

Pitt School of Social Work PhD Candidates on the Job Market

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University of
Pittsburgh

School of Social Work

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Adrian J. Ballard

Email: ajb283@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3QMVgfj>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3QqUxQ0>



Adrian J. Ballard, MSW, LCSW (he/him/his) is a licensed clinical social worker with post-MSW practice experience in outpatient mental health services. Adrian's research focuses on the role of sexual socialization and sexuality development in people's overall mental, emotional, and social well-being, across and at intersections of identities and cultures. His dissertation entails development and validation of a measure to assess characteristics of sexual socialization messaging individuals receive and perceive. This will serve as a foundation for the research agenda Adrian intends to pursue, exploring relationships between sexual socialization experiences and psychosocial outcomes, with a particular emphasis on advancing sexual harm prevention innovations. As an educator, Adrian strives to embody a social work practice approach to serving students according to their unique and diverse strengths, needs, and self-determination.

Adrian's research interests and teaching philosophy are influenced significantly by his clinical social work experience in a New York State-certified community clinic in rural Upstate New York. There he conducted assessment, diagnosis, and psychotherapy with adolescents, adults, and older adults. He headed a group treatment program for mandated adults convicted or accused of sexual offenses or other problematic sexual behavior. Other prior employment and service experience includes adoptive family services, suicide prevention and crisis intervention, health care, medical education, non-profit, and corporate work in the Washington, DC, metro area. In addition to a PhD, Adrian will be completing a certificate in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies from the University of Pittsburgh.

Research Interests

- Sexual socialization across the lifespan
- Gender and sexual diversity and intersectionality
- Sexual harm prevention
- Social work education advancement and innovation

PhD Candidate



Ana T. Flores

Email: anaflores@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3pFetDK>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3ciTX91>



Ana T. Flores is a proud daughter of immigrants and first-generation college student. Her scholarship is focused on advancing culturally relevant services for Latinxs with a schizophrenia spectrum diagnosis from diverse and under-served communities. Ana's long-term goals are to (1) contribute to an understanding of the needs and experiences of Latinxs living with schizophrenia; (2) inform intervention research with the expertise of service users and their families and communities; and (3) to develop equitable community implementation plans that support increased engagement, acceptability, and relevance of MH treatment for Latinxs.

Ana's dissertation, titled "Social Cognition in Latinxs with Schizophrenia," is a novel exploration of the construct and measurement of *social cognition* in this population. Her approach incorporates psychometric analyses, multivariate regressions, and cross-cultural cognitive interviews. In addition to her dissertation, Ana is also involved in Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) research and various Latinx initiatives at the University.

Ana is originally from Southern California where she received her BA in Psychology from California State University San Bernardino. Following eight years of work in the California mental health system, Ana earned her MSW at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work during the joint MSW/PhD program.

Research Interests:

- Psychosocial treatments for schizophrenia
- Mental health services
- Latinx mental health
- Cross-cultural measurement and interventions
- Community engagement and implementation

PhD Candidate



Soobin Kim

Email: sok55@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3R1nXF6>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3TfwLcf>



Soobin Kim (she/her/hers) is a doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. She received her MSW (2017) and BA in Social Work with highest honors (2015) at Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea. Through her research and practice experiences during and after her BA and MSW, she worked with individuals and families residing in low-income neighborhoods and social work agencies engaging with these populations, as well as created national philanthropy education programs for different age groups. Currently, Soobin is working on the Pittsburgh Wage Study, which investigates the experiences of low-wage workers and their well-being.

Soobin's research agenda centers on economically disadvantaged populations, economic disparities, health disparities, and social policy. Specifically, her scholarly inquiries focus on 1) individual-level and societal factors associated with economic hardships, inequality, and health disparities, 2) structural barriers that hinder disadvantaged populations from experiencing better economic opportunities, and 3) the effectiveness of current social welfare policies and potential policy alternatives. Her career goal is to produce rigorous evidence to support designing and implementing policies and programs to alleviate hardships of economically disadvantaged populations and reduce economic and health disparities.

Research Interests

- Economic inequality
- Health disparities
- Poverty
- Social welfare programs
- Social policy

PhD Candidate



Ke Li

Email: ke.li@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3pL7Boh>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3dSPWs7>



Ke Li is a PhD candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. She earned her MSW from Washington University in St. Louis, with a specialty in aging and mental health. She received her BA in social work at East China University of Science and Technology. Prior to entering the PhD program, she worked as a research assistant on the Population Study of Chinese Elderly in Chicago Study (the PINE Study) examining multiple health determinants among older Chinese immigrants and their adult children.

Her research interest mainly focuses on understanding the potential mechanisms underlying the longitudinal effects of social isolation on the growth trajectories of loneliness and depression of older adults. She is also interested in examining the impacts of different patterns of social isolation and loneliness on older adults' psychological well-being. She also conducted research involving a wide range of topics in later life, including the impacts of immigration experience and neighborhood segregation on cognitive functioning and depression of older Chinese immigrants, living arrangements and social engagement of older adults, and the impacts of grandparenting on psychological well-being.

Research Interests:

- Social isolation and psychological well-being among older adults
- Productive engagement of older adults: employment, volunteering, grandparenting
- Intergenerational relationships
- Cognitive functioning and depression of older immigrants

PhD Candidate



Christopher Thyberg

Email: CTT19@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3To8LUH>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3x8bfg3>



Christopher Thyberg, LSW (he/him/his) is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. He received his BSW with highest honors from Calvin University (2014) and his MSW from the University of Pittsburgh (2015) with a certificate in Children, Youth, and Families. He is a licensed master's level social worker in the state of Pennsylvania. Christopher has extensive clinical experience doing therapeutic work with children, adolescents, and families. He has experience using Trauma Focused-CBT, family systems therapy, and social-emotional learning strategies. In addition to his clinical work, he has considerable research experience in K-12 schools and has worked in the Pittsburgh public school system as a high school soccer coach for almost a decade.

Christopher's research agenda is directly informed by his clinical and professional experiences and focuses on racial disparities for adolescents in mental healthcare and school-based settings. He is particularly interested in understanding how critical consciousness integrated with restorative practices can function as a panacea to the school-to-prison pipeline and racial disparities in school discipline. His dissertation examines how teacher racial attitudes associate with disparities in school-based discipline outcomes in the context of schools implementing restorative practices. Christopher is also interested in examining how critical social work education can help prepare social work students to engage with societal issues using multifaceted approaches that incorporate micro and macro interventions.

Research Interests

- School-to-prison pipeline
- Restorative practices and trauma-informed care within schools
- Racial and ethnic disparities in mental health
- Adverse childhood experiences and exposure to potentially traumatic experiences
- Critical and structural social work education

PhD Candidate



Cortney R. VanHook

Email: cortney.vanhook@pitt.edu

Profile: <https://bit.ly/3QJ9Q7N>

CV: <https://bit.ly/3dTr2Jb>



Cortney R. VanHook is a PhD Candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. Cortney received his Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Georgia State University (2012), a Master of Public Health (2015) degree and Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (2017) degree both from Mercer University, and a Master of Social Work – Direct Practice (2020) from Pitt. Cortney's academic background represents his interest in practicing at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. His transition to Social Work at the PhD level was a result of his desire to engage with curriculum and research steeped in social justice.

Cortney is passionate about the mental health of young Black males in the adolescent and young adult cohorts. His professional interests center on developing and evaluating interventions tailored to young Black males. His professional experience spans stints at the Centers for Disease Control, psychiatric hospital care, and university-partnered community interventions. VanHook has received extensive training in community-oriented research and qualitative methodology and his work is grounded in critical social theories.

Cortney is a native of the South Side of Chicago and considers both Chicago and Atlanta, Georgia as home.

Research/Clinical Interests

- Mental health of young Black males (adolescent and young adult cohorts)
- Individual, community, and policy interventions to reduce intra-community gun violence
- Qualitative methods, mixed methods, and program evaluation
- Critical social theories, humanistic psychology, and peace & conflict studies

PhD Candidate



University of
Pittsburgh

School of
Social Work

2117 Cathedral of Learning
4200 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

socialwork.pitt.edu