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Nine Scholars Recognized for the 12th annual Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Research Funding Awards

Established in 2008 by the SRCD Student and Early Career Council (SECC), the Dissertation Research Funding Awards (DFAs) are given to dissertation research proposals that are exceptionally noteworthy and display a strong potential to contribute to the field of child development. Each recipient is awarded $2,000 USD to use for research costs related to the proposed dissertation project.

SRCD congratulates the 2020 Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Funding Awardees: Emily Cohodes, Cassondra Eng, Nelcida Garcia, Patrece Joseph, Lok-Wah Li, Tina Melamed, Ogechi "Cynthia" Onyeka, Nila Shakiba, and McKenzie Stokes.



Emily Cohodes, Yale University

"Parsing Heterogeneity in the Effects of Stress on Frontolimbic Circuitry Across Development”

Emily Cohodes is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Yale University, where she works with Dr. Dylan Gee in the Clinical Affective Neuroscience and Development Lab. Emily uses functional MRI to learn about how stress influences a child's developing brain and mental health. While we know that exposure to stress in early life often impacts the brain and risk for mental health disorders, her research tries to understand how different features of stress (e.g., type, timing, perceived attributes) each have a unique effect on brain development, and how specific dimensions of stress may be differentially impactful at specific stages of development. By understanding the roles of specific features of stress exposure in shaping the developing brain, this research has the potential to shed light on the etiology of stress-based disorders and to inform prevention and intervention for children exposed to adversity.



Cassondra Eng, Carnegie Mellon University

“Physically-active Gameplay as a Context for Fostering Executive Function Development in Children”

Cassondra Eng is a doctoral candidate at Carnegie Mellon University working with Dr. Anna Fisher and Dr. Erik Thiessen. As a Fellow in the Program in Interdisciplinary Education Research (PIER) and the Center for the Neural Basis of Cognition (CNBC), her training is in two distinct, but complementary areas: learning sciences and cognitive neuroscience. She utilizes eye tracking and neuroimaging to investigate the interactions between psychophysiological processes and educational outcomes. Cassie’s research focuses on fostering attention regulation and executive function through enriching virtual learning contexts. Her dissertation examines how physically-active video games (exergames) enhance executive function development and neuroplasticity in preschool-age children. As technology use grows at an exponential rate and sedentary behavior increases in the wake of the global pandemic, evidence-based practices that promote both physical activity and cognitive engagement are needed. Long-term, she hopes to extend her dissertation work to examine well-being and socioemotional development in a wider variety of age demographics, low-income youth, and individuals at-risk for neurological disorders. She advocates for Educational Neuroscience, the emerging field that fosters collaborations in neuroscience, psychology, human-computer interaction, and related disciplines to explore how learning experiences support brain

development and cognitive skills crucial for academic achievement and success.



Nelcida Garcia, Florida International University

“Understanding the Home Spatial Environment”

Nelcida Garcia is a doctoral candidate in Developmental Science at Florida International University under the mentorship of Dr. Shannon Pruden. Prior to pursuing her Ph.D., Nelcida completed a B.S. in Psychology and an M.A. in Educational Psychology. Nelcida’s current research focuses on the role of environmental, cognitive, and biological factors in the development of spatial abilities, which are precursors to achievement in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Nelcida’s dissertation examines the direct and indirect effects of parent characteristics on children’s intrinsic and extrinsic spatial ability in a fully remote format. She hopes that findings from this study will contribute to the knowledge of the factors that influence STEM learning and retention in children and provide a foundation for future interventions. Nelcida’s long-term research goals are to increase interest and achievement in STEM in young children and underrepresented groups, like women and minorities, as well as advance developmental theory about spatial thinking in an effort to inform parenting, practice, and policy in preschool and higher education

settings.

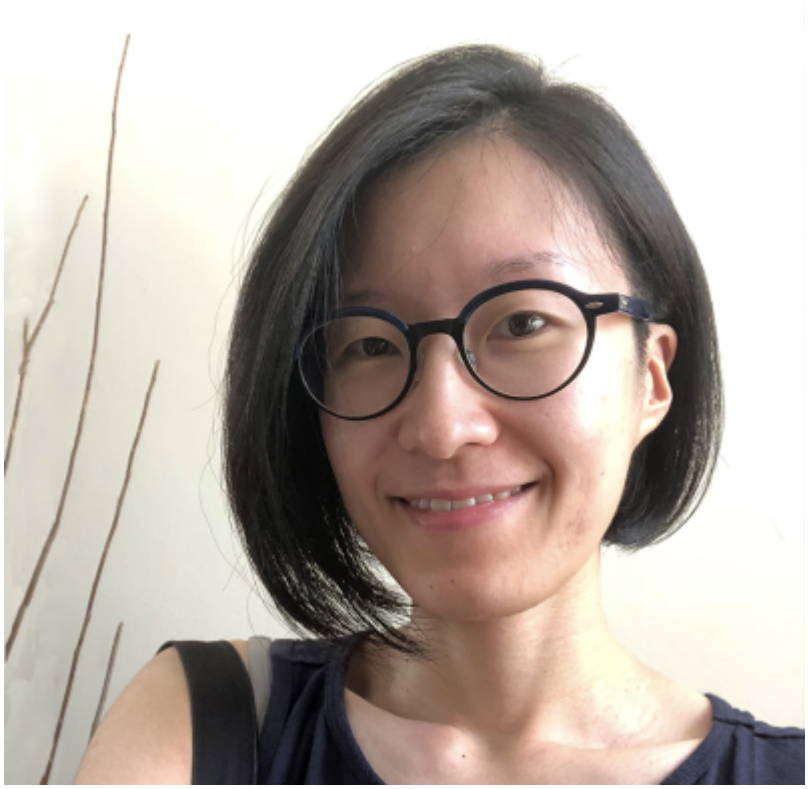


Patrece Joseph, Tufts University

“Development and Validation of the Adolescent Health Identity Development Scale”

Patrece Joseph is a doctoral candidate in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University (Advisor: Dr. Sasha Fleary). Her research uses community-engaged methods to have a positive impact on the health of adolescents from marginalized communities (e.g., Black, Latinx, and/or low-income). She is interested in (1) adolescents’ unique health-related beliefs, decision-making skills, and health behaviors and; (2) designing, implementing, and disseminating interventions that consider adolescents’ developmental trajectories, contexts, and build on their strengths. Her dissertation seeks to develop and establish reliability and validity for a measure of health identity development in a diverse sample of adolescents through four phases: item development, content expert reviews, cognitive interviews with adolescents, and scale administration and evaluation. Greater understanding about the relationship between adolescents’ health identity (i.e., the consolidation of health-related attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors into cognitive structures that guide meaning-making and decision-making) and their health behavior may provide insight for developing

interventions to reduce health-related disparities.



Lok-Wah Li, Tufts University

“Childrearing Practices for Approaches to Learning as Determined by Multiple Caregivers among Chinese Heritage Families with Low-Income in the US”

Lok-Wah Li is a doctoral candidate in Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University, working under the supervision of Dr. Christine McWayne. Lok’s research interests stem from her background as an immigrant from Hong Kong, as well as her experiences working in preschool and children’s museum settings in the US. Her research seeks to understand childrearing among culturally diverse families from a ground-up, strength-based perspective. Lok’s dissertation explores how primary and extended caregivers’ childrearing beliefs and practices are associated with approaches to learning among Chinese-heritage preschool-aged children. Specifically, her project focuses on how multiple caregivers consider, negotiate, and implement daily childrearing practices related to supporting their young children’s learning and school readiness. The project also provides a platform for immigrant caregivers to share their stories and insights on how their personal characteristics, cultural background, and interactions with other caregivers in the family shape the

way they support their young children's learning. Lok hopes her research can center the voices of caregivers from low-income communities to highlight narratives on resilience and strength in childrearing, illustrating again that "it takes a village to raise a child."



Tina Melamed, University of Texas at Dallas

"Neural Oscillations Supporting Bilingual Language Processing"

Tina Melamed is a doctoral student studying Communication Sciences and Disorders at The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) under the mentorship of Dr. Mandy Maguire. She graduated with a BA in Linguistics and MS in Speech-Language Pathology before working as a clinician in the largest public school district in Texas. As part of her work in the Developmental Neurolinguistics Lab, she has used behavioral and neurophysiological (EEG) methods to examine the role of underlying cognitive processes that support language development and use in children. Specifically, she has focused on children's ability to use language they know to infer the meaning of words they do not know. For her dissertation, she will compare auditory and written word learning abilities of 8-15-year-old children to determine which modality best supports novel word learning from the surrounding linguistic context. Her long-term goals are to examine language

learning in school-aged children and adolescents, and to identify strategies to improve academic performance for struggling language learners, such as those with developmental language disorder (DLD).



Ogechi “Cynthia” Onyeka, Loyola University Chicago

“Pupils of the Pipeline: Exploring the Role of the School-to-Prison Pipeline on Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning”

Ogechi “Cynthia” Onyeka is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Loyola University Chicago, working under the mentorship of Dr. Maryse Richards. Cynthia’s research is focused on factors that promote resilience for youth of color and the relationship between socio-ecological stressors, trauma, and mental well-being in marginalized communities. Her initial interest in this area emerged through her work implementing and evaluating a longitudinal cross-age peer mentoring program for Black and Latinx youth exposed to community violence in Chicago. Through this work, Cynthia developed a research focus centered on how various socio-ecological systems can impact youth psychosocial functioning and the processes youth utilize to critically reflect upon these contexts (i.e., critical consciousness). As such, her dissertation explores the role of school discipline and disciplinary actors on adolescent psychosocial functioning,

utilizing quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methods. Specifically, this project seeks to investigate how adolescents interact with different contributing factors to the school-to-prison pipeline and how these experiences relate to social-emotional functioning (particularly for youth of color). Cynthia hopes that her research will supply information about the importance of exploring the role of the school-to-prison pipeline on adolescent development, while providing a more nuanced understanding of the conditions under which youth experience safe, conducive, and productive learning environments.



Nila Shakiba, University of Utah

“Mismatch or cumulative stress: Advancing our understanding of the intergenerational transmission of stress exposure”

Nila Shakiba is a doctoral candidate in Developmental Psychology at the University of Utah under the mentorship of Dr. Elisabeth Conradt. There is a large literature examining the deleterious effects of early life stress on child stress physiology, health, and socioemotional development. Nila’s program of research addresses two major gaps in this literature: (1) biobehavioral mechanisms by which early life stress becomes biologically embedded to impact child physiological and developmental outcomes; (2) reconciling seemingly

contradictory findings suggesting that early life stress may be adaptive for socioemotional development in some contexts. Nila's dissertation project is informed by the two competing theoretical models of Cumulative Stress (a disease-focused approach) and Match-Mismatch (an evolutionary-developmental approach) to study the intergenerational effects of maternal emotion dysregulation on toddler emotion dysregulation. She will leverage multilevel models to examine the unique and combined effects of maternal prenatal and postnatal emotion dysregulation on physiological and behavioral indices of emotion dysregulation in 18-month old toddlers. The findings of this project will help illuminate which theoretical model best explains how exposure to maternal distress becomes biologically embedded and shapes toddler biobehavioral regulation. She hopes to highlight the importance of considering mother's experiences of emotion dysregulation during pregnancy and the early postnatal period as transdiagnostic risks for child emotion regulatory processes.



McKenzie Stokes, North Carolina State University

"Understanding the Racial Socialization of Biracial Black-White Adolescents: A Meta-Ethnographic Review and Scale Development Study"

McKenzie Stokes is a doctoral candidate in Applied Social and Community Psychology at North Carolina State University. Her doctoral advisor is Dr. Elan Hope. In her research, McKenzie examines the role of race-based promotive and protective factors (e.g. racial socialization, racial identity) and family processes (e.g. parent-child relationships) on the psychological wellbeing of racially marginalized adolescents. McKenzie is specifically devoted to increasing the visibility of multiracial youth in developmental research beginning with her dissertation, which is a mixed-methods scale development study that will produce the first validated measure of racial socialization for biracial Black-White adolescents. She plans to expand this scholarship throughout her career and utilize the findings to develop culturally relevant interventions that foster wellbeing and mitigate risks associated with racial disparities in mental health outcomes among multiracial youth.