Growing up, how did you become interested in social psychology?

I became interested in this field when I took my first course in social psychology as an undergraduate. I was fascinated by the creative methodological approaches social psychologists utilize to examine important aspects of human behavior, ranging from close relationships to intergroup conflict. I was especially impressed with the field’s commitment to understanding and addressing social inequalities. As an Asian American woman with a disability, I have long been committed to improving the lives of marginalized populations and found social psychology to be an ideal avenue through which I could pursue this goal.

What helped to shape your focus on studying stigma as a determinant of health disparities among marginalized populations?

Although I very much enjoyed my training in experimental social psychology as a graduate student, I also realized over the course of my doctoral training that my passion lies in understanding and addressing the long-term consequences of stigma in relation to population health and well-being. I subsequently had the opportunity to further hone these interests through a postdoctoral fellowship under the mentorship of a clinical psychologist whose work focuses on the mental and behavioral health impact of stigma on members of the LGBTQ+ community. Taken together, these training experiences helped inform my current program of research, which examines the role of stigma as a driver of mental
and behavioral health inequities through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates theories in social
psychology, clinical science, and public health.

What would you like other psychological scientists to understand about the consequences and
implications of stigma—and where do you see the need for further research?

While psychologists have traditionally conceptualized stigma as an interpersonal phenomenon, my
interactions with colleagues and students in public health have heightened my awareness of how stigma
can operate through structural processes (e.g., inaccessible environments, inequitable laws/policies) to
disadvantage socially marginalized populations. To this end, I believe that more research is needed to
elucidate the psychological mechanisms underlying the health impact of structural stigma. I also believe
that more attention should be devoted to identifying sources of resilience among members of
marginalized communities. In other words, what personal and environmental resources enable
stigmatized individuals to thrive despite pervasive oppression and adversity? Addressing this research
question would help inform the development of tailored psychosocial interventions to improve the health
and well-being of stigmatized individuals.

The research you presented at the 2022 APS Annual Convention explored how the pandemic
exacerbated many existing challenges for people with disabilities. How personal was this research
for you, and what helped you remain healthy and productive during those difficult times?

This research was very much motivated by my personal experience as someone who is blind, as well as
the experiences of my friends and acquaintances in the disability community. While I was personally
fortunate enough to have family support during the height of the pandemic and did not encounter many
of the practical difficulties experienced by my disabled peers (e.g., limited access to
groceries/medications, transportation challenges), I was acutely aware of my dependence on my support
network and deeply frustrated by the fact that people with disabilities were often treated as an
afterthought in our society’s pandemic response. Setting time aside for connecting with loved ones,
regular walks, and good books helped me stay centered and productive.

How can the scientific enterprise broadly—including societies, publishers, and educational
institutions—better support and empower researchers who are members of the disability
community, including students who might become part of the next generation of researchers?

Ableism remains pervasive in academia and in our society more generally, yet it has received little
attention in conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion. In order to better support current
and emerging disabled scholars, the scientific enterprise as a whole needs to recognize ableism as a form
of social oppression that is just as significant and harmful as other forms of marginalization, such as
racism and sexism. One way to do this is by ensuring that all aspects of the scientific process (e.g.,
publishing, conferencing) are maximally accessible and inclusive for people with a wide range of
disabilities. It is also important to include disabled voices and perspectives in public forums (such as the
APS Observer) as well as to provide dedicated resources to support the professional development of
disabled scholars, such as mentorship programs, grants, and training fellowship opportunities.
Implicit Bias

Unconscious bias can lurk below the level of conscious awareness, but researchers are working to uncover more effective methods of reducing these prejudices.
Bias and Stigma

Psychological science on the effects of prejudice, and how to counter these beliefs.
APS Global Collaboration on COVID-19

Six working groups explore how psychological science can more effectively inform solutions to pandemics.