

Pitt School of Social Work PhD Candidates on the Job Market

Fall 2023



University of
Pittsburgh
School of Social Work

Cecily D. Davis

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CV



Cecily D. Davis, MSW (she/her/hers) is focused on eliminating anti-Black racism through her scholarship, teaching, and practice. Her research agenda includes projects supporting Black children's racial identity development, anti-racist practices, and improving schools' racial climates. Using critical theories, Cecily is working to (1) understand the essential components of how Black parents most effectively socialize their children around issues of racial bias; and (2) translate optimal Black youth development and anti-racist methods into practice.

Cecily has extensive micro, mezzo and macro social work practice working with and on behalf of oppressed communities, families, and children. With 14 years of practice experience, Cecily specializes in developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships with non-profit and for-profit organizations, schools/government agencies, and nationally funded research projects. Through these organizations, Cecily established program development, grant management, leadership, community engagement, and research skills.

Cecily's research utilizes mixed methods designs, and her community engaged research experience includes an efficacy study of a kindergarten mathematic readiness program and a study investigating social emotional skills with preschool students and teachers. During her doctoral assistantship, she has been a co-investigator and lead facilitator for a pilot research project studying a first-of-its-kind program that assists Black parents in supporting their child's emotional well-being and racism coping. In her role, she co-led a qualitative analysis of Black parents' perspectives in regard to barriers in educational attainment and co-authored an article discussing a research-to-practice partnership and study.

Cecily's research is directly informed by her professional experiences working with Black communities, and from that vantage point she has also examined how antiracist social work education can address the racism deeply entrenched in social work practice across settings and contexts. She is committed to supporting the development of social work students to engage in eradicating racism and to actively use our common core of theories, skills, and code of ethics.

Dissertation Title: *How Caregivers' Experiences with Racial Discrimination Relate to Racial Bias Socialization Processes within Black Families*

Research Interests

- Racial Discrimination
- Racial Socialization
- Stress and Coping
- School Social Work
- Interventions in School-Based Settings
- Mental Health
- Mixed Methods Design



Alex Fixler

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[CV](#)



Alex Fixler is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research is dedicated to understanding the intricacies of drug policy and harm reduction interventions, and how they influence public health and the criminal legal system. Alex's dissertation involves (1) the curation of a novel scale to quantitatively evaluate the severity of state-level drug offense penalties and (2) the assembly of a public-access database providing a systematic overview of state opioid possession and distribution penalties over time. Together, these two components serve as the foundation for an analysis of the impact of state-level penal drug laws on opioid arrest and overdose outcomes. This project will provide a systematic way to evaluate and compare penal drug policy across different states, while the compilation of a state penalty database will facilitate their study in other contexts. By exploring the relationship between state drug laws and public health and safety outcomes, Alex hopes to shed light on the interplay between policy decisions and their real-world consequences.

Alex received her MSW from Tulane University, and her BA in Literature from New College of Florida. She has worked in a variety of social service roles, including as a substance use counselor, a permanent supportive housing case manager, a school social worker, and a data and field coordinator for a county food bank. She also held a number of research positions pertaining to criminal legal policy, environmental justice, and the Social Security disability benefits program. Alex draws on her research and practice experiences to support her goal of understanding the impact of policy on individuals navigating substance use and criminal legal issues. Going forward, Alex plans to continue conducting research that can inform and support effective policy change.

Dissertation Title: *Measuring the Impact of State Drug Policy on Arrest Patterns and Overdose Rates*

Research Interests

- Drug policy
- Harm reduction
- Criminal policy
- Transformative justice



Ana T. Flores

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[CV](#)



Ana T. Flores is a proud daughter of immigrants and a first-generation college student. Her scholarship is focused on advancing culturally responsive services for Latines with a schizophrenia spectrum diagnosis and identifying strategies for removing structural barriers to quality care. Informed by her own experiences working with diverse individuals and families living with serious mental illness, Ana's long-term goals are to (1) contribute to an understanding of the needs and experiences of Latines 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 mental health treatment for Latines.

Ana's dissertation, titled "Social Cognition in Latines with Schizophrenia," supported by an NIMH F31 Predoctoral Fellowship, is a novel exploration of the construct and measurement of social cognition in this demographic. Her methodological approach incorporates psychometric analyses, multivariate regressions, and cross-cultural cognitive interviews. Beyond her dissertation, Ana is an active investigator in Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) and Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) research as related to equitable implementation and ethnoracial outcomes. Additionally, she is involved with a qualitative inquiry aimed at understanding cultural adaptations and structural strategies for implementing early intervention services for psychosis in Latine communities. Using mixed methods and critical approaches, Ana is committed to research that is community-engaged, collaborative, and participatory, all of which contribute to democratizing inquiry into solutions for mental health disparities.

Dissertation Title: *Social Cognition in Latines with Schizophrenia*

Research Interests:

- Mental health services for serious mental illnesses in diverse communities
- Latine mental health and intersectional disparities in serious mental illness
- Cross-cultural measurement and interventions
- Community engagement and implementation



Soobin Kim

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[CV](#)



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 in South Korea, she worked with individuals and families residing in low-income neighborhoods and social work agencies engaging with these populations. She also created national philanthropy education programs for diverse age groups, contributing to promoting philanthropic culture in Korea. Currently, Soobin is working on the Pittsburgh Wage Study, which investigates the economic well-being, family dynamics, and health of low-paid healthcare workers in Western Pennsylvania.

Soobin's research interests span economic and social inequality, health disparities, family well-being, and social policy. Her motivation lies in comprehensively understanding the challenges faced by economically and socially marginalized individuals, considering their multifaceted contexts such as family, school, workplace, community, and neighborhood, alongside the influence of social policy and social forces. Her work is anchored in two key themes: (1) identifying and addressing structural barriers that hinder marginalized populations' access to improved socioeconomic opportunities and healthier lives, and (2) exploring protective/risk factors impacting the well-being of underrepresented populations, including lower-wage workers who may be nominally middle class but still face significant challenges making ends meet. Ultimately, her aim is to inform policy alternatives that enhance the well-being of marginalized populations.

Dissertation Title: *The Diverging Trajectories of Child Externalizing Behavior by Family Economic Status at Birth: The Mediating Role of Neighborhood*

Research Interests

- Economic and social inequality
- Health disparities
- Family well-being
- Social policy



C. Bailey Nichols

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[CV](#)



C. Bailey Nichols, LSW, is a PhD Candidate who plans to defend her doctoral dissertation in 2024. Her primary research interest involves the incorporation of religion and spirituality in social work practice and education to improve social work providers' cultural competence in religion and spirituality. Bailey's mixed-methods dissertation explores discussions that social work students have with their field instructors related to religion and spirituality. Bailey aspires to promote spiritually and religiously competent practice through her research, to foster critical thinking and enthusiasm for social work education among her students and to make social work education both enticing and accessible for a wide range of individuals.

After receiving her bachelor's degree in 2013 from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, she worked in various roles for four years within a non-profit community organization in Wilmington, Delaware which provided services for youth and families through after school programs and summer camps, private schools and job training programs. During her time teaching and serving in Wilmington, Bailey recognized the importance of training and equipping social service providers with tools and skills to enhance their effectiveness and plans to combine her love for teaching and desire to strengthen social service provision through an academic career in social work.

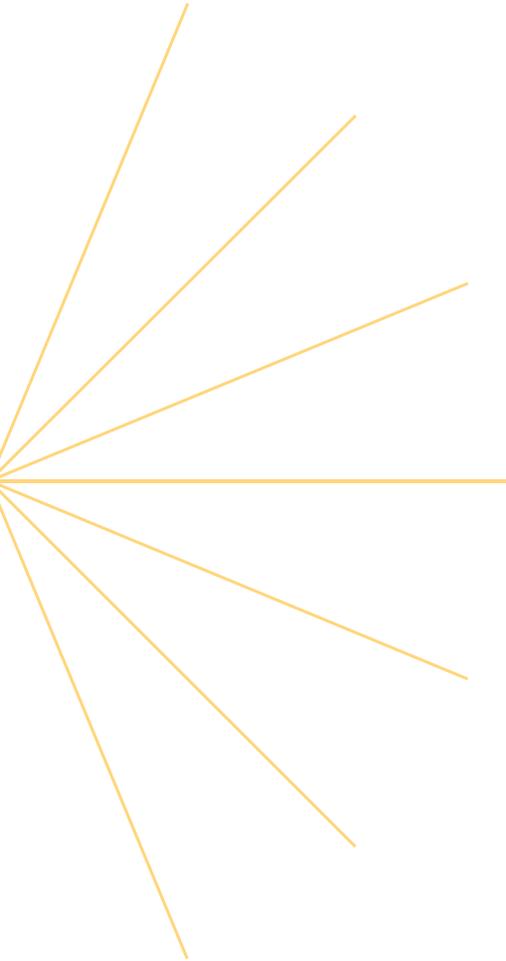
Dissertation Title: *An Examination of Social Work Student Experiences and Comfort Levels Discussing Religion/Spirituality within Field Placement Supervision*

Research Interests

- Holistic healthcare
- Spirituality education
- Social work field placements
- Social work student classroom engagement
- Academic partnerships with spiritual/religious organizations







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