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Dear Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Section Members,

On behalf of the entire Health Section executive, I sincerely hope your end of semester is going well despite the difficult circumstances. As I’m sure many of you can relate, one aspect of the pandemic that I struggle with is the feeling of disconnect from my colleagues – I miss chatting with colleagues about science or commiserating over the challenges of the day (now seemingly so small!). So I hope that in some small way, reading this newsletter helps you to feel a little more connected to your colleagues and serves as a reminder that we are part of a great community of health psychologists who are doing important and impactful work that improves the lives of Canadians.

So in the midst of your surely busy schedules, I hope you’ll take some time to read this exciting edition of the Health Notes Newsletter. In this issue, we highlight three researchers working towards improving healthcare access and delivery: Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen whose research aims to improve mental health among pregnant and postpartum women, Dr. Justin Presseau whose recently funded project will increase access to diabetic retinopathy screening among new Canadians, and Dr. Jaime Cidro who aims to increase support of Indigenous mothers travelling to city centers to give birth. We also highlight the great work of our two most recent student recipients of the Ron Melzack Award and have included an interesting piece highlighting some of the challenges that trainees are facing amid the pandemic. Also, be sure to check out our recommendations for upcoming virtual conferences to attend in 2021. Last but not least: please see our call for nominations for the Senior Investigator Award and nominate the excellent senior researchers in your life.

Take care and stay healthy!

Jennifer Gordon, PhD, RD Psych
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Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen Shares Research on Perinatal Mental Health with Parliament

Written by Lucas Walters, BSc (Ottawa)

Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary, a Child Health and Wellness Researcher at the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute and private practice clinician. Dr. Tomfohr-Madsen has a variety of research experiences and skills with a focus on parental health, mental health, and sleep. Her primary research interests focus on understanding and preventing transgenerational transmission of health risk. With an impressive research portfolio and a host of clinical skills, we had the chance to ask Dr. Tomfohr a few questions related to their experiences and recent projects. More information about Dr. Tomfohr can also be found on their lab's website (www.healthyfamilieslab.com).

I understand that you recently presented some of your research to members of parliament. Can you tell me more about that?

I was presenting some of the data from a pan Canadian study called, *Pregnancy during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Myself and Drs. Catherine Lebel and Gerry Giesbrecht are following over 8200 Canadian women who have been pregnant or given birth since COVID-19 began with the goal of understanding the impact of the pandemic on pregnancy, mental health, birth outcomes, and bonding experiences. Our presentation to parliament aimed to raise awareness of the unmet mental health needs in pregnant and postpartum women. We were also calling for a national strategy to improve parent mental health and create a comprehensive, culturally sensitive framework for screening and treating mental health problems in new parents.

What research project or experience are you most proud of?

I am very proud of the work we have done in my lab examining family socioeconomic status (SES) and associations with birth and child outcomes. In particular, I am proud that this research has identified modifiable factors like sleep and mental health as contributing to intergenerational transmission of stress -- these factors are modifiable, and I can see psychology’s role in promoting healthier outcomes for underserved populations.

(cont’d)
Member Spotlight - Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen

What experiences have shaped your career the most?

I am very invested in improving teaching, training and research as it relates to issues of equity and diversity. I have been fortunate to have been exposed to diverse world views and perspectives throughout my life and in my academic career. Hearing the opinions and experiences of people that are vastly different from my own has shaped the direction of my career and service and lead to me to try to incorporate more diversity of views in all areas of my work.

Through your roles, affiliations, and responsibilities, what is your favorite part of being a researcher in health psychology?

By far, the best part of my job is working clinically and getting to supervise students as they develop into confident and competent clinicians. I really believe in a clinician-scientist model of training and that working with clients informs patient relevant research. Seeing students translate their clinical experiences into their research is the best part of the job, especially when it is focused on helping populations who would not usually have access to good psychological care.

What advice do you have for early career researchers in the field of health psychology and behavioural medicine?

There can be an expectation in academia that you need work all the time to achieve career success — I recommend that people really fight that urge and invest heavily in their relationships, and valued activities outside of work. At work, surround yourself with people who support your success and whose work you can also support. There is no greater gift at work than having collaborators who bring their whole selves to work. Aim to be that person and surround yourself with people who support you.

What research are you planning over the next year?

Over the next year, I am very focussed on getting a number of interventions launched that are aimed at improving the mental and physical health of people transitioning to parenthood. One of these is a telephone-based peer intervention for women who are experiencing depression in pregnancy, and another is development of an app that aims to both treat transdiagnostic emotional distress and improve parenting outcomes. I hope that both of these contribute to a literature showing that early systemic investments in mental health can significantly improve parent and child outcomes.

Seeing experiences into their research is the best part of the job.

Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen
Introducing the 2020 Winners of the Ron Melzack Student Award

The Ron Melzack Student Award is awarded to the student with the best research presentation at the CPA annual meeting. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually. Although this may have posed as a challenge for some, two students really rose to the occasion! Esther Briner from Carleton University and Bethany Nightingale from Ryerson University performed exceptionally well and tied for first place.

Esther Briner, PhD Candidate, Carleton University

Esther Briner’s presentation was entitled “Body Mass Index Moderates the Depressive Symptoms-C-Reactive Protein Relation Among Emerging Adults.” The study took a cross-sectional approach to examining the relationship between body mass index (BMI), depressive symptoms, and C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of systemic inflammation in the body. Specifically, in 5,114 young adults, it was found that self-reported feelings of sadness were associated with increased levels of CRP but that this relationship was only true among those with a high BMI. In contrast, the relationship between sadness and CRP was not significant among individuals with low to moderate BMI. These findings suggest that overweight individuals may be more vulnerable to the negative health consequences of depressive symptoms.

Bethany Nightingale, PhD Candidate, Ryerson University

Bethany Nightingale’s poster was entitled “Eating Self-Efficacy Predicts Post-Surgery Emotional Eating Among Bariatric Surgery Patients.” The study investigated whether pre-surgery eating self-efficacy—one’s belief that difficult situations do not affect one’s ability to eat in a healthy way—predicts psychological consequences one year post-surgery. Individuals enrolled in the Toronto Western Hospital’s Bariatric Surgery Program (n = 358) completed questionnaires pre-surgery and one year post-surgery. The questionnaires included various scales to assess eating self-efficacy, emotional eating, binge eating, body image, and self-esteem. The findings suggested that eating self-efficacy was a predictor of eating in response to post-surgery anxiety, anger, and depression. In other words, bariatric surgery patients who believed that they could eat in a balanced way during difficult situations engaged in less emotional eating post-surgery. Says Nightingale: “future research can develop and test interventions to target pre-surgery variables in order to increase positive eating and body image outcomes post-surgery.”
The Trainee Experience
during COVID times

Written by Kailey DeLucry, MA (Regina)

When I made the decision to move to Regina, Saskatchewan from Saint John, New Brunswick to pursue my PhD in Clinical Psychology, I was apprehensive at the prospect of moving so far from home. What if a loved one became sick? What if I missed my best friend’s wedding? I weighed the pros and cons of trading in the coast for the prairies, and I quieted my anxiety by simply reminding myself that I was only a couple of plane rides away, if anyone ever needed me. In March 2020, when the seriousness of the pandemic became clear, I realized that a couple plane rides is not as close as I’d imagined.

Aside from the disappointment that comes from being far from home, I also quickly realized that another essential component of my social support system had disappeared as classes transitioned online. Although working from home has its perks, I noticed I really missed those special moments that can only take place on campus. Until it was no longer an option, I didn’t realize the value of commiserating with my pals during those late-night study sessions at the library. I never recognized how much I gained from sipping over-priced coffee while walking to class with a colleague. I underestimated the significance of those impromptu run-ins with professors who tell you about this conference and that scholarship opportunity.

Despite all this, I am lucky that the pandemic has not gravely impacted my academic experience; however, I think that has a lot to do with what stage I am at in my career and a lot of luck. In order to gain insight on other students’ experiences, I interviewed five individuals who are all at various phases of their academic journey. Each student explained the unique challenges they’ve faced while trying to pursue post-secondary education during these unprecedented times. These five students generously shared how they’ve navigated the university experience:

1. The First-Year Undergraduate Student

University of Regina’s first-year undergraduate psychology student, Haley McStravick, started her post-secondary education journey quite differently than students of the past. Instead of getting lost on campus or learning which library floor is the best to study on, Haley has been doing coursework online from home. When asked about her experience thus far, Haley reported many of the positive aspects of e-learning. She emphasized the ease of recorded lectures, noting how useful she finds being able to pause and re-watch lectures. Another side of remote learning that Haley has found advantageous is not having to take tests in crowded classrooms filled with distractions.

(cont’d)
The Trainee Experience during COVID Times

One disadvantage Haley noted is having to adapt to the diverse range of e-teaching styles professors have adopted as they switched to remote teaching. With the first semester coming to an end and a second semester looming in January, Haley often wonders how she will transition to in-person learning, if, or when, school shifts to traditional classroom instruction again. Fortunately, Haley has found a sense of community with her peers: “Everyone in all my classes are really nice to each other and know we are all going through it together.”

2. The Fourth-Year Undergraduate Student

Abby Phillips is in the final year of her undergraduate degree at the University of Regina. She is working on her honours thesis and applying to graduate school this year — two very time-consuming and stressful processes. She speculates: “COVID-19 has made my fourth year much more stressful than it would have been otherwise.” When describing her experience, she recounted the disappointment she has felt not having the opportunity to lean on other classmates for support. On top of feeling disconnected from her peers, she said that remote learning has impacted her ability to develop close connections with supervisors and grad students in her lab. Abby highlighted how important these connections are when it comes to applying to graduate school, as such guidance is invaluable when tackling the ins and outs of applications and interviews. Further, Abby discussed the downsides of working from home, which included poor Internet connection, glitchy videos, and the toils of having to share a workspace with an animated (and at times, disruptive) elementary school teacher.

3. The International Student

Yaren Koca is an international student pursing her Master of Arts in Psychology at the University of Regina. When asked about her experience, Yaren underscored the difficulty she has faced transitioning her research to an online platform. Yaren studies the cognitive mechanisms underlying human visual perception, and she normally administers experiments in person. However, given the restrictions, Yaren has not been able to conduct research in the way she has been trained. In order to continue her research, she had to learn a whole new set of skills in a very short amount of time. Despite lamenting on the stress and challenge of this, she did make a point to emphasize how happy she was to get to learn a new approach. Yaren also expressed one upside of online research—faster data collection!

As an international student from Turkey, Yaren also emphasized how mentally taxing it has been not being able to go back home. Yaren said she debated the option of returning home and working from Turkey, but decided to stay in Regina for fear of catching COVID-19 during the travel and spreading it to her family. She also noted the problems that would arise given the 9-hour time zone difference between Regina and her hometown; after all, a 6PM meeting in Regina would translate to 3AM Zoom call in Turkey! Yaren also voiced concerns about her ability to legally work internationally as a Teaching Assistant. Thus, Yaren made the tough decision to stay in Regina: “it's been difficult for me not being able to visit my loved ones, but I'm okay as long as I know they're safe.”

(cont'd)
4. The Graduate Student

Brandon Sparks is in the final year of his PhD program at the University of Saskatchewan. Given all the uncertainty that arose when the initial lockdowns commenced, Brandon made the decision to move back home to New Brunswick where his wife and family are. Because he did not anticipate his return to New Brunswick to be indefinite, he has found himself in a bit of a pickle: “I didn't pack any of my winter clothes and most of my personal belongings are now halfway across the country.” This has proven problematic, as he has been in New Brunswick for almost ten months now. Another unfortunate side effect of an abrupt and unplanned move across the country is that Brandon did not get the opportunity to say goodbye to some of his friends who have since moved away from Saskatchewan.

At the start of the pandemic, Brandon recounted the increased stress and pressure that faculty were put under transitioning classes to remote delivery. This transition ended up directly impacting Brandon by delaying his Comprehensive Exams to much later than he had anticipated. Aside from being a student, Brandon teaches. Currently, he is teaching a class remotely that he had previously taught in person, and despite having some material already done, he mentioned the online course has ended up taking up far more time than he had originally estimated. To enhance the online student experience, it was recommended that weekly student discussions be included, which has added considerably to Brandon's grading workload. Adding further to his workload is the fact his class size doubled, but no additional TA supports were provided, which has been overwhelming.

Aside from the challenges of online teaching, Brandon recounted missing the camaraderie he shared with his grad student peers. He remembers how those in his shared office space had often gotten together for coffee to discuss research, stresses, and work through any school-related issues. Now, given his swift return home, he says he and his colleagues now all live in different Canadian cities and these daily chats are greatly missed.

5. The Postdoctoral Fellow

Loveness Dube is a postdoc at the University of Regina. When asked how COVID-19 has impacted her academic experience, she noted the huge impact travel restrictions have had on the ability to share research findings, as in-person conferences have been cancelled. Loveness also described the impact COVID-19 has had on her ability to network and meet colleagues within her field. With scientific conferences taking place virtually, the networking part of postdoc training has become a challenge. Loveness worries about the impact this past year could have on career prospects after training, as many employers are uncertain of the future, and few, if any, are actually hiring.
Thank You

I want to thank these students again for sharing their stories. If anything, the pandemic has shown us the importance of companionship and togetherness when it comes to academic success. Although COVID-19 inevitably impacts students differently across career stages, there is a common theme that makes the demands of post-secondary education sustainable, and that is a sense of community. In many ways, these trainees have shown great resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty by being open to learning new research techniques and making sure to remember the advantages of working from home. However, it is abundantly clear that the pandemic and its subsequent (though necessary!!) restrictions has negatively impacted students by forcing them to be disconnected from their peers, colleagues, and professors.

There is a common theme that makes the demands of post-secondary education sustainable — a sense of community.

*Kailey DeLucry, MA*
We use the term ‘doula’ because it’s the most commonly used term, but amongst us, we actually use the term ‘birth worker’. How the birth workers are really working is prenatal, birth, and post-partum. So they’re connecting with mom, as advocates, as people that they can get information from, to help them navigate systems. Once they're in the delivery room, they're there as a support also, as an advocate. You know, our moms experience racism in the hospital so as a layer of protection, I guess, and an advocate in those really important and crucial times during delivery. Then also postpartum to support mom with all those things that happen after baby comes.

And it's not just moms, it's actually family. We're trying to look at it as a family model and one of the pieces that we're really trying to do better job of addressing is gender diverse families as well. [...] Essentially, that's what our doulas are there for: prenatal, delivery, and postpartum. So kind of a traditional doula model, but beyond that, we're interested in this idea of being a good relative. We had done interviews a couple years ago with a first group of doulas that came out of a pilot project and so we interviewed all those doulas and that's what those doulas were saying to us – the reason they were doing this work is they were women themselves, moms themselves. They just wanted to be a good relative. So that's the other piece, we just want our doulas to be good relatives.
You’ve written about the importance of Indigenous self-determination. How would you describe the ways in which the Urban Indigenous Doulas project is rooted in Indigenous self-determination?

Well, I think, you know, from a researcher perspective, we've been asked to do this work – directly asked, you know, by partners. I'm always uncomfortable when people ask me to talk about it, because I don't like anyone to get the idea that this is my project – I just kind of facilitate relationships – facilitating the rolling out of the work, right. So I think as a researcher, that's part of self-determination – being told by the community what they need, and figuring out ways to make that happen. Our Kishaadigeh project is looking at ways that community organizations consider research, or data storytelling, or whatever it is that you want to call it, and how they can be supported in figuring that out. So the work is really about resourcing them directly. In my mind, self-determination is directly resourcing, and stepping back and engaging in evaluation components that we've all designed together. So, not me setting up the evaluation, but as a team of organizations, how do we think we should measure success? And my job is just to tick the boxes. I think self-determination is about community and driving the work from cradle to grave, and as a researcher, just being there in a supportive role. And trying not to take the credit for things – I try not to be the one presenting, or if I do I'm dragging someone else with me. Because I think it's just not good practice to be the one to be the face of things all the time.

What does community-driven research mean to you? Why is research guided by relationships important to you?

Because I think, if you're not doing that, then you're just... wasting a bunch of time. And we don't have time to be wasting. It's about being respectful of people's time. I've been working with the same people for a long time, and that's because we have the same motivation and ethos around it. I only work with Indigenous community members and scholars, because we all have a similar approach, which is putting the community first and providing and being a facilitator – almost like a contractor in a way. When you're not doing that, when you're not engaging well in relationships and when you're driving it, instead of having partners drive it, then you're just wasting time and you're wasting money. On top of that, you're perpetuating this idea of “researched to death”. The bottom line is, when you hear communities saying that “we've been researched to death”... reality is you need research, you need numbers, you need nuanced information. So you may as well do it better, than not doing it at all.

What sorts of changes do you hope will result from the Indigenous Doula Project?

What I hope to see, first of all, is a really strong, urban, Indigenous doula birth worker program. A program that is strong in so far as being well-connected to community partners, with strong referral systems, and doulas who feel so emboldened to advocate for their moms and their families, and just the confidence to do that. And moms that are confident, when they need that hospital or the birth center, they feel good about their pregnancy, about their delivery, and then they're going home and feeling confident as moms, and that their babies stay with them. You know, that's our
goal, really, is that moms come away feeling like that. Because we know those zero to five years,-
those are just the most critical periods for our human development. When our babies are
surrounded by stability, love, their culture, and all of those things, we know how that sets them up
for life.

What research are you planning over the next year?
Over the next year, I am very focussed on getting a number of interventions launched that are
aimed at improving the mental and physical health of people transitioning to parenthood. One of
these is a telephone-based peer intervention for women who are experiencing depression in preg-
nancy, and another is development of an app that aims to both treat transdiagnostic emotional
distress and improve parenting outcomes. I hope that both of these contribute to a literature show-
ing that early systemic investments in mental health can significantly improve parent and child
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Dr. Jaime Cidro
Diabetic retinopathy is a major complication of diabetes and is the leading cause of blindness in working aged people in the Western world.

Screening for diabetic retinopathy aims to detect and reduce damage from severe ocular complications. However, research has found that patients with diabetes often do not receive annual screenings for retinopathy, particularly elderly patients and those who live in areas with reduced access to specialists. Another subgroup of patients that are much less likely to receive regular screenings for diabetic retinopathy includes recent immigrants to Canada. Furthermore, immigrants have lower rates of surgical treatment of diabetic retinopathy compared to long-term residents, suggesting that treatable retinopathy may be missed among recent immigrants because of inadequate screening that may be associated with reasons other than accessibility.

With this in mind, Dr. Justin Presseau, an Associate Professor at the University of Ottawa’s School of Epidemiology and Public Health and School of Psychology and chair of our section, alongside Co-PIs Dr. Joyce Dogba and Dr. Michael Brent, aim to target barriers to attending screening for diabetic retinopathy using funds recently awarded through a CIHR Project Scheme grant. Specifically, they plan to recruit people with diabetes from China, Africa and the Caribbean to participate in workshops and focus groups to discuss barriers associated with attending screening. Using this information, they will co-develop interventions aimed at overcoming these identified barriers alongside patients and healthcare stakeholders. Among planned intervention elements is the use of teleretina screening, where retina imaging can be done using a portable screening equipment so that people can be screened in their community instead of at a specialist appointment. They then plan to deliver the interventions over a 6-month period in Ottawa and Montreal with the aim of assessing their feasibility and acceptability.
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This grant ties in nicely with Presseau and colleagues’ previous work, which involved a systematic review of barriers and enablers to attending retinopathy screening, and a qualitative study of the barriers and enablers specifically associated with immigrants from China, Africa and the Caribbean. These studies found that current interventions on improving diabetic retinopathy screening were poorly-suited for the specific barriers immigrants and minorities face, suggesting that partnering with patients to improve interventions may help overcome limitations of past approaches and result in a more culturally and linguistically-appropriate intervention.

Presseau hopes that this research could be used to guide future studies extending past Montreal and Ottawa: “Findings will help to inform a more definitive larger-scale trial which could be run across more cities and ultimately then inform pan-Canadian approaches”. The scalability of these interventions to visible minorities in rural and remote communities will also be an important consideration for Presseau and his team. Presseau also emphasizes that further research will be needed before the interventions are used in clinical practice: “We’ll need to establish the evidence that our intervention works before it can be implemented. That will take longer than this particular grant”. Though much work lies ahead, the newly funded research holds great promise in its potential to improve the prevention of blindness resulting from diabetic retinopathy among new immigrants to Canada.

Findings will help to inform a more definitive larger-scale trial which could be run across more cities and ultimately then inform pan-Canadian approaches.

Dr. Justin Presseau

References:
1— Boucher et al. (2005). Can J Ophthalmol, 40(6), 734-742
3— Dr. Dogba’s profile: www.tinyurl.com/joycedogba
4— Dr. Brent’s profile: https://ophthalmology.utoronto.ca/content/michael-brent
Written by By Ali Bukhari (Regina)

While many conferences have been cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many societies are moving to an online format. These are great opportunities to present, learn and network without the time and expense of travel! While you may miss out on touring a new city, there are still great people to meet and interesting science to learn about. Consider these great options with upcoming abstract deadlines.

**Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Annual Convention**

**June 7 to June 25, 2021**
Abstract deadline: January 22, 2021
Workshop abstract deadline: December 12, 2020

Originally scheduled in Ottawa, Ontario, this conference will be a three-week long event. Posters will be uploaded as PDFs and any presentations will be pre-recorded PowerPoint presentation.

[www.convention.cpa.ca](http://www.convention.cpa.ca)

**American Psychological Association (APA) Convention**

**August 12 to August 15, 2021**
Abstract deadline: January 12, 2021
Workshop and Psych Science in 3 abstract deadline: January 6, 2021

Sure to contain an abundance of health psychology research, the APA’s annual convention is another well-attended event. The 2021 APA convention contains a “Psych Science in 3” program, inviting graduate students and recently matriculated psychologists to share their research in three short minutes. No shortage of opportunities to show off your work here!

[www.convention.apa.org](http://www.convention.apa.org)
Virtual Conferences to Consider
Conference Guide 2021

International Congress of Behavioural Medicine (ICBM)

June 7 to June 11, 2021
Abstract deadline: TBA

This event is themed “Interdisciplinary Behavioural Medicine: Systems, Networks, and Interventions,” a broad and exciting subject that is extremely useful for health psychologists—why wouldn’t you want to attend?

Additionally, the conference includes an interesting keynote address by Dr. Viola Vaccarino titled, “Stress and Heart Disease: Focus on Women.”

www.delegate-reg.co.uk/icbm2021/

American Psychological Science (APS) Convention

May 26 to May 27, 2021
Abstract deadline: March 1, 2021

The APS convention regularly showcases the top psychological research from around the world, and is therefore of great interest to health psychologists. The virtual poster presentations will launch during the Virtual Convention and remain open until September 1, 2021 for extra viewing time.

psychologicalscience.org/conventions/2021-virtual
Dear Colleagues,

We hereby invite you to nominate an individual for the Senior Career Award to be given out at the 2021 CPA Annual Conference. We systematically rotate level of seniority for the awards and this next cycle is directed at the Senior Career Award.

Self-nominations are allowed.

The award committee seeks letters of support from two individuals who are familiar with the candidate's achievements (upper length limit two pages) and a recent copy of the nominee's CV.

Criteria are:

- 20 or more years since highest academic degree
- Member in our section

The committee will judge the nominations on two main criteria: contributions to our field as a science but also to our profession within Canada.

The award winner will be asked to present a 30-minute talk about their work at the convention

Send all materials to:

Wolfgang Linden
Professor Emeritus, UBC
Chair, Awards Committee
wlinden@psych.ubc.ca

Deadline
January 4, 2020
11:59 pm EST