

CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

The University of Georgia's Center for Social Justice, Human and Civil Rights promotes social justice and the understanding of human rights, values and issues.

Established in 2013 and housed in the School of Social Work, the Center's value comes from its interdisciplinary collaboration, explains Dr. Llewellyn J. Cornelius, LCSW, the Center's director and the Donald Lee Hollowell Distinguished Professor of Civil Rights and Social Justice Studies. Social justice, he says, is "the pursuit in favor of a fair and equitable society... Across campus, we have quite a few souls interested in social justice and it makes the lifting a lot less heavy. The whole is greater than the sum of many parts, especially in academia where we tend to stick to our silos."

To that end, the following fellows represent a cross section of scholars from across the University of Georgia campus who are documenting the barriers of access to resources in society, as well as the achievement of health, mental health and economic well-being.



Dr. Harold Briggs' core social work research foci include the study of social, cultural and ecological predictors of African-American well-being and adjustment in child welfare, behavioral health and sexual health. Recently, he has been using content analysis methods to review the extent to which the focus on race and African-Americans continues to be marginalized in the social work profession. For example, in the most recent issue of *Research on Social Work Practice* (RSWP), Dr. Briggs' content analysis study of the extent to which African-Americans are an emphasis in social work literature revealed a small emphasis on topics of race and African-Americans.

The scholarship of Associate Professor of Employment Law & Legal Studies, **Dawn D. Bennett-Alexander, Esq.**, focuses on discrimination in the workplace against African-American women. She understands that the work of social justice is broad and deep. How could it not be, given the fact that it tries to dismantle an entire system that formed the basis of life in our country for its nearly 400-year existence? Not only is social justice about changing government systems, laws, rules and social mores that limit the lives of groups not considered favored, but also about examining the underlying principles that dictate those peoples' personal lives. She writes that "while many of these rules have been dismantled, vestiges of many still remain with us in ways that significantly impact our everyday lives."

Dr. Y. Joon Choi researches gender-based violence, and specifically intimate partner violence (IPV). "My current research addresses this critical need to prevent IPV and enhance access to services and resources for immigrant victims of IPV," she explains. "Specifically, I have developed a culturally appropriate online training for immigrant religious leaders, with the purpose of increasing their capacity to assist immigrant victims and help prevent IPV

in immigrant communities." She first tested this training with Korean immigrant religious leaders in a small (n=55), randomized clinical trial and found that the online training speaks to Korean immigrant religious leaders' cultural values; they embraced the online format. The program was effective at increasing knowledge of and attitudes against IPV.

Dr. Jane McPherson's scholarship sees social work through a human rights lens, and she applies human rights principles to research, teaching and practice. She creates tools to investigate and promote rights-based social work practice, and her work has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese. Currently, with funding from the International Association of Schools of Social Work, Dr. McPherson is working with a team of scholars from Croatia, Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina to explore human rights engagement among social workers in Southeastern Europe and to develop culturally appropriate human rights trainings for the region. Another area of research focus for Dr. McPherson is social work education.

Dr. David Okech's work focuses on local and global human trafficking. He writes that "a social work perspective on human trafficking is critical in effective anti-trafficking efforts, not only because of the professional guiding principles and values, but also because of the comprehensive nature of social work interventions. Herzog (2008) noted that there are significant attitudinal disparities among the general public, who continue to view victims of trafficking as complicit with all or part of the crime. A social work approach is not only guided by the values of social justice and human rights; it also sees the greater micro, mezzo, macro and global contexts that are associated with trafficking. Using an ecological approach, social workers are able to look beyond the perpetrator-victim dichotomy to the

qualities that empower individuals and groups as survivors and advocates.”

Dr. Michael A. Robinson's research is in the areas of substance abuse, criminal justice and the investigations of police shootings. He has an established research and publication history in the area of African-Americans and mental health, and how interactions with the criminal justice system affect mental health outcomes. Dr. Robinson serves as an advisor and educator in the area of diversionary programs for individuals who have been arrested/ticketed for marijuana use, alcohol use, theft and anger management. He has been recognized across the country as an expert in the field and was recently honored by the Conference on Racial Ethnic and Cultural Diversity for his work in the area of African-Americans and the justice system.

Dr. Tiffany Washington focuses on the challenges of managing End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) for older adults of color. Race disparities in ESRD are profound in the southeastern United States; meanwhile, living with ESRD can be difficult and negatively affect quality of life. The need to promote positive self-management of ESRD in diverse populations is, therefore, important. Dr. Washington's research examines the impact of psychosocial factors on kidney disease self-management among black and white older adults. The ultimate goal of her work is to improve the qual-

ity of life for older adults living with chronic conditions, especially given the fact that they affect nearly two-thirds of that population.

Dr. Henry N. Young's research targets health equity and social determinants that impact overall health and well-being. The nationwide issue of addressing and moving beyond the mere identification of health disparities drives his research program. Dr. Young's interests focus on health communication, medication use and health outcomes, with a special interest in improving health care for underserved and minority patient populations. He writes that “minority communities are overwhelmingly burdened by negative health outcomes, many of which stem from chronic medical conditions that are treated with medications. In an effort to overcome these negative outcomes, we may ask ourselves: *How do we help minority communities use medications safely and appropriately to improve health and well-being?*”

— Allison Salerno

To learn more about the Center for Social Justice, Human and Civil Rights contact Dr. Llewellyn Cornelius, lcornel@uga.edu, 706-542-0244.

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Llewellyn J. Cornelius, Ph.D., Director, Center for Social Justice, Human and Civil Rights