

Summer 2022



# University of Pittsburgh

## Biological and Health Psychology Newsletter

### Inside this edition:

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| <a href="#">Welcome!</a>         | 1  |
| <a href="#">Featured Alumni</a>  | 2  |
| <a href="#">Current Students</a> | 5  |
| <a href="#">APS Highlights</a>   | 7  |
| <a href="#">Submit News</a>      | 11 |

Greetings, friends, and colleagues.

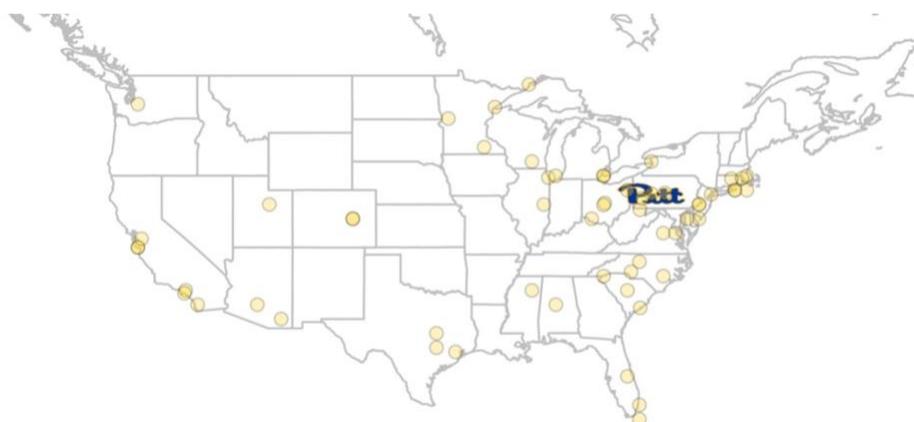
When I was a graduate student, the field of Health Psychology was just a germ of an idea. As chair of the Biological and Health Psychology program at the University of Pittsburgh now for the past eighteen years, it has been my privilege to observe this field's growth, and to participate in the nurture and development of several generations of scholars. I am grateful to have Pittsburgh as a vantage point for this field, as the generative training and collegial community we share here continue to feed my curiosity, enliven my efforts, and help to provide a broader context for the questions that I grapple with in my research.

We have put together this newsletter with the hopes of re-connecting with the scholars, educators, and clinicians who have passed through Pittsburgh as part of their career trajectory, who have experienced this generative spirit, and who have continued to participate in expanding the depth and breadth of the Pittsburgh Health Psychology network. We would like to share with you our most recent efforts to shape this burgeoning field, and, in the process, reinforce our valued friendships.

I hope that you enjoy this news.

Tom Kamarck, PhD

Professor and Chair, Biological and Health Psychology Program  
University of Pittsburgh



### Where is everyone now?

Map of Biological and Health Psychology program alumni's current positions

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## ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

Our program is proud to have trained some of the leading biological and health psychology researchers in the field. In each newsletter, we are featuring a previous graduate student and post-doctoral associate to highlight their current work and accomplishments. In this edition, please enjoy brief interviews of Shari Waldstein PhD, former graduate student, and Jesse Stewart PhD, former post-doc.



### **Shari R. Waldstein, Ph.D.**

**Previous Position at Pitt:** Joint Clinical-Health Psychology Graduate Student

**When:** 1985-1992

**Advisor:** Steve Manuck Ph.D.

#### **Background & Trajectory:**

##### ***What do I do?***

I'm currently Professor of Psychology, Director of the Behavioral Medicine Track of the Human Services Psychology (HSP) graduate program, and Affiliate Professor of Gerontology at UMBC, and Professor of Medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. My lab's interdisciplinary research program broadly addresses interrelations among age-related brain, neurocognitive, and cardiometabolic health and disease processes and how and why these differ inequitably as a function of intersectional identities including self-identified race, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender. One of our current foci is the study of race- and SES - related disparities in magnetic resonance imaging assessed indicators of accelerated brain aging and midlife risk markers for vascular and Alzheimer's dementia, their micro-to-macro level mediators, and associations with neurocognitive and functional status. I mentor many trainees ranging from undergraduate students to junior faculty, and am strongly committed to mentoring individuals who identify with minoritized groups. I also teach graduate courses in behavioral medicine and neuropsychology, and maintain involvement in multiple professional service activities.

##### ***What trajectory brought me here?***

During my truly remarkable time at Pitt, I was fortunate to obtain training and mentoring in both behavioral medicine and neuropsychology and strongly wished to integrate these disciplinary perspectives in my career. With encouragement from my mentors, I had an



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eye out for helping to build something new with select geographic locations in mind. After completing my clinical internship in neuropsychology and behavioral medicine at Brown, I accepted an Assistant Professor position at UMBC, which has afforded several exceptional growth opportunities over the past 29 years. First, I was able to develop a highly interdisciplinary research program, establishing strong ties locally with the University of Maryland School of Medicine where I hold my secondary academic appointment and am part of the Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center and Center for Research on Aging; the Baltimore VA Medical Center where I'm part of the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center; and the National Institute on Aging's Intramural Research Program where I collaborate extensively with the PIs of the epidemiological cohort study Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span (HANDLS) and spend my sabbatical time. With colleagues from these and other local and national institutions, I've had the amazing opportunity to collaborate with individuals from over 20 disciplinary/specialty backgrounds, and be part of UMBC's transition to R1 Carnegie classification. Second, shortly after my arrival, I redesigned the Behavioral Medicine track of our HSP program, and initiated our joint track model which now includes any combination of our three HSP tracks – Behavioral Medicine, Clinical Psychology, and Community Psychology. Designed to train graduate students to serve underrepresented groups in research, clinical, and other applied aspects of their work, our HSP program continues to work toward more fully integrating training in diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DISJ) throughout the curriculum. Third, our department as a whole engages in challenging ongoing work to fully embrace its mission with respect to DISJ via multiple initiatives. Under the leadership of the extraordinary President Freeman Hrabowski, the mission of UMBC has long included commitment to cultural and ethnic diversity and social justice, and the success of students underrepresented in science. I've been involved in the Meyerhoff Graduate Fellows Program since its inception, through which I've had the honor of mentoring many graduate students of color and serving on the Advisory Committee. These are the experiences that have kept me here at UMBC for so many years.

I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to my mentor Steve Manuck and the extraordinary faculty at Pitt for leading me to this wonderful life! I am confident that those of you in training at Pitt now will be incredibly well prepared for your own trajectories.

### **Pearls of Wisdom:**

#### ***What is your favorite aspect of your job?***

Mentoring! I particularly love to help graduate students identify their passions and achieve their goals. I find it incredibly rewarding to join them on their professional and personal journeys, often via very different pathways, and learn both with and from them. Also, working with individuals from multiple disciplinary backgrounds to address complex research problems. It's been an extraordinary experience to continuously learn as part of our interdisciplinary teams, and seek to integrate our perspectives and knowledge bases.

#### ***What are your words of wisdom for those who are interested in pursuing a career in behavioral medicine or health psychology?***

Find that which will bring you joy in your career. Be open to constant discovery and a bit of serendipity.





## **Jesse Stewart Ph.D.**

**Previous Position at Pitt:** Post-Doctoral Fellow on T32 Cardiovascular Behavioral Medicine Training Grant

**When:** 2004-2006

**Advisor:** Tom Kamarck Ph.D.

### **Background & Trajectory:**

#### ***What do I do?***

I am a Professor and the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Psychology at IUPUI (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis), Indiana's urban research and academic health sciences institution. The majority of my time is devoted to my research and that of my mentees through my Cardiometabolic Behavioral Medicine Lab ([www.cbmlab.org](http://www.cbmlab.org)). This is a great fit for me, as I love to sit in my office and write, listening to tunes. I also have teaching, mentoring, service, and administrative responsibilities, most of which pertain to research or graduate education, which are passions of mine.

#### ***What trajectory brought me here?***

Before IUPUI, I completed my undergraduate education at the University of Illinois (B.S. in Psychology), my graduate education at Ohio University (Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology), and my postdoctoral training at the University of Pittsburgh (NIH T32-funded program in Cardiovascular Behavioral Medicine Research). I was attracted to IUPUI as an early-stage investigator because of their outstanding clinical research environment (excellent collaborators, research resources, and research-engaged healthcare systems) and their APA-accredited Clinical Psychology PhD Program. In addition, I grew up in the Chicago area, so Indy is fairly close to family and friends (and the Bears, Bulls, and Sox).

### **Pearls of Wisdom:**

#### ***What is your favorite aspect of your job?***

The autonomy – I love having the decisional latitude to pick which projects to pursue and which collaborations to foster. For the most part, I also get to structure my days and weeks to fit my working style and passions.

#### ***What has surprised you the most about your career?***

The evolution of my program of research – When I came to IUPUI, I considered myself to be an epidemiologic and mechanistic researcher and doubted that would ever change. Early on as an



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Assistant Professor, I received a nudge from a close collaborator to expand to clinical trials, as there were (and are) clear needs for such studies in behavioral medicine. While I'm still engaged in epidemiologic and mechanistic research, I would now classify myself as a clinical trialist (nearly all my funded work has been for various kinds of trials), and I have a growing interest in implementation science. Along with autonomy, I also love this dynamic aspect of academic life.

***What research areas do you think are gaining momentum at this point, and why?***

This is my biased view, but I'd say clinical trials and implementation science. There continues to be growing recognition of the major role of behavioral, psychological, and social factors in health by folks outside of behavioral medicine, including at NIH and among politicians and the general public. I hope we have reached a tipping point. I suspect that, along with this recognition, will come greater interest in and needs for interventions addressing behavioral, psychological, and social treatment targets to prevent chronic diseases, to improve clinical care and prognosis after disease onset, and to reduce (and ultimately eliminate) health disparities. In addition, I see a current need for implementation science work to inform broad implementation of our field's interventions with demonstrated efficacy.

***What are your words of wisdom for those who are interested in pursuing a career in behavioral medicine or health psychology?***

Stay curious and courageous – Keep learning and evolving as a scientist, clinician, mentor, teacher, and person. Have the courage to make bold changes and pursue new areas and approaches. Seek out and jump on opportunities to lead and have an impact, even if you feel underprepared for the role (likely not true). Finally, enjoy your work and your time away from it!

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## CURRENT STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Our program is proud to be training the next generation of health psychologists working on a variety of research topics. In each newsletter, we plan to feature this next generation and share with readers their work and accomplishments. In this edition, please enjoy interviews with two of our trainees: Riley Jouppi, a first-year student; and Emily Jones, a postdoctoral associate.





## Riley Jouppi

**Year:** 1<sup>st</sup> year

**Program:** Clinical and Biological and Health  
Joint program

**Advisor:** Michele Levine Ph.D.

### **Research Interests**

Through her research and clinical work, Ms. Jouppi aims to lessen the health burden of eating related disorders and understand the mechanisms underlying these conditions. This includes studying eating behaviors, obesity and overweight, and the relationships between these factors.

### **Current Accomplishments**

Since joining the program in the fall of 2021, Ms. Jouppi has completed several projects that address different components of the obesity and overweight public health issue, including the role of sleep in weight gain and how to effectively measure disordered eating in unique clinical populations. Case in point, Ms. Jouppi led a project exploring the psychometric properties of a novel eating behavior scale administered to pregnant women with obesity and overweight. This paper was recently submitted to the *International Journal of Eating Disorders* and validated the use of the Eating Disorder Examination in this population. Additionally, Riley has presented her work at local and international conferences on the topic of sleep and weight gain in pregnant women. This research suggests that typical patterns relating sleep to weight gain may not extend to pregnant women with overweight and obesity.

### **Future Directions**

Ms. Jouppi looks forward to exploring how a mindfulness intervention may influence eating behaviors and how weight loss may associate with alterations in the motivational significance of food in future projects. In her upcoming master's thesis, she plans to examine how weight loss may be related to greater power over food through behavioral impulsivity. Clinically, she is excited about the opportunity to work with populations experiencing the conditions she studies. This includes starting her clinical work as a student in our joint Clinical and Health Psychology Program.





## **Emily Jones Ph.D.**

**Alma Mater:** Penn State

**Year:** 1<sup>st</sup> year on Cardiovascular Behavioral Medicine T32 Training Grant

**Faculty Mentors:** Anna Marsland Ph.D. RN, Pete Gianaros Ph.D.

### **Research Interests**

Broadly, Dr. Jones is interested in social and developmental processes associated with cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk, particularly the individual and interpersonal characteristics that may confer risk for or protection against the negative health consequences of childhood socioeconomic disadvantage. Specifically, she is interested in how upward mobility and post-secondary education shape CVD risk. Dr. Jones's research is part of a robust line of research and clinical work conducted at Pitt that aims to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in health and disease.

### **Current Accomplishments**

Dr. Jones has been an active member of our research team since coming aboard in August of 2021. Most recently, she published a manuscript demonstrating that first-generation college students had higher concentrations of the proinflammatory cytokines CRP and IL-6 upon making the transition to college, compared to their non-first generation peers (Jones & Schreier, 2022). Additionally, she currently has a manuscript under review that extends findings showing that childhood adversity prospectively influences inflammatory biomarkers, using data from our Pittsburgh Imaging Project sample. Lastly, Dr. Jones is working in partnership with Dr. Marsland and her graduate student, Brianna Natale, on a book chapter addressing the physiology of health and illness, which provides an overview of how biopsychosocial processes influence health through autonomic and endocrine systems.

### **Future Directions**

Dr. Jones is in the early stages of writing a K grant, which she hopes to submit in her second year as an important step towards becoming a health inequalities researcher. As part of Dr. Marsland's Pathways to Health Study, Dr. Jones will be helping to code neighborhood characteristics collected from Census data to better understand how discriminatory housing and neighborhood policies across childhood shape cardiometabolic risk in young adulthood. She looks forward to expanding her focus on individual and family influences on health to learn



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how policy and community factors, such as redlining and disinvestment, perpetuate health inequalities. She is assisting in organizing this year's Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research conference, the theme of which is the role of socioeconomic position in aging.

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## RECENT ALUMNI ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To be completed in future editions. Send us your news!



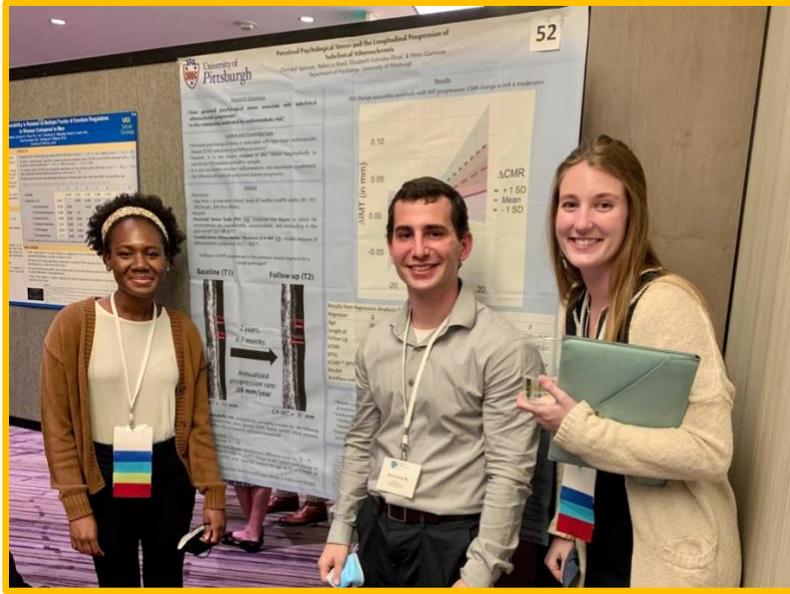
## DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Enjoy some photos from the American Psychosomatic Society 2022 Annual meeting in Long Beach, CA.

**Photo from APS  
Poster Session:**  
Former graduate  
students  
reconnected with  
mentors and  
friends.

*Left to Right:  
Aric Prather  
Anna Marsland  
Pete Gianaros*





**Photo from APS Poster Session:**

Current biological and health graduate student Chrystal Spencer presenting her work on the association between perceived stress and atherosclerosis.

*Left to Right:  
Chrystal Spencer  
Will Eckerle  
Abby Hillmann*

**Photo from APS Pitt Night:**

Pitt alumni, current faculty, and students took time to meet up while at APS.

*Left to Right:  
Katherine Duggan  
Ryan Brindle  
Tom Kamarck  
Kristi White  
Aric Prather*





**Photo from APS Pitt Night:**  
Pitt alumni, current faculty, and students took time to meet up while at APS.

*Left to Right:  
Rachel Koeffler  
Kristina Dickman  
Yuanjun Shen  
Brianna Natale  
Pete Gianaros*



L to R: Mary Carson, Kristi White, Kristen Salomon, Dan Buysse, Anna Marsland, Tica Hall, Juanjun Shen, Rachel Koeffler





L to R: Annie Ginty, Jennifer Boylan, Jenny Cundiff, Neha John-Henderson

## SUBMIT YOUR NEWS HERE!

Submit your recent accomplishments or other recent alumni accomplishments [here](#).

Contact the Biological and Health Psychology Communications Sub-Committee at:  
[bhpsych@pitt.edu](mailto:bhpsych@pitt.edu)

**Brought to you by the Biological and Health Psychology Communications Sub-Committee:**

Will Eckerle  
Abby Hillmann  
Tom Kamarck  
Steve Manuck  
Rebecca Reed  
Hayley Ripperger  
Chrystal Spencer