power of education, she decided to dive into her studies as her ticket out of public housing and into a brighter future.

In high school, Harrell applied for more than 30 scholarships at once and received more than half a million dollars in financial support. She beat out thousands of other students to win a Gates Millennium Scholarship, which paid for all of her education. At Auburn University, Harrell earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees while serving in

the U.S. Army’s Reserve Officer Training Corps.

But her life plans abruptly changed when she learned about the power of social epidemiology in a workshop at Auburn during her first year of graduate school.

“My heart began to race,” Harrell said. “I remember thinking, ‘I don’t know what epidemiology is, but this is what I want to do for the rest of my life.’”

She switched her major after completing her master’s degree in human development and family studies. She received her M.P.H. in epidemiology at George Washington University and is now a Ph.D. candidate at the Yale School of Public Health. She’s looking to become

a successful researcher at YSPH and continue to prove that success is possible despite daunting odds.

“I knew that if I was going to spend the rest of my life studying public health, then I want to be trained by some of the best researchers in the field,” Harrell said. “Yale had it. I knew the faculty here are unmatched, the resources here are unmatched ... and since coming here, all of that has been verified.”

Harrell is in her first semester of her doctoral studies. For her dissertation, she’s planning on writing about the relationship between religious involvement and health among low-income African Americans. Theology classes at the Yale Divinity School have helped with her research, she said.

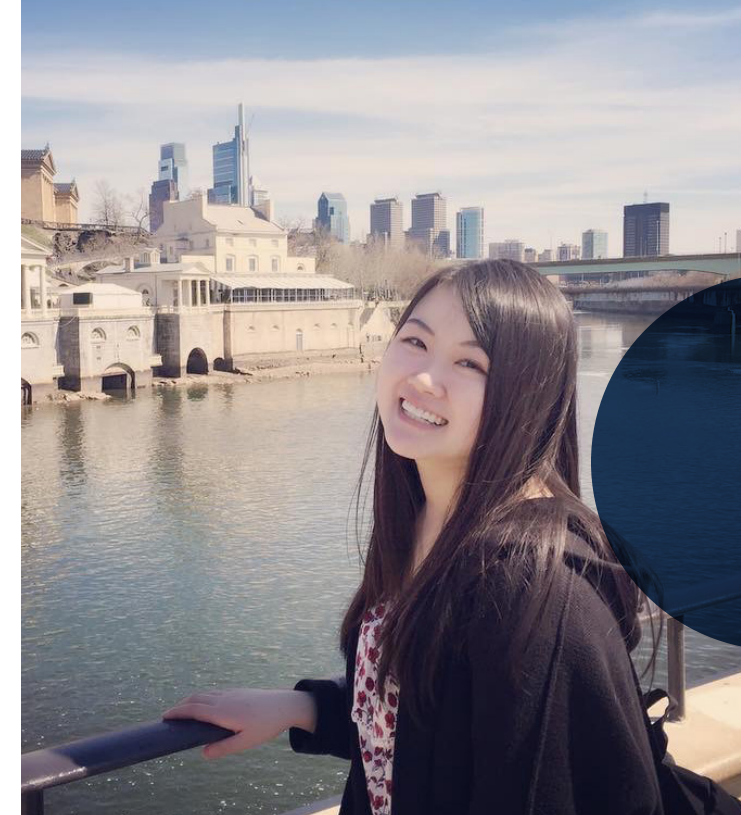
Harrell’s long-term goal is to work for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That way, she said, she can continue to be an advocate for Black health and wellness.

“We’re seeing in the research that religious background has a significant impact on the health of low-income minority individuals,” Harrell said. “It’s very difficult to study religion

and spirituality, but it’s a growing field. I want to jump all in to see where I can find my niche.”

Harrell is also a first lieutenant in the Army and moonlights as a life coach and academic Adviser for low-income students. Last year, she added even more to her busy schedule when she started writing a book. She sold her television so she could focus on writing thousands of words every morning. The end result: Harrell finished a book about her educational journey from public housing to the Ivy League. The book illustrates how education can be used to help people achieve their goals in life. *Crystal Clear: A Journey of Self-Discovery*, was published in March 2021.

“If I have a book, I can have all this information in one place, I can highlight my journey, and I can help people on a larger scale,” she said. “This is like a dream come true. I would also like for my book to serve as a message of hope and resiliency for people who wish to defy the odds.”



“I FEEL A SENSE OF JOY USING MEANINGFUL TECHNOLOGY THAT MAY HELP TO CONTRIBUTE TO SAVE MILLIONS OF LIVES.”

JOANNA CHEN

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

FITTING IN AT YSPH: FROM CHINA TO NEW HAVEN

When Joanna Chen, M.P.H. ’21, left her home in China to attend college in the United States at 17, the cultural shift challenged her self-confidence. A daunting language barrier made classroom learning difficult as well.

“It was difficult because I was not able to find any confidence and speak my mind during that time,” she said. “Imposter syndrome filled my school life.”

Over time, Chen found her undergraduate classmates and professors to be receptive and encouraging, which allowed her to be more open and confident. But she wondered whether she would find a similar environment in graduate school.

She was grateful, therefore, when she enrolled at the Yale School of Public Health and found a vibrant and supportive academic community that offered many opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Since she started studying at YSPH, Chen said she has encountered friendly faculty, powerful women role models, and bountiful internship opportunities. Her concentration in biostatistics has also allowed her to explore her passions for computer science and public health. Chen works as a research intern at an artificial intelligence research institute in Montreal, Quebec, where she investigates new ways to accelerate drug discovery.

“There was a bit of a learning curve,” she said about her job. “But it was incredible to be able to put some theoretical quantitative methods I had learned in the classroom into practice and to solve some real-world public health problems.”

Chen said the flexible course-registration system at YSPH allowed her to dive deeply into subjects in which she was interested and fostered her passion for computer science and artificial intelligence.

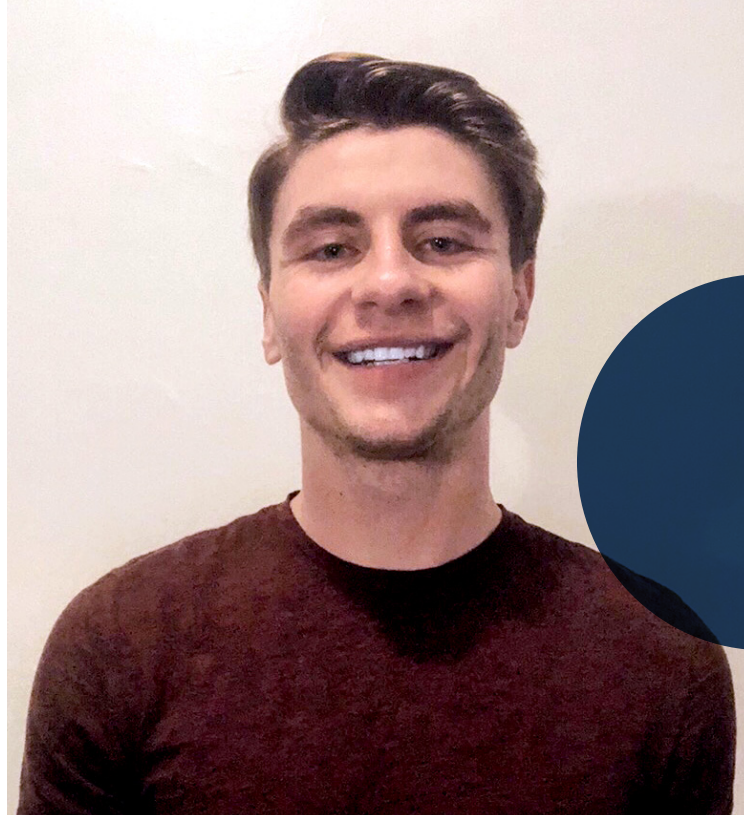
Chen was able to apply her biostatistics skills as a volunteer for the Haven Free Clinic, a student-run primary care clinic that provides the New Haven community with access to comprehensive, high-quality health care free of charge. She helped clinic managers by analyzing the likelihood of patients following through with appointments. Chen has also volunteered for the New Haven Health Department and was among a specially trained team of Yale students who conducted contact tracing within the Yale and New Haven communities during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chen hopes that her biostatistics and computer science training will eventually help her to become a machine learning engineer or data scientist. She would like to use her coding skills to serve the community and society.

“I feel a sense of joy being able to contribute to the health care field using meaningful technology that may help to contribute to save millions of lives,” she said.

Chen also said her time at YSPH has improved her confidence.

“Thanks to the inclusive and welcoming environment of YSPH and the interdisciplinary nature of YSPH,” she said, “I can work with people with diverse backgrounds, varying perspectives, and distinct ways to handle public health programs. Such a culture at YSPH has helped me to succeed in an increasingly diverse and intertwined society.”



“HAVING GROWN UP IN A WEB OF HOMOPHOBIA, I BECAME VERY INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING WHY SOME GAY MEN STRUGGLE WHILE OTHERS THRIVE.”

ANTHONY MAIOLATESI

BY COLIN POITRAS

EARLY EXPERIENCES MOTIVATE RESEARCH ON LGBTQ MENTAL HEALTH

Growing up as one of the few openly gay men in his small hometown of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, Anthony “Tony” Maiolatesi experienced homophobia firsthand. He remembers the slurs, the stares, and the bitter sting of harassment and prejudice he encountered as he went about his daily life.

That hometown experience, coupled with his innate curiosity about human behavior, motivated Maiolatesi to pursue a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Columbia University and ultimately enroll in the graduate training program in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH).

“Having grown up in a web of homophobia, I became very interested in understanding why some gay men struggle while others thrive,” Maiolatesi said.

Now a Ph.D. student at YSPH, Maiolatesi is using rigorous experimental methods to study how stereotypes shape gay men’s impressions of themselves and their behavior.

His research recently caught the attention of the National Science Foundation, which awarded Maiolatesi a competitive Graduate Research Fellowship award in March. The NSF grant provides three years of funding to Graduate Research Fellows, totaling \$138,000.

“This NSF grant will allow me to experimentally test whether gay men’s social behavior, namely assertiveness, is contingent upon whether their gay social identity is activated or their male social identity is activated, given that male stereotypes (assertive, masculine) are diametrically opposed to gay stereotypes (shy, feminine),” said Maiolatesi.

Maiolatesi hopes his research will fill gaps in the current scientific literature by showing that male- and gay-relevant stereotypes differentially influence how gay men see themselves and interact with the social world.

“The state of knowledge pertaining to the social world’s impact on gay men is almost entirely correlational,” Maiolatesi said. “Many of the causal relationships and processes proposed by rigorous social psychological theory remain untested and unexplored among this unique population of men.”

One line of Maiolatesi’s research focuses on personality dispositions that might explain variability in gay men’s responses to social rejection, with implications for their psychosocial well-being and health. A second line explores

the psychological mechanisms underlying gay men’s self-views and attitudes toward other gay men.

Maiolatesi’s faculty Advisers are John Pachankis, Ph.D., Susan Dwight Bliss Associate Professor of Public Health (Social and Behavioral Sciences) and director of Yale’s LGBTQ Mental Health Initiative, and Melissa Ferguson, Ph.D., Yale professor of psychology and a leading expert in implicit social cognition.

When asked his thoughts about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in science, Maiolatesi said that it’s critical that the scientific community reflects the communities it serves.

“I believe that the strongest, most innovative research is conducted by those who have a personal stake in their work,” said Maiolatesi. “It is my hope that my research can serve as a vehicle to make a transformative impact on the lives of younger scientists by creating a research environment whereby people under-represented in the sciences, namely LGBTQ people, are not only supported, affirmed, and celebrated, but also reminded that being different is never a bad thing and that people like us do belong in academia.”



“I THINK SOMETIMES THE PROBLEM SEEMS SO BIG THAT WE ASK THE SAME QUESTIONS OVER AND OVER AND GET LOST.”

MADELINE NGUYEN

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

BRINGING A RACE PERSPECTIVE TO MATERNAL HEALTH

Health inequality is a growing concern across the world. Food insecurity threatens millions — especially low-income minority communities. And for many people of color, maternal health care is simply out of reach.

Madeline Nguyen, M.P.H. ’21, wants to help change that.

Nguyen is working to ensure that health care is more accessible to people in New Haven. She is one of the leaders of Womxn of Color for Maternal & Child Health, a Yale School of Public Health group

dedicated to providing health justice for women of color across the city. And she’s just getting started. Once she graduates, Nguyen said, she would like to continue to bring a critical race perspective to all her projects.

“I think it’s so important to have that perspective and to be able to think differently than what has been done in the past,” she said. “Even though everyone is really trying to be better in terms of diversity and inclusion efforts, I think sometimes the problem seems so big that we ask the same questions over and over and get lost in all of the different solutions that we could actually implement.”

It’s this same inquisitiveness that Nguyen brought to her internship with the city of New Haven last summer. At the city’s Food System Policy Division, Nguyen investigated ways to fight food insecurity among communities of color. But just like her time in the classroom, she strove to ask new questions: not what the city could do about food equity, but rather why communities needed help in the first place.

Through this new approach, she ended up learning about historical food-related disparities in New Haven and wrote a detailed memo about how land use affects the city’s public health.

Nguyen said her education at Yale has helped her gain more skills and experience, through which she can help marginalized communities. And her interactions with fellow students and faculty members have grown her perspective on public health. When everyone’s trying to make a better and healthier world, she said, that energy excites her.

“I came to YSPH because I was really looking for a public health program that would provide me with all the skills, experiences and networking opportunities that really lend themselves to promoting not just a quality life, but also creating more equitable systems,” she said.

Womxn of Color for Maternal & Child Health is one such avenue through which Nguyen has been able to promote health equity. As the first Yale maternal health group to be exclusively geared toward women of color, the organization is doing vital work to improve health outcomes and fight racial disparities.

“Not only has it taught me a lot of things and helped me hone some of my skills, it’s also given me a space where I feel understood in a very different way with other women of color who might have experienced things similarly or feel something similarly,” she said.



“THERE IS POTENTIAL TO ADDRESS [AMERICAN SAMOA’S] PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEMS, BUT IT JUST TAKES TIME.”

MATA’UITAFA SOLOMONA-FAIAI

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

IMPROVING MATERNAL HEALTH HALF A WORLD AWAY

Mata’uitafa Solomona-Faiiai, a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Chronic Disease Epidemiology, has stepped foot on the Yale campus twice – first for a personal visit and then for her admissions interview just before COVID-19 reached the U.S.

Now, 7,000 miles away from New Haven on the island chain of American Samoa, she applies what she’s learning at the Yale School of Public Health in real time. And the six-hour time difference and sheer distance from Connecticut haven’t

stopped her from using her education to improve maternal and child health outcomes in the South Pacific.

Her success, she said, is due in large part to the excellent relationships she’s already built with faculty at YSPH and beyond.

“Yale has been a great institution. I’m in my second semester, but I’ve learned so much during that time,” said Solomona-Faiiai, who goes by Mata’u. “Professors are concerned, and they would reach out. I think it’s the perfect place for me.”

American Samoa, which straddles the International Date Line, is still dealing with the impacts of colonialism and medical racism and reports high rates of obesity. When coupled with economic hardship, the unincorporated U.S. territory faces public health crises that require unique approaches to solve.

Since her teenage years, Solomona-Faiiai knew she wanted to dedicate her life to researching new ways to improve health in her home territory. First at Chaminade University in Hawaii, and then at the George Washington Milken Institute School of Public Health, she worked hard to make that dream a reality. She worked as a research assistant with YSPH Associate Professor Nicola Hawley, Ph.D., at the Obstetrics & Gynecology Clinic at LBJ Tropical Medical Center, the only hospital in American Samoa; there, she learned about how YSPH could help her become a better researcher. Solomona-Faiiai also spent a couple of years as a maternal child epidemiologist for the American Samoa Department of Health before coming to YSPH.

“There is potential to address [American Samoa’s] public health problems, but it just takes time,” she said. “I think American Samoa is heading toward reversing the [public health] shift.”

Even though her time at YSPH has been short, Solomona-Faiiai has already racked up accomplishments. Last November, she and another student won an award from the Asian & Pacific Islander Caucus for Public Health for their mixed methods study of adolescent mental health in American Samoa. She is also a recipient of the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarship, which provides a full scholarship from undergraduate admission to the doctoral level. For her dissertation, Solomona-Faiiai plans on building a maternal child health surveillance system to allow for adequate monitoring of health conditions that affect maternal and child health in American Samoa.



“I THINK, TO ME, WHAT’S REALLY IMPORTANT IS TRYING TO FIX HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES, WHETHER THAT’S IN THE U.S. OR ABROAD.”

JESSICA AINOOSON

BY MATT KRISTOFFERSEN

A HELPING HAND FOR NEW HAVEN HEALTH

As a student at the Yale School of Public Health, Jessica Ainooson, M.P.H. ’22, is working to make the world a healthier place.

Ainooson, who concentrates in social and behavioral sciences, is spending her gap year assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Black and brown populations in New Haven for the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE).

Co-housed at Southern Connecticut State University’s School of Health and Human Services and the Yale School of Public Health, CARE works in collaboration with local community partners to improve health in New Haven by identifying solutions to health challenges through community-based research.

When she returns to her studies in the fall, Ainooson said she would like to also continue her work at the Neighborhood Health Project, an

interdisciplinary collaboration between students at the Yale schools of medicine, nursing, and public health, and the Physician Associate Program, which provides free blood pressure and blood glucose screenings in New Haven.

It’s all part of her plan to help communities around the world, starting with New Haven.

“I have really big dreams,” Ainooson said. “If I’m being honest ... my dream of a lifetime would be to run an international global health organization like the World Health Organization or Doctors Without Borders. I’m really interested in global health.”

For Ainooson, public health is as interesting as it is personal. Her family is from Ghana, and she’s passionate about improving health outcomes and infrastructure in developing nations. She’s also passionate about addressing health care inequities, wherever they exist.

“We talk about global health and think that it has to happen outside of the U.S., but that’s not necessarily true,” she said. “I think, to me, what’s really important is trying to fix health care disparities, whether that’s in the U.S. or abroad. Especially when you think about racial disparities.”

The opportunities Ainooson has engaged in during her time at Yale have helped her advance toward a future career in public health. And New Haven has been a great place to sharpen her skills thanks to outreach programs at YSPH, she added.

“I feel like the Yale School of Public Health definitely makes more of an effort to conduct programs that are community-focused,” she explained. “I’ve found it easier to engage in things that bring me closer to New Haven and make it feel more like a home that I’m invested in.”

giving back

Many of the school's most significant accomplishments and current projects — in areas such as metabolomics, disease modeling, climate change, and health — have been supported by donors committed to improving the well-being of communities worldwide. At critical moments in our history, the Yale School of Public Health's alumni and friends have invested in our future and in a shared vision for a healthier and more equitable world. We hope you will join us in this critical venture.



DONATION CREATES DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION FUND AT THE YALE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

BY COLIN POITRAS

The Yale School of Public Health's ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, and belonging received a substantial boost with a generous donation from Dr. Pilar Vargas and her husband, Dean Sten H. Vermund.

The gift, which creates an endowed fund exclusively dedicated to school DEIB efforts, is the latest of several contributions the couple has made to the school since Vermund became dean in 2017.

The fund is named in honor of Dr. Vargas' parents, Dr. Pedro Vargas and Mrs. Pilar Bodas de Vargas, who believed

in the power and potential of education and the importance of equal opportunity for all individuals to increase their knowledge and improve their lives.

"My father, an ophthalmologist, was a lifelong member of the Rotary Club, and he was very interested in one of the club's core missions, which is to provide scholarships to students to start, continue, or complete their studies," said Pilar Vargas, a retired child psychiatrist and neurobiologist. "Hopefully, with this donation, we can do the same and support students in their studies."

It was Pilar Vargas' grandparents, a farm family from Isabela, Puerto Rico, who instilled in the family a deep respect for and interest in education. The eldest son, a pharmacist, and his other brothers helped support Pilar's father's passion to study medicine. Pedro Vargas would go on to become the first of what would eventually be a long line of physicians (11 in all) to carry the Vargas family name.

But like many students from underrepresented and underserved populations today, the journey Pedro Vargas made to further his education was full of challenges.

With no medical school in Puerto Rico at the time and unable to afford medical school in the continental United States, Vargas went to Madrid to pursue his medical training, only to have his plans cut short by the Spanish Civil War. Fleeing the civil unrest with classmates, Vargas transferred to Cologne, Germany, and then to Austria, where he completed his medical degree at the University of Vienna in 1939.

Vargas returned to Puerto Rico, where, with the enduring and essential support of his wife, Pilar, he would give back to the greater Arecibo community, providing clinical care to residents in northern Puerto Rico for more than 35 years.

Dr. Pedro Vargas' impact on the community cannot be overstated. Having a local doctor who grew up in the area and who understands local culture and community can have profound effects in building positive doctor-patient relationships, Vermund said. Some of his patients would pay for ophthalmologic services with their own farm products when they had no money, Vargas recalled.

"Being from rural Puerto Rico, Pedro Vargas cared very deeply for the people there and he paid it forward," said Vermund, a pediatrician, infectious disease epidemiologist, and Yale's Anna M.R. Lauder Professor of Public Health. "The cultural synergy between a patient and a professional who serves his or her own community can be very powerful. It all starts with education and opportunity."



THE FUND IS NAMED IN HONOR OF DR. VARGAS' PARENTS, WHO BELIEVED IN THE POWER OF EDUCATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS.

As set forth in the establishing documents, the mission of the new fund is to:

“Ensure that the Yale School of Public Health is a place where students, faculty, and staff are free to explore the breadth of their intellectual curiosity, the depth of their humanity and the potential of their scholarship, research, work and practice. Activities (supported by the fund) should engage the school and broader community around addressing health inequities and challenges to inclusion at Yale and in society; facilitate the exchange of ideas across ideological, political or other differences; and/or celebrate examples of excellence and achievement.”

Vermund said the structure of the fund is deliberately open-ended to allow flexibility in supporting a broad range of efforts related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. He hopes news of the fund will encourage others — such as Yale School of Public Health alumni, current students, and school supporters — to contribute and help it grow.

Vermund has partnered with faculty to make diversity, equity inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) a core pillar of the school, building on the prior work of many contributors. In 2019, he appointed Associate

Professor Mayur Desai, M.P.H. '94, Ph.D. '97, as the school's inaugural associate dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Desai, who will administer the new fund, has fully embraced his new deanship and is working diligently to promote DEI through a variety of new initiatives. These include supporting memberships in the National Association of Health Services Executives for students of color, hiring Leigh Roberts as the DEIB program administrator, and reviewing the staff hiring process to achieve greater diversity.

Other YSPH initiatives include new Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences faculty in the academic field of racism and health, spearheaded by Department Chair and Professor Trace Kershaw; a new social justice curriculum concentration directed by Associate Professor Danya Keene; and deeper engagement of alumni (Emerging Majority Affairs Committee) and students (Emerging Majority Students Association) in guiding the school in its DEI efforts.

“I know I speak on behalf of the entire YSPH community in thanking Dr. Vargas and Dean Vermund for their generosity and support of DEI activities at YSPH,” said Desai. “Over time, I hope the fund can grow to support a variety of purposes,

including supporting public health student internships focused on addressing health inequities, hosting diverse scholars and practitioners who are leading experts in their fields, and holding trainings and events aimed at engaging the YSPH community in difficult conversations around implicit bias and systemic racism.

I also thank those prior donors who have highlighted the needs of underrepresented students at YSPH.”

Vermund cited several existing YSPH student scholarships advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging as inspiration for the DEIB fund.

YSPH offers a variety of opportunities for alumni and friends to have a lasting impact on the students of today, and the future of the school:

- Sra. Pilar and Dr. Pedro Vargas Fund for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.
- Endowed scholarships and internship funds for underrepresented minority students.
- Health Equity Fellowships within the Office of Public Health Practice (OPHP). These fellowships provide students with the opportunity to engage in high-quality, equitable practice projects with local organizations.
- Support for the new HEALTH AND JUSTICE CONCENTRATION, including endowed professorships, scholarships for students pursuing the health and justice concentration, and innovation funds to support pilot research projects.

To learn more about these opportunities, please contact Connie Evans, senior director of development and alumni affairs (cornelia.evans@yale.edu).



LEAVE NO PERSPECTIVE UNEXPLORED.

Public health demands every perspective. But perspective is not just where we look, it is who is looking. We strive to remove barriers and create an environment where students freely explore the breadth of their intellectual curiosity, the depth of their humanity, and the potential of their scholarship.

By donating to a fund at the Yale School of Public Health, you will celebrate the diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives at the School, promotion of broad access to a Yale education, and innovative educational programs. You'll support the open exchange of ideas across our differences while addressing health inequities through our work. You'll nurture tomorrow's leaders and inspire the difference they'll go on to make in this world.

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