

SMITH COLLEGE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL WORK

InDepth

FALL 2022

IN THIS ISSUE

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

RADICAL SELF-CARE

OUR AMERICAN PROBLEM



Arianne Napier-White (left), M.S.W. '15, poses with her wife, Chrishana, and their dog Kenzo Diego White.



SMITH COLLEGE School for Social Work

InDepth is published by the Smith College School for Social Work. Its goal is to connect our School community, celebrate recent accomplishments and capture the research and scholarship at the School for Social Work.

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SSW alumni use many different techniques to work with clients including sound healing which incorporates sounds from items like tuning forks to help clients calm their bodies.

SMITH COLLEGE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL WORK

InDepth

FALL 2022

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ON THE COVER

M.S.W. students Shai Kuper and Aaliyah Bell smile together during SSW's Pride Celebration in June 2022. Kuper helped coordinate the event that brought together students, faculty and staff to celebrate. Photo by Shana Sureck.



MARIANNE R.M. YOSHIOKA, M.S.W., MBA, PH.D., LCSW

Hello Again



Coming together as a community helped us to stay engaged in difficult moments when dialogue and listening are even more important.

This summer we held our first on-campus summer in two years and welcomed students and instructors back to residential life in King-Scales and Haven House, the dining hall, Seelye Hall and also Smith's gorgeous new library. The pandemic provided us with a complete reset of all the former summer traditions and an opportunity to build new ones.

This summer instituted the first of what will be many large and small changes to better align our programs, policies and practices with our Core Principles. To that end the Rituals for Healing and Community Building Workgroup created five significant events:

- A grounding opening ceremony for intention setting and making a professional and personal commitment to building community
- An epic Pride open mic and dance party
- A community altar
- A summer solstice gathering
- A closing ceremony to gently end the summer together.

Under the advice of our newest faculty, Loren Cahill, Alberto Guerrero, Brandyn McKinley and JaLisa Williams, we hosted thoughtful Juneteenth programming that included an anti-Blackness training for the School community, a tour of the Sojourner Truth memorial, and, for our Black students faculty and staff, a community lunch and an optional day of rest.

Together, these events created opportunities for shared learning and support, for strengthening relationships and for fun. Coming together as a community helped us to stay engaged in difficult moments when dialogue and listening are even more important.

We also began what will be a lifelong process of building accountability. We have struggled with how best to handle moments of rupture in the classroom when words or actions of bias emerge or become apparent and create pain and feelings of harm. We decided that an important first step to any kind of accountability practice is for our community to create a shared understanding of accountability and the limitations that prevent accountability. Beginning with orientation, we familiarized ourselves with an old practice that we are calling the Pause. In a hard moment, the Pause asks us to slow down, take a breath and tap into personal resources of insight and incisiveness. The Pause is not a requirement but a tool. We have been learning from students and faculty how and when they used the Pause this past summer, when it was most helpful and when it was least helpful. We continue in our work to identify practices of accountability that all students, faculty and staff will be asked to learn and try beginning with summer 2023.

Importantly, we also have begun to consider how the Core Principles shape our theoretically rigorous curricula. We are committed to deeply connecting Principle 3 to our relational approach to practice. It's an exciting opportunity that is asking us to grow. We are so fortunate to have resident and adjunct faculty and field advisers who have the knowledge and interest in deepening this work.

There are many changes at the School. Changes that I believe strengthen our programs, teaching and learning. With the wonderful addition of our new director of alumni engagement, I am looking forward to opportunities in the near future to tell you more about them. ♦

Facing page: As students returned to campus for the first time since summer 2019, they were welcomed with a food truck festival and the opening ceremony to set intentions. Families were invited and many students, faculty and staff brought their children and pets to celebrate the start of the academic terms.

SSWorks

News from Lilly Hall

IN THIS SECTION
SCHOOL NEWS
FACULTY NOTES



BY SIMONE STEMPER

Collective Community

How being in community shifted one student's perspective



Beth Nanjala Luvisia was drawn to SSW because of the clinical social work focus, and importantly, she wanted to learn to assess and diagnose a client while considering the impact their environment has on them. Coming to SSW with the plan of becoming a clinical therapist, Luvisia found that her experiences at Smith helped her reframe her entire approach to both social work and anti-racism work.

When she started at Smith, the first thing that came to her mind for anti-racism work was protesting—doing forefront social justice work. Luvisia's time at SSW broadened her understanding of what anti-racism work and social justice can look like, which she experienced at SSW as collectivism and community.

"The beauty of being in community helps you do collective community work. It helps you get things going and also allows you to step back if you feel too overwhelmed...and allows others in your community to step forward when you're feeling burnt out."

Noting that students with historically marginalized identities can get very burnt out doing both their course work and social justice work in the School, the community aspect created a shift in how Luvisia approaches her own academic and social justice work. Having affinity groups within the classroom impacted her learning experience deeply.

"At Smith I really learned the importance of [affinity groups], especially when we're talking about real life, people's lived experiences, and the ways it can be triggering even in the classroom setting. Having affinity groups was helpful and important in knowing how I can move into practice if I'm doing group therapy with folks with different identities."

Luvisia said another new approach to social work for her is centering joy and healing and not only focusing on trauma, which is especially essential when working with clients who have been historically marginalized. In a course with resident faculty JaLisa

Williams on centering the Black experience, Luvisia came to understand that healing-centered therapy is a form of social justice and anti-racism work (related story p. 20).

"[It] also made me realize that my identities of being Black and a woman, especially as a Black woman, existing within these systems is actually anti-racism work, and learning how to take care of myself during the process in a way that doesn't lead to burnout... [is] self preservation mode."

Luvisia also delved deeper into the history of social work, and was surprised to learn the depth of the harm it has done to Black and brown families. She said she knew about it, but not the extent and it has helped her consider her own role as a social worker.

"I'm also learning that even though I'm a Black woman, I am within a system that has done a lot of harm. There's also power in being a social worker and working with other populations, whether or not they have similar identities, so that's something I'm learning how to navigate. How to be an anti-racist social worker and not to perpetuate harm within my own community. I'm looking at

my own blind spots that could potentially exist."

When Luvisia arrived at SSW, she planned to work with immigrants and refugees in the African Diaspora, especially the young adult population. Identifying as an African immigrant in the Diaspora herself, she is interested in identity development, specifically where African and American identities connect and show up in different spaces. However, after clinical experience she's had at SSW, she's shifting that timeline a bit and wants to develop her professional identity and boundaries before working with clients who share so many experiences and identities with her.

As Luvisia looks toward her near future, she plans to prepare for the ASWB exam and ultimately her dream is to find a job with a healthy work environment where her full self and all her identities are seen and supported.

"I plan to take a few years working on my clinical skills, learning about the field, who am I as a social worker, what do I bring to the table, what kind of therapy modality am I leaning toward, or theory, then from there refocus on what my original passion was." ♦

SPOKEN WORD

"I hope you will be part of the creative magic of building the world that we long for and the world that we all, and most certainly future generations, deserve. There is no one way to fight for justice. There is no one way to change the world."

—MIA MINGUS, Transformative and Disability Justice Writer and Educator and SSW Commencement Speaker



A WARM WELCOME

Tapping skills, knowledge, passion



Katie Potocnik Medina, L.M.S.W., joined the Smith School for Social Work as director of alumni engagement in July 2022. She joins the SSW community after a decade as a social worker and leader at a middle school in Manhattan.

Prior to her work in schools, Potocnik Medina spent approximately five years managing behavioral health research projects focused on HIV/AIDS and the prison population. In addition, she and her sister formed a mindfulness and wellness practice called Awareness of Mind, which focuses on providing resources and tools for their clients to reach their greatest potential. She looks forward to continuing to use her clinical skills to serve her clients. "I want to build more awareness of my clients' thoughts and feelings and how this connects to their overall being," she said.

Potocnik Medina, a Cleveland native and Columbia School of Social Work alumna, is excited to bring her wealth of direct practice experience both to building SSW alumni networks and to supporting them.

"The relationship building is the most important skill that I want to bring to the work," she said, adding that she plans to listen to what alumni need and want from Smith SSW so it continues as a resource throughout their social work careers.

"Just being able to work with the School and also really continue to keep that spirit of the work that Smith is doing ongoing," she said. "I'm excited to learn about the ways we can engage with alumni."

Potocnik Medina resides in New York City with her husband and two kids, ages 12 and 9. In their free time, they love to explore NYC parks and museums. During the summer, they enjoy traveling to the Dominican Republic and to Cleveland to spend time with family. Most recently, the family traveled to Acadia National Park, which sparked an interest in visiting more national parks.

—Kira Goldenberg



ON

CAMPUS



With exuberance, hope and joy, we returned to on-campus learning this summer for the first time since 2019. We kicked it off with several days of events, including Pride festivities, song and dance and food trucks, connecting on campus with classmates previously only met on Zoom.





AND

IN

PERSON



Faculty Notes

Recent news and accomplishments



A crisis moment is also an opportunity. For the first time, a lot of people could think more broadly about telehealth, which made space for innovation.”

/ MORE /

For complete bios of our outstanding faculty visit ssw.smith.edu/faculty

Bending the System in a Positive Direction

To Assistant Professor Hannah Karpman, M.S.W., Ph.D., the many research and student mentorship projects she juggles can be crystallized into a single throughline: “How do we harness existing structures to bend the system in a positive direction for youth and families?”

To that end, she saw the pandemic as a moment to embrace innovation. Karpman spearheaded a project that benefitted two populations and organizations simultaneously: LGBTQIA+ young people in Florida in need of mental health services, and Smith School for Social Work students who needed placements that were virtual during the coronavirus pandemic.

At the start of the pandemic, Karpman facilitated a partnership between a Jacksonville-based community center serving LGBTQIA+ young people, called JASMYN, and the School. JASMYN has offered a suite of supportive programs to empower young people for more than a quarter century but, before 2020, mental healthcare wasn’t one of them.

“A crisis moment is also an opportunity,” said Karpman, who harnessed pre-existing organizations to increase access to mental health services for LGBTQIA+ young people. “For the first time, a lot of people could think more broadly about telehealth, which made space for innovation.”

With a more flexible telehealth environment and a fledgling partnership in place, SSW was able to place three students at JASMYN virtually during the 2020–2021 field session. The following year, two students chose to do a placement there in-person. This coming fall, four students are on-site, two of whom are returning for a second year.

Karpman said that she hopes the Smith-JASMYN partnership will reap long-term benefits for Jacksonville’s

LGBTQIA+ youth, and that perhaps some Smith students will decide to practice there in the long term and “there won’t be an unavailability of queer folks in that community who have that skill set” anymore, she said.

In addition to helping grow the Jacksonville placement, Karpman recently co-authored the quantitative research entry in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies*, and she continues to work with Massachusetts state programs to make mental health assessments more inclusive.

—Kira Goldenberg

Well-Deserved Tenure

At its meeting in February, the Smith College Board of Trustees approved tenure recommendations for School for Social Work faculty member Rory Crath, M.A., Ph.D., effective July 1.

Professor Crath brings a sociological and visual studies imagination, humanities thinking and years of experience as a community activist and youth worker in Tkaranto (now known as Toronto, Canada) to his work. His research focuses primarily on how colonization, racialized capitalism and state-direct liberalism shape the contexts in which knowledge about marginalized communities is generated. He also looks at what alternative ways of imagining and practicing social services and health care might arise from centering what is often sidelined: the knowledge paradigms, artistic and political expressions and embodied practices being cultivated in queer/trans/Black/Indigenous and other minoritized life worlds.

“This is an exciting moment and recognition for all of Professor Crath’s hard work and many contributions to the School, our programs and our students,” said Dean Marianne Yoshioka. “Please join me in congratulating him!”

—Kira Goldenberg

Crath brings a sociological and visual studies imagination, humanities thinking and years of experience as a community activist and youth worker in Tkaranto (now known as Toronto, Canada) to his work.



Supporting Adolescent Mental Health Literacy

The disruption, isolation and loss caused by the coronavirus pandemic spurred a youth mental health epidemic ripe for social work research and intervention.

“Just like any other complicated issue, the unmet need that we see has to do with the mental health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also with the deep social and political divides and conflicts nationally and internationally,” said Professor Ora Nakash, Ph.D.

Nakash, also the director of SSW’s doctoral program, is addressing that unmet need by focusing on research aimed at developing clinical interventions to improve mental health outcomes for vulnerable youths. To that end, she and colleagues just completed a randomized control trial with a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health looking at how clinicians can increase parental involvement in the treatment of low-income youth diagnosed with conduct disorders.

And she is ramping up a project focused on adolescent mental health literacy, seeking to understand where teenagers seek information, and how they differentiate between accurate and false offerings.

“How do you develop the tools to discern reliable from unreliable information?” Nakash asks. “And how can we as a society help them develop those tools?”

As director of the School’s doctoral program, Nakash is similarly working to support mentees in pursuing research to improve clinical interventions. To that end, the program instituted increased research mentorship last year, which has helped some of her Ph.D. candidates and post-docs obtain prestigious early-career grant awards.

“It’s supporting people in advancing our field and developing interventions for those who are most marginalized and are having the greatest difficulty accessing services they need,” she said. “It’s research that’s coming from the field, meant to go back to the field and really help clinicians to have the tools

to provide higher quality and culturally-sensitive services to those in need.” —Kira Goldenberg

Working to Support Families

Professor Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., M.S.L., Ph.D., ABPP, a specialist in co-parenting and family development who describes her focus as “a broader, more inclusive view of family structures,” has been busily working on building and growing tools and interventions focused on family systems dynamics.

One project is Co-Parenting Across Family Structures (CoPAFS), a 27-item survey tool to measure the level of co-parenting within a family, usable both by agencies to track program effectiveness and as a clinical assessment instrument. The survey, currently translated into seven languages, looks at five factors: trust, respect, acrimony, communication and valuing the other parent.

So far, Kline Pruett and her colleagues’ research shows that CoPAFS



How do you develop the tools to discern reliable from unreliable information? And how can we as a society help them develop those tools?”



My work has focused on bringing fathers who were formerly viewed predominantly as the ‘problem makers’—the men who were absent, abusive, or inconsistent—and create a positive role for them in the family.”



retains validity across languages and cultures. It also distinguishes how the five factors vary across family structures (such as married, divorced, never married, etc.).

“We’ve published several papers illustrating how the data we’ve collected can be useful clinically and valid statistically, while being short and easy to administer. There’s nothing like it in the field,” Kline Pruett said. “We’re showing what I would call the fundamental cornerstone of parenting relationships: If there’s no trust and respect, you’re not going to get very far working on communication and anger.”

Kline Pruett also continues refining Supporting Father Involvement (SFI), a co-parenting support program she created with her husband and colleagues some 15 years ago. Called Parents as Partners in countries outside the U.S., the 32-hour program is a small-group intervention that includes collective group sessions, as well as meals, case management and childcare. A series of randomized controlled trials and benchmark studies have demonstrated that 18 months after the intervention SFI reduces

child abuse risk factors, including substance misuse, parental stress, violent problem solving and parental depression/anxiety, while increasing paternal involvement, co-parenting communication, the quality of parenting and family income. Relationship satisfaction and child behavior problems remained constant, compared to declines in these areas among control group participants.

“It takes a village,” Kline Pruett said. “We know that it’s best for children to have as much family that can work together on their behalf as possible. My work has focused on bringing fathers who were formerly viewed predominantly as the ‘problem makers’—the men who were absent, abusive, or inconsistent—and create a positive role for them in the family. Their ‘stepping up’ continues to support the incredibly salient role that mothers play, but we also recognize that fathers and grandparents also do a lot of parenting and contribute importantly to children’s well-being in families. We need to widen our focus about who raises children and how they can better work together on behalf of the children they all love.” —Kira Goldenberg

A series of studies have demonstrated that Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) reduces child abuse risk factors, while increasing paternal involvement, co-parenting communication, the quality of parenting and family income.

Curiosity-Driven

A career of identifying shared issues beyond traditional boundaries



[ON RETIRING]

When Professor Joshua Miller, M.S.W., Ph.D., was in college, he double-majored in sociology and psychology, and he recalls being unable to understand why they were two separate areas of study when internal and external factors constantly impact each other.

“It didn’t make sense to me,” he said. Miller, who just retired after 30 years on faculty at SSW, has spent his entire career since that undergraduate epiphany working to integrate the two areas into one.

“That’s what I’ve done in all my practice—my teaching, my writing—always trying to look at inner psychological processes that are occurring and how to work with them as well as external institutional factors,” he said. That throughline has motivated a varied and fascinating career that spans continents and issues, from post-disaster psychosocial capacity building to anti-racism work.

After college, Miller moved out West, where his work in a children’s group facility—as well as the influence of his father and uncle who were both social work professors—led him to earn an M.S.W.



BY KIRA GOLDENBERG

degree. From there, he worked in England as a social worker for a local borough and in Ireland for an order of nuns serving developmentally delayed children and eventually trained in family therapy and became the director of a family service agency working with socially marginalized clients.

“To work internationally right after getting my M.S.W. helped set me on the life course trajectory I followed, which is to think not just about what it’s like to be working in the United States,” he said. His work with immigrant clients and clients of color in England made him “very aware of the targeting and oppressions they were experiencing and how it was unacknowledged. That started to inform my work everywhere I went all the time.”

He continued that work stateside upon settling in Northampton in 1980 with the Department of Social Services until, about eight years later, he decided to pursue a Ph.D. While still completing that coursework, he saw an ad for a teaching job at Smith in a local newspaper and was hired to redesign and co-teach the School’s anti-racism course alongside Ann Marie Garran, M.S.W., Ph.D. ’08. That course ultimately became a book, *Racism in the United States: Implications for the Helping Professions*. It is now in its third edition with two additional co-authors, Lisa Werkmeister Rozas, M.A., M.S.W. ’96 and former SSW Professor Hye-Kyung Kang, M.A., M.S.W., Ph.D.

“It’s the kind of book you have to keep updating. For example, we write about the web of institutional racism that is constantly mutating and evolving,” Miller says. “The stakes have always been high when confronting racism, but they

were even higher when we wrote the third edition.”

In addition to anti-racist practice, Miller also specializes in psychosocial capacity building after disasters, which has taken him to Haiti, China, Sri Lanka and Uganda, as well as post-Katrina New Orleans and post-9/11 New York.

“I saw it as separate from my anti-racism work, initially,” he said. “What I came to realize was: they are inseparable. Colonialism and coloniality are central to racism as well as to who are most vulnerable to disasters. These disasters, they’re not just natural disasters. They hit a country like Sri Lanka harder than they hit a European country. I also realized that there were profound cultural differences in personhood—what it means to be a person, when to seek help, who to seek help from and what people need to recover.”

Rather than push Western psychosocial interventions on traumatized communities in other parts of the world, Miller partners with them with a goal of helping them to reconnect to their own indigenous sources of cultural resilience.

And though his retirement plans include spending more time with family and deepening his meditation practice, he is in the process of articulating his view of psychosocial capacity building with socially-targeted groups in a new book, requiring cross-cultural collaboration, with tenets that include radical transparency, integrating social advocacy with psychosocial interventions as well as the recognition that “there’s no such thing as therapeutic neutrality.”

The book critiques “the coloniality that informs clinical social work practice today and is often part of unexamined assumptions,” he said. ♦



Left: Miller processes behind now Dean Emerita Carolyn Jacobs during the 2013 Commencement Ceremony. **Right:** Miller signs copies of his book during SSW’s 90th anniversary celebration.



PUSH- ING THE ENVEL- OPE

Psychodynamic
approaches
that tap into the
transformative
powers of art

Student Shai Kuper (left) poses with James Shultis, co-director of Translate Gender, in Translate Gender's new studio in Northampton. The studio will house the co-ACT Youth Theatre Collective created by Kuper which provides trans, nonbinary and gender-expansive youth with a safe space to explore identities, share stories and find support through theater.

STORY BY FAYE S. WOLFE



Each in their own way, an SSW student and an alumnus are pushing the psychodynamic envelope, developing therapeutic approaches that tap into the curative and transformative powers of art. M.S.W. student Shai Kuper (*they/he*) has organized and founded co-ACT, the first trans, nonbinary and gender-expansive youth theater collective in western Massachusetts. As its Chief Operating Officer, SSW adjunct associate professor John Gill (*he/him*), M.S.W. '07 guides Beats, Rhymes & Life (BRL), a nonprofit that has pioneered hip-hop therapy for at-risk youth.



What If It's a Musical? was performed at the Northampton Center for the Arts in June 2022.

Kuper, who is trans, graduated as an Ada Comstock Scholar from Smith College in 2021 with a bachelor's in psychology and the study of women and gender. That fall, Kuper started their M.S.W. internship at Translate Gender, a Northampton-based nonprofit co-directed by Shannon Sennott (*she/her*), M.S.W. '08, Davis Chandler (*they/them*), M.S.W. '11 and James Shultis (*he/they*). Translate Gender works to address the needs of transgender youth, their families and caregivers and to build awareness of the challenges they face. As an intern, Kuper started building on previous work as one of the organization's facilitators, providing clinical and non-clinical support and training.

The work Kuper is doing is urgently needed, and not only in Western Massachusetts. A study released in June 2022 estimates that there are 300,000 adolescents ages 13-17 in the United States who identify as transgender. Statistics show trans and gender-expansive youth have higher rates of homelessness, depression, suicidality and substance abuse than their cisgender peers. They are also more often subjected to harassment and violence.

In Translate Gender's supportive environment, Kuper centers creativity. "I wanted to explore the therapeutic components of theater, of how it could be a way to tell our own stories, in our own words."

With the support and guidance of the organization's co-director, James Shultis, the theater collective got underway in February with Kuper and Zev Levi Spiegel (*he/him*) as co-facilitators, and in June its members performed their script *What If It's a Musical?* at the Northampton Center for the Arts. It was a first step for the pilot project, and a rewarding one for the teen participants. "They had agency," said Kuper. "They wrote the play, they wrote the music with local musician Red Jasper (*they/them*) and with their guidance decided to sing onstage. It was all their choice—and that's empowering."

Kuper is no stranger to theater. Originally from Occupied Palestine, they spent 11-hour days in classes and rehearsals as a student in the prestigious acting academy for the performing arts, Beit Zvi. Kuper found the school's casting standards "stifling," based on "white ideals of beauty that excluded the possibility of authentic roles" for many. After acting school, they founded a community theater in Tel Aviv (Occupied Palestine) with queer survivors of sexual violence in the Tel Aviv Gay Center.

"Theater has always been a radical tool," said Kuper. Social work needs radical tools, they believe, given the issues it seeks to address. A long-time social justice activist, Kuper's passion for that cause is front and

Kuper will lead two co-ACT groups next year: one for tweens and one for teens. Both groups are accepting registrations and they will begin working together in January 2023.

center as they talk about the questions that motivate them as a SSW student. “Who perpetuates the gender binary and who does it serve? How do we decolonize clinical practice? How do we address questions of power in the relationship between a therapist and a client? How do we go beyond traditional therapeutic models that have supported white supremacy?”

Acknowledging that there already are therapies that draw on the healing powers of the arts, Kuper also believes that theater has a unique role to play, one not yet fully explored. For starters, said Kuper, it has the advantage of offering actors multiple ways to get their message across: “Body language, pantomime, the use of props, even gibberish.”

This versatility pays off therapeutically for immigrants, refugees and others learning an adopted language. It can be invaluable for people with disabilities. And nonbinary, gender-expansive and trans youth, said Kuper, can use these various forms of self-expression to “speak” at a stage of life when putting thoughts and emotions into words is hard.

Hip-hop therapy also gives a voice to those whom more traditional modalities have failed. Tomás Alvarez III (*he/him*), M.S.W. '06, and John Gill, both hip-hop therapy pioneers, established Beats, Rhymes & Life in 2011, and Gill has played a key role in its evolution ever since. As well as being its COO, Gill is lead clinician of the BRL Academy, a career pipeline program that trains adults ages 18–26 to become social workers and leaders.

A key element of BRL's unique approach is its therapeutic activity groups (TAG), a team of teaching artists, trained clinicians and peer mentors who conduct sessions that combine creative expression and therapy techniques. BRL has served more than 4,500 youth of color and other marginalized young people since its founding.

“Traditional therapy is a white European male model,” said Gill,



“I wanted to **EXPLORE** the therapeutic components of **THEATER**, of how it could be a way to tell our own stories, in our own words.”

SHAI KUPER



On August 8, the Beats, Rhymes & Life mobile studio bus came to Smith College with the TAG team of artists and clinicians from Children's Services of Roxbury (CSR). The team led a workshop for Gill's students and spoke with them about the methodology. The results? Students wrote 21 songs as part of their final—all derived from the activity led by the CSR team.

one that doesn't work for, say, students in a high school where typically half the kids don't graduate. Or in a community where, in Gill's words, "Problems don't go out of the house. You don't sit in a box somewhere and talk about your problems with strangers."

These attitudes reflect a general distrust of health systems among marginalized people stemming from numerous sources, including, as Gill points out, older modalities' shortcomings in meeting people where they live. Hip-hop therapy does that, via America's most popular music genre. "It's familiar and comfortable," said Gill, to the kids in BRL programs.

Gill, like Kuper, knows well how teens struggle to put feelings into words. (Gill himself struggled as a child with a speech impediment. Thanks to rapping with friends as a young man, he said, "My speech improved tremendously.") Traditional narrative therapy is a slow process; emotions and realizations emerge

gradually. But when a 15-year-old starts rapping, it's free association at warp speed. "You don't have time to think," Gill said, "During a round or two, things get put on the table. A teen might say, 'Wow, I didn't know I was angry with my mom.' Emotions get expressed, and they discover things about themselves."

Once emotions are out in the open, examining their sources, effects and ways to deal with them, can begin.

Gill shared one of BRL's many success stories. An 11-year-old never spoke in school, so deep was his distrust. Some at the school even assumed he was physically mute. His teacher said "success" would be getting him to sit at the table, literally—not under it. At the end of his BRL sessions, the tween stood onstage and rapped before an audience of 300. "The look on the teachers' faces!" said Gill. "People went crazy." And does Gill know how he did afterward? Gill: "Oh, he's in college now."

"Youth are often treated as if they should not be seen and not heard," Gill said. "We don't lean on their abilities, we leave them out of the picture." He's proud of how BRL brought teens into the picture when it set up its new headquarters about 10 years ago. "We asked them what they wanted, and they told us, 'lots of art, wide open, with a music studio.'" The resulting

"dynamic, evocative and safe space" has big, bright murals, soaring ceilings and a studio for recording albums of the kids' original songs.

More recently, Children's Services of Roxbury has been using BRL's model to assist Boston-area adolescents. On Free Style Fridays, it sets up in parks with its mobile music studio for a little community outreach. On a sizzling day in August, the colorful van rolled up to Lilly Hall at Smith and stepped Gill's SSW students through a rap workshop. They were shy at first, but Big Mike, Melissa, Darryl, Hardine, Trevor and Anisha warmed up the crowd, with dramatic results. In rhyming bars, students stood up and opened up about graduation just days away, their final papers, their families, their fears and their hopes. Sam expressed a wish to give future clients "the faith they deserve." Ava's exit line was, "You can't change the world, but you change the world for one." It was a remarkable, moving demonstration of the power of hip-hop to elicit and express emotion, and the crowd roared its approval of each performance.

The co-ACT *What If It's a Musical?* performance in June 2022 was also received with cheering, warm laughter and wild applause. That "agreement" between the audience and the performers, Kuper said, is just one of the affirming and healing aspects of theater. Kuper plans to continue the pilot project with the teens and open a group for tweens in January 2023. "I don't know what they're going to bring. It could be a play, or it could be...a screaming competition," they said with a laugh. "The point is to be open to what they want to do. They are the leaders."

More seriously, Kuper hopes this work will uplift those youth who participate, that they come away from the experience with a broader sense of themselves. Both Kuper and Gill have seen how creative expression helps the performers and the young people in the audience. As Kuper put it, "They see how they might thrive. It's heartwarming to see people realize the changes they are capable of, that they can become the leaders of their own stories." ♦

"But when a 15-year-old starts rapping,
it's **FREE ASSOCIATION** at warp speed.
You don't have time to think.
Things get put on the table.
EMOTIONS get expressed, and they
discover things about themselves."

JOHN GILL

A

Centering
joy and
healing
with
self-care

RAD

ACT

To many, self-care is a form of indulgence: privileged people enjoying a spa day. But this image misrepresents self-care and especially radical self-care.

cal

Radical self-care is the opposite of selfish—it is caring for yourself so that you can do the difficult work of caring for your community.

STORY BY MEGAN RUBINER ZINN



JaLisa Williams uses yoga and movement to help clients center joy and healing in their mental health care.

RADICAL self-care is not new. It grew from the civil rights and women's movements and the scholarship of feminist women of color like Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and bell hooks. It is particularly crucial for individuals healing from trauma as well as those working to help our communities heal from trauma, especially activists.

I spoke with four practitioners—two Smith College School for Social Work faculty and two alumni—about how they define radical self-care, how they use it in their practices and the impact it can have.

In addition to her role as lecturer at SSW, JaLisa Williams, M.S.W., LCSW, is a therapist and yoga instructor. She focuses on the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions and holistic practices for people of color. Williams describes radical self-care as a reimagination of what healing looks like. "I think of the idea of us plunging ourselves into the work; really being imaginative and creative about our healing."

Associate Professor Annemarie Gockel, M.S.W., Ph.D., focuses on mindfulness in community programs, anti-racism and therapy in her research and trauma healing in her practice. Gockel describes self-care as starting with self-acceptance. "The more fully we can accept ourselves as we are, the better position we are in to tap into the personal power that we have and take action in our lives."

Johanna Hammer, M.S.W. '99, LCSW, is an autism and behavior specialist for the Belchertown, MA school district and an adolescent DBT therapist. She describes self-care as "the thing that's going to build my capacity to just be a better human in the world." Rachel Michaelsen, M.S.W. '89, LCSW, a psychotherapist specializing in energy

psychology, havening techniques and sound healing treatment, describes self-care quite similarly: "If we're a mess, we just can't do what we're here for."

Self-Care in Therapeutic Environments

Williams, Gockel, Hammer and Michaelsen all incorporate self-care strategies into therapy sessions so clients can benefit from them in the moment, but also take them into their daily lives. They approach self-care through the body, rather than the intellect, with mindfulness, yoga, sound therapy, breath work and other forms of bodywork. These strategies help clients ground and settle themselves so they are in a better place physically and emotionally to engage in healing.

Because we tend to live in the world in a disembodied state, these strategies help us reconnect to our body. They also help us quiet our nervous system and return to our parasympathetic nervous system. "All of the techniques are working on calming the amygdala in the limbic system, so when restimulated by reminders of past trauma, you don't have a fight-or-flight response," explained Michaelsen.

Working with kids with cognitive and physical disabilities, Hammer focuses on the body to help them learn to self-regulate and be more present. Reflecting on what they're feeling in their body is easier to name and understand than an abstract intellectual concept.

Michaelsen uses sound techniques with tuning forks and chimes to help clients calm their bodies. "Research has shown that certain sound frequencies will increase the nitric oxide level in the blood, which will cause the arteries to relax and lower blood pressure."

Self-Care and Trauma

Embodied self-care strategies are particularly effective in helping people heal from trauma. According to Gockel, it's becoming a well-established idea in trauma-informed therapy that trauma is a mind-body

Facing page:
Annemarie Gockel
uses mindfulness in her
trauma work to help
clients work through
the ways trauma
impacts both the mind
and the body.

**“I THINK OF THE
IDEA OF US
PLUNGING
OURSELVES
INTO THE WORK;
REALLY BEING
IMAGINATIVE AND
CREATIVE ABOUT
OUR HEALING.”**

—JALISA WILLIAMS

event. “It’s not something that’s just intellectual, it happens to our body, it’s based in our nervous system.” Those who have experienced trauma often feel extremely disconnected from their bodies. “If I’ve had to work really hard to dissociate from my body as a protective mechanism, unworking that can be really challenging,” Hammer observed. To recover from trauma, people need to feel safer in their bodies and more in control, which self-care facilitates.

Self-care is also a way to remember what it’s like to feel good. “We need to pay equal attention to what feels good and to see if you’re able to expand that,” said Gockel. “My body can actually feel good. I can trust myself again—the cues that I’m getting are meaningful and help me navigate. I can feel in charge again.”



**“THE MORE FULLY WE CAN ACCEPT OURSELVES
AS WE ARE, THE BETTER POSITION WE ARE IN
TO TAP INTO THE PERSONAL POWER THAT WE
HAVE AND TAKE ACTION IN OUR LIVES.”**

—ANNEMARIE GOCKEL



“IF WE’RE A MESS, WE JUST CAN’T DO WHAT WE’RE HERE FOR.”

—RACHEL MICHAELSEN

Rachel Michaelsen uses a variety of sound healing techniques to help clients lower anxiety and reap physical benefits from sound.

Hammer employs yoga to help clients rid their bodies of the stress hormones that trauma can produce. “Yoga offers this very concrete way of cleansing and detoxing,” she said. “I’m not trying to think my way out of this—I can actually move my body in a way that offers me some relief.”

Radical self-care is particularly important for marginalized people, whose lives can be filled with trauma, small and large.

Williams observed that because Black women navigate fight-or-flight experiences daily, they hold adrenaline and cortisol in their bodies. Self-care techniques like walking, dancing or yoga, “keep our bodies moving to release some of the things that we’re holding on to.” It’s been part of Williams’ mission to create spaces where Black women can engage in self-care comfortably, where they “feel supported, feel seen and feel affirmed in our bodies and who we are.”

In Gockel’s view, self-care is the antithesis to the dehumanizing narratives that marginalized people experience. “Being able to be connected to your body and loving yourself is itself a really radical gesture for someone who’s experienced that kind of marginalization.”

Radical Self-Care and Activism

With the current erosion of civil rights and justice we’re experiencing,

expanding and deepening activism is crucial, but it must be accompanied by comparable attention to radical self-care. “When you come back from an ugly intervention in the world—when you’re decentered—you need strategies to come back to center,” said Michaelsen.

A strong practice of self-care means we will be able to show up for the work and that we can also build sustainable activist communities that can show up for the work. “The more we can be fully connected with ourselves, the more we can be fully connected with one another,” Gockel affirmed.

We’ve seen communities of self-care especially among young activists in the uprisings after George Floyd’s murder. They are very aware that they need to go into protests prepared, teaching each other how to stay safe and establishing places for first aid and healing. This care by itself is a form of defiance in the face of oppression. “The systems want to see us just broken and yelling, versus healing and being very in tune and intentional about what we’re out here fighting for,” asserted Williams.

Barriers to Self-Care

Barriers to self-care, particularly for marginalized people, can be significant. Many assume that self-care is for privileged people. They may also be held back by expectations that they need to be strong and resilient—to be like their ancestors who managed without self-care. “Those narratives really do stop us from being able to lean into what self-care in this radical way looks like and means,” said Williams.

Time, space and resources for self-care can be in short supply, especially in a culture that overvalues productivity or demands too much. “Folks of color live in a world that has us going all the time,” said Williams. “Once you start adding on intersectional identities and the politics of the world around us—it’s hard to just sit down and exist.”

Moving through these barriers is not simple. It involves staying aware of your body and what it needs, finding forms of self-care that are true to your own experience and culture and focusing on how caring for yourself translates to caring for your community. According

to Gockel, communities are increasingly finding ways to counteract barriers.

“It’s encouraging that there are more diverse voices, people from communities of color, people from different class strata, people with different gender identities, that have always had a form of radical self-care, talking about how to make it their own.”

Both Williams and Gockel advocate self-care as part of a larger effort to center joy and healing in mental health. “There’s a large conversation happening around healing and shifting from this idea of being trauma-informed to being healing-centered,” said Williams. “We engage in the work very differently when we change what is being centered.”

Centering self-care is a powerful way to envision healing for ourselves and our wider community, especially as we engage in extremely high-stakes battles for justice.

“It’s very dangerous not to recognize that as we struggle, we are attempting to precise the world to come,” Angela Davis asserted in a 2018 interview with AFROPUNK. “And the world to come should be one in which we acknowledge the collectivity and connections and relations and joy. And if we don’t start practicing collective self-care now, there’s no way to imagine, much less reach, a time of freedom.” ♦

SELF-CARE: “THE THING THAT’S GOING TO BUILD MY CAPACITY TO JUST BE A BETTER HUMAN IN THE WORLD.”

—JOHANNA HAMMER

Johanna Hammer helps her students tap in to how their bodies are feeling to help them self-regulate and become more present.



OUR AMERICAN PROBLEM

STORY BY
TYNAN POWER

Seeking a
sense of safety
in a nation
plagued with
gun violence

ILLUSTRATION BY
BALBUSSO TWINS

In May 2022, a school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, left 22 people dead, 16 injured and a community devastated. Shock waves rippled across the country and the media remained riveted for weeks. Yet it was hardly the first such tragedy in the U.S. this year; in fact, it was the 27th school shooting and the 214th mass shooting.



Just six weeks later, media attention turned to a shooting at a Fourth of July parade in Highland Park, Illinois—but between the two events there were nearly a hundred mass shootings that garnered little attention.

Whether or not gun violence makes national news, the impacts are profound—especially for children, who are facing higher risks than ever before. Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for American children under 19. School shootings, specifically, are on the rise, with a record 42 incidents in 2021. This increase in gun violence has grave consequences: impaired cognitive functioning; hypervigilance; difficulty with emotional regulation; heightened anxiety, depression and suicidality—and more.

School Social Work
Association of America
recommends

one
COUNSELOR
to every
250
STUDENTS
in a school.
(Very few states meet
that recommendation).



Increasingly, social workers find themselves providing services to children and families who are directly impacted—as well as to those experiencing ripple effects far beyond the local communities.

“Social workers need to be aware and informed about how to work with clients who have experienced trauma,” said Maria Maldonado-Morales (D23), who has been

responding to community needs following Uvalde through her work with Texas Children’s Hospital. “They need an awareness of what trauma looks like and how trauma presents in different people—knowing that it won’t always look the same.”

Even if clinicians know what to look for, trauma can be hard to address with the new realities brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s quite challenging to do trauma work over Zoom,” said Maldonado-Morales. “I think there is a very important piece of being in the room, of being able to emotionally ‘contain’ someone. With kids and teens, especially, it’s very easy for them to just say, ‘Okay bye’ and shut the computer while we’re still talking.”

IN THE AFTERMATH

Unprecedented times require flexibility and willingness to try new approaches.

“After the Aurora, Colorado, mass shooting the local mental health center worked around the clock to serve anyone who came in. Clients did not need appointments, their regular clinician did not need to be available, they were seen individually and in groups on demand, and they offered a range of options for people, including EMDR,” said Professor Emeritus Joshua Miller, who has taught about psychosocial responses to disasters like mass shootings and serves on a team that provides crisis intervention to first responders. “Nothing works for everyone. There always needs to be multiple interventions and the recognition that different groups, families and individuals have different needs and responses.”

In a number of recent mass shootings, victims were targeted due to race or ethnicity, so clinicians need to understand the historic and current contexts of clients’ identities.

“When victims belong to groups that are structurally and politically targeted by virtue of race, ethnicity, social class, gender or sexual orientation—and often the interaction of these identities—the disaster is on top of a long chain of structural violence, erasure and targeting,” said Miller.

“That can make things worse, because it’s an accumulation of exposure to violence and discrimination.”

“Race and social justice are conversations we’ve been unpacking in schools. We certainly talked about gun violence, being in New York City, in Brooklyn, what that means, and about the everyday lives of our students, who are primarily youth of color,” said Marina Badillo-Diaz, SSW faculty field adviser, whose experience has spanned community mental health and school social work, school administration and will soon include working with the U.S. Department of Education as a Fellowship Ambassador.

Some of the violence students experience in their everyday lives can lead to desensitization, according to Badillo-Diaz.

“That’s just the reality. It’s another way of coping with it.”

On the plus side, the bonds of shared identities and experiences can help communities recover.

“Groups of people who have experienced racism, misogyny, transphobia, etc. often come together as communities of support, resistance and liberation which is a strength and can help with surviving disasters,” said Miller.

In Uvalde where many victims were Latinx, it was unsettling that the gunman was also a member of the Latinx community, as were some local officials.

“There is this feeling of lack of safety within the community [in Uvalde], because everybody involved is from a similar cultural or ethnic background,” said Maldonado-Morales. “In many of the families, there was some relationship to someone involved. There is a break in that feeling of community, a sense of ‘we’re supposed to watch out for each other and that didn’t happen.’ Even the chief of police and all these people that are supposed to take care of us... What’s hard is that there’s a lot of shifting of blame, of saying ‘it was because of this’ or ‘we didn’t do this.’ All those things can be true and shifting blame doesn’t necessarily make anything better. That also gets convoluted in the trust of the community. If all these things went wrong, and there is no one person to blame, then who can we trust?”

ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK

Finding a way to restore trust and a sense of safety is crucial for healing.

“In the trauma world, we talk a lot about how in order to begin to process trauma, you have to feel safe,” said Maldonado-Morales. “In the neurobiological way of thinking, if your prefrontal cortex is not able to sort of come online, you can’t use logic. You’re using that fight, flight, freeze instinct all the time and your body is in a constant state of agitation. So when we feel safe, we can use logic and begin to process the trauma. For the Uvalde community, it’s not happening. That sense of calm, that sense of safety, isn’t going to happen for a while because all these things are up in the air. The new school year’s coming up. What is school going to look like? How do we recognize the families that lost their children and the children’s lives that were lost? And how do we help the kids who lost classmates and friends and family members? It’s quite nuanced and layered; it’s not just something that needs to be addressed once and then we’ll be good.”

“As a professional school social worker, I think now, more than ever, our profession has to be at the forefront of this conversation in education,” said Badillo-Diaz. According to the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA), school social workers have a wide range of

responsibilities, from helping students with conflict resolution, anger management and emotional skills, and helping parents support their children to coordinating community resources to meet students’ needs beyond the school.

“We come with a toolbox of interventions and assessments to support schools,” said Badillo-Diaz. “We’re not only there when these horrific instances happen, providing support with the trauma work, working with families and educators, but we also provide schools with support on the preventive side. We bring mental health service referrals and support with promoting positive school, climate and culture. When, unfortunately, these instances happen, I see it as another reminder of how much important work we have to do.”

“There’s a common thread of these young people—often men—who are angry or have their own trauma or their own mental health struggles,” said Maldonado-Morales. “How can we equip our schools and our families to notice something is off and intervene now versus after something tragic happens? I think that circles back to access to services and access to mental health care. In many schools there are only two counselors for an entire school and they have to do testing and other things, so the ability to provide actual mental health services or actual counseling is quite limited.”

“When victims belong to groups that are structurally and politically targeted by virtue of race, ethnicity, social class, gender or sexual orientation—and often the interaction of these identities—the disaster is on top of a long chain of structural violence, erasure and targeting.”

—JOSHUA MILLER

Badillo-Diaz is also concerned about the ratios of students to counselors. While the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) recommends one counselor to every 250 students in a school, Badillo-Diaz says that very few states meet that recommendation.

Texas Children's Hospital is trying one approach to augment mental health services in schools. Maldonado-Morales works on their Behavioral Health Mobile Unit, which partners with Houston Independent School District to provide services on-site at schools.

"Students face barriers like having to go to the hospital for services, paying for parking there, or having to have their parents miss work," said Maldonado-Morales. "Many students are underinsured or uninsured. The mobile unit takes away as many barriers as possible."

Social workers providing these much-needed services also need support to do their jobs well. Those working with children and families during a crisis can benefit from trauma training, access to current research publications and supervision, according to Maldonado-Morales.

Badillo-Diaz, who completed SSW's Advanced Clinical Supervision Certificate program in 2016 and supervises SSW students in field placements in New York City public schools, also stressed the importance of supervision.

"The Uvalde shooting definitely came up, not only in individual supervision but also in group supervision in the field," said Badillo-Diaz. "In the field advisement group that I work with, they work in after-school programs and in schools. They're novice, they're new, and this is happening. They want to know how to support young people for the first time and how to have conversations with school staff. So supervision of how to support our up-and-coming school social workers—or any social workers—in the field is really critical to pass along helpful information, to talk about how to have these conversations around gun violence, how to support young people and alleviate anxiety and also how to address the preventative measures in school."

"Sometimes it's hard to feel like you're making an impact when you're only one person. But it's important to remember that even something small can be meaningful to someone and have a ripple effect."

—MARIA MALDONADO-MORALES

LONG TERM CHANGE

The SSWAA recommends that school social workers have professional supervision provided by a certified, credentialed or licensed social worker with at least three years of experience.

"Not all school social workers are guaranteed to receive that," said Badillo-Diaz. "More likely, supervisors of social workers in education are professionals that are not social workers, such as school principals or special education directors."

Even if social workers were fully resourced and supported, providing more mental health services cannot be expected to solve the problem of gun violence. In the wake of the Uvalde shooting, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), along with SSWAA and other organizations, issued a statement calling on Congress to address gun violence and avoid conflating violent acts with mental illness—and some organizations have called on social workers to be active advocates for change.

"It's not because someone has a mental illness that they're going to shoot someone," said Maldonado-Morales. "But what were the things that led up to it? I think that's where a mental health intervention can happen: Not because that person is mentally ill, but because there are other systems that have failed. As social workers, there is a role for us in trying to figure out what systems are failing."

"We need awareness of the lack of access to mental health care as a preventive measure, to reduce instances of bullying, school violence

and community violence. Access to resources and mental health care is really critical and important," said Badillo-Diaz. "But I see policy as really important, as a means to reduce overall access to guns, to prevent young people from getting access to guns, because we know once you have access, that increases your likelihood of actually committing a violent act."

"Social work has always been a profession that goes hand in hand with policy change," said Maldonado-Morales. "They are intertwined, especially at the city level and at the state level. I think social workers can have a really powerful role in advocating for policy change."

All of these efforts can take time, whether advocating for policy change or working with impacted communities.

"This is a long-term thing," said Maldonado-Morales. "It's not 'we'll come in, we'll do a little therapy, we'll get out and everyone will be good to go.' And sometimes we can forget this is still happening, because we're not seeing it on the news. This is still the reality and the community is still living through it."

For social workers grappling with the implications of mass shootings—and knowing these tragedies can resonate for years—it can feel daunting.

"Sometimes it's hard to feel like you're making an impact when you're only one person," said Maldonado-Morales. "But it's important to remember that even something small can be meaningful to someone and have a ripple effect." ♦

Alumni News

IN THIS SECTION
ALUMNI DESK
ALUMNI PROFILE



Juliana Casella, M.S.W. '22,
shares a laugh with her
parents after the Com-
mencement Ceremony.



KATIE POTOCHNIK MEDINA, L.M.S.W.
Director of Alumni Engagement

Greetings

Ready to engage with and lean into the SSW community



My commitment to social justice aligns with the Core Principles of practicing anti-racist work happening at Smith College SSW.

I am very excited to introduce myself as the director of alumni engagement for SSW. For the past 15 years, I have worked in the field of social work in various capacities from HIV/STI research to urban education. The constant for me throughout my career has been my identity as a social worker and the values I live by. When I was discerning my career path options, I chose social work for the roots to social justice work. Fifteen years later, my idea of what social work and social justice are have transformed. My commitment to social justice aligns with the Core Principles of practicing anti-racist work happening at Smith College SSW, which is one of the reasons I am most excited about joining this community.

As I step into this role, I am looking forward to learning from our alumni. I am excited to serve the alumni community in a meaningful and, more importantly, intentional way. I also know at the forefront of this work is living the Core Principles as a community.

Here are a few ways I envision that we can do this together, and I welcome suggestions from you too:

- Community building both virtual and local—The Smith College connection doesn't end when you graduate. We love supporting our alumni and connecting you with each other!
- Networking—Supporting each other with networking opportunities

- Social events—Connecting with each other in different ways, like happy hours, book clubs or social justice events
- Conferences—Let's get connected as lifelong learners
- Mentorship—This is an amazing way to give back to current students who are looking for guidance as they embark on their careers
- Resume review—Provide feedback for current students as they prepare to join the workforce as social workers. Who better to provide this kind of feedback than our alumni who are doing the work!

Outside of my professional life, spending time with my family brings me so much joy. This includes my beautiful extended family, and importantly my husband, Leoncio, and two children, Nico and Amaia. As a family, we love to spend time in parks, visiting family in the Dominican Republic and Cleveland, Ohio, and going for bike rides together. I am in search of some new hobbies, so if you have any you would like to share, please get in touch!

I am looking forward to getting to know the SSW alumni community and to contributing my knowledge in social emotional learning and adolescent mental health to create new connections and community.

Feel free to reach out to me at kmedina@smith.edu! ♦



'22

COMMENCEMENT

SSW celebrated the class of 2022 during the first in-person commencement since the start of the pandemic. Joy abounded as students shared their accomplishments with friends and family on campus in the days leading up to the event. Said Commencement Speaker Mia Mingus to graduates, "We need you and the wonderful things that you will do, we need all of your big ideas, we need all of your humanity and heart and capacity for love and liberation and mistakes." Congratulations to the graduates!



BY MEGAN RUBINER ZINN

Alice Kahn Ladas

A career of challenging norms in sexual and cultural studies



At 101, Ladas is still practicing, continuing her research and driving her young grandkids to after school activities.

A trailblazer in body psychotherapy, Lamaze childbirth, breastfeeding and women's sexuality, Alice Kahn Ladas, A.B. '43, M.S.S. '46, Ed.D., never hesitated to push boundaries. At 101, she is a somatic psychologist in New Mexico still passionate about her work and family.

Ladas attributes her groundbreaking career to an unusual upbringing. Moving between divorced parents in New York and Alabama gave her a broad view of American life. "I had intercultural experiences few kids have," she explained. "I think that led me to not fully accept the cultures I lived in and to be a pioneer." She also attended the Ethical Culture School, which taught that the purpose of education is to make the world a better place.

Ladas attended Smith College, majoring in political science. Her thesis was titled, "Towards a Better Presidential System" and she graduated cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. During college, she had the life-changing experience of getting to know Eleanor Roosevelt while participating in a student leadership program at the Roosevelts' Campobello Island home in New Brunswick, Canada.

Ladas' first job was with the Fair Employment Practices Commission, where she was successful in upgrading the positions of Black workers at the Patent Office. After hearing Frieda Fromm-Reichman lecture at the Washington School of Psychiatry, Ladas took a job with faculty member Benjamin Weininger. For further training, she returned to Smith to attend the School for Social Work. During her field placement at the Jewish Board of Guardians, she met family therapy pioneer Nathan Ackerman, who hired Ladas once she completed her degree.

Disenchanted with traditional talk therapy, Ladas was drawn to the work of Wilhelm Reich, and how he incorporated the body into psychotherapy. She joined the staff at Reich's Infant Research Center, and in 1956 helped Reich's student Alexander Lowen incorporate the Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis.

Reich's work inspired Ladas to help improve the treatment of infants. She studied the Lamaze method of childbirth in France and offered one of the first courses in the United States. Ladas also entered a doctoral program at Columbia



The G Spot and Other Discoveries about Human Sexuality, first published in 1982, is a *New York Times* bestseller and more than 1,000,000,000 copies have been sold to date.

Teachers College, where she proposed a dissertation on breastfeeding, working with the newly formed La Leche League. Faculty refused to support this subject until Ladas convinced legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead to join her committee. Ladas completed her Ed.D. in 1970, and her dissertation was published in peer-reviewed journals in medicine and sociology. “That’s what I’m most proud of,” she said. “I believe it influenced, in the United States at least, more women to breastfeed.”

In the early 1980s, Ladas and her husband, Harold Ladas, collaborated with Beverly Whipple and John Perry on the groundbreaking book *The G Spot and Other Discoveries About Human Sexuality*. Published in 1982, it became an international bestseller.

Continuing to practice part time, Ladas also travels to visit her children and grandchildren, plays piano, performed in her friend’s musical *The Vagina Penis Dialogues* and stays very physically active. The namesake of the U.S. Association for Body Psychotherapy’s research award, Ladas continues her lifelong interest in research. She recently added a therapeutic approach she calls Early Coping Strategies: Another Kind of Addiction focusing on how early coping strategies may negatively impact adult functioning. She hopes to find a graduate student to research this topic so it is not just her N of 1 belief. ♦

Don’t make us resort to this!

SSW alumni are amazing. Please share your stories.

We hope you will submit notes and photos for the spring edition of *InDepth* so we don’t have to resort to writing them *for* you like the editors of “The Social Syndrome,” a newsletter written by the Boston area alumni group in the 1920s!

DINSMORE, KATE A., Chief Social Worker, Child Guidance Clinic, Dallas, Texas.
Kate Dinsmore has been doing a perfectly fine job in the Dallas Child Guidance Clinic ever since she finished at Smith. We don't know why she was unwilling to give us this information.

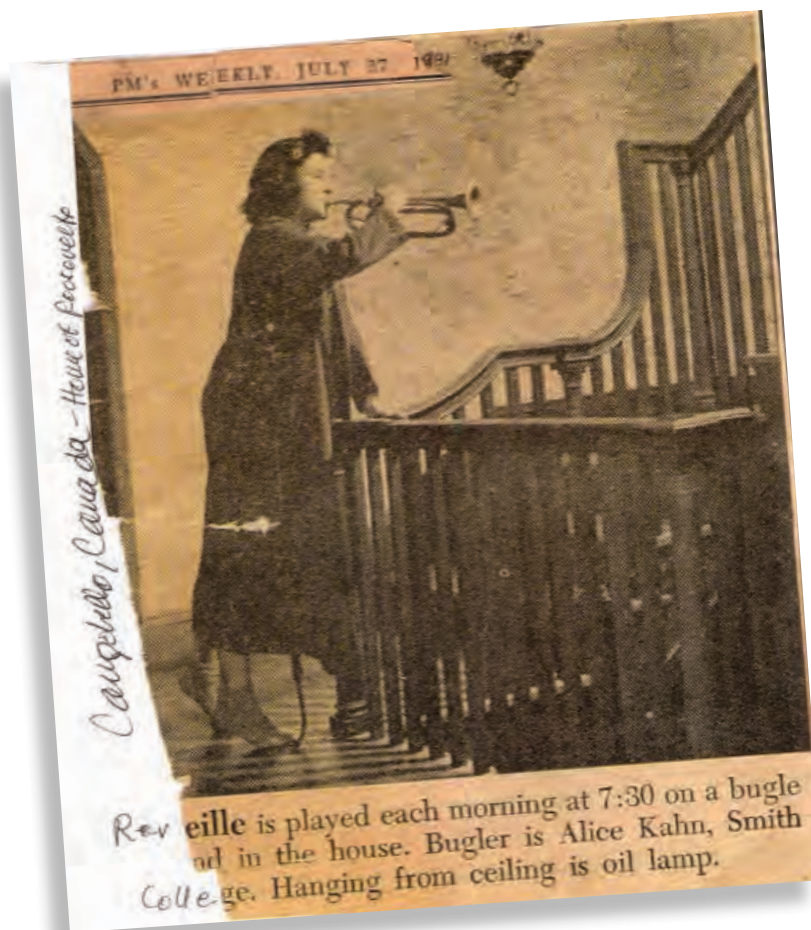
COLE, BLANCHE E. (MRS. FRED. LOWENTHAL), 436 Aldine Ave., Chicago, Ill.
We beg to announce to Blanche Cole that a husband, Chicago politics, and murders are no alibi for not being chatty and confidential with us.

STEWART, KATHRYN E., Chief Psychiatric Worker, Mental Health Clinic, Department of Public Welfare, City-County Building, Pittsburgh, Pa.

When last heard from she was too hot to reveal anything regarding her career. Later, on her vacation, she still refuses to divulge her maneuvers.

CATTERAL, MARY, Director, Presbyterian Clinic, Dallas, Texas.

Mary Catteral cut us cold, but even that doesn't keep us from remembering her charming southern drawl and her delightful way withal. Incidentally, people who know, say she is doing a splendid job in Dallas.



Early Wake-up Call

While playing a reveille on a bugle may not be recommended as a sound healing technique, for alum Alice Kahn Ladas, A.B. '43, M.S.S. '46, Ed.D., it marked an important moment in her career. Attending a student leadership program at the Roosevelts' home in New Brunswick, Canada while an undergraduate at Smith, it gave her both leadership insight she still uses in her work today, 81 years later, and of course some impressive bugling skills.

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