

STRIPED

A PUBLIC HEALTH
INCUBATOR

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

A Collaboration of Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Boston Children's Hospital

Newsletter Fall 2022

From the Director



S. Bryn Austin

From Day One, STRIPED has set our sights upstream, taking aim at targets in our society's toxic social environment that chip away at young people's body image and

sense of self and set so many up for developing an eating disorder. Prime targets for us include the diet industry's never-ending parade of dangerous and deceptive products and the corrosive effects of weight discrimination on health care, basic rights, and dignity, to name just a few.

I'm often asked what we are doing to help kids become more resilient to our toxic environment. It's a fair question, but I always respond that we are not focused on changing kids. We are changing our environment so the burden isn't on kids to be resilient to the pressures they shouldn't have to face in the first place. How do we do that? Here are a few examples from our latest projects you'll find featured in this newsletter:

- ◆ Read about the array of social media and legal research studies we have underway to help come up with better policy approaches to protecting teen mental health (pg. 2).
- ◆ Learn about what inspired us to

organize an exploratory workshop with the support of a grant from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, convening 15 leading scholars, clinicians, and community advocates from across the country to come up with novel ways to address weight stigma in public health and healthcare (pg. 2).

- ◆ Check out the impressive eating disorders prevention innovators from around the globe who we've had the privilege and honor to host as STRIPED fellows this year (pg. 3).
- ◆ Find out what seeds of change the talented high school students of STRIPED's Youth Corps are sowing in state legislatures across the country (pg. 4).

I suppose that last example, the STRIPED Youth Corps, likely does have some resiliency-building effects. But after nearly two years of working with them, I have no doubt that one day in the not-so-distant future, it will be this spectacular Youth Corps cohort and others like them from their generation who will be leading us to resiliency, ready to face all that the future holds for our society and our planet.

With gratitude,

S. Bryn Austin, ScD

What Our Trainees Say About STRIPED



Danni Ojumu

“I am researching the harmful effects of social media on adolescent mental health with a team of public health and legal researchers. As an undergraduate, new to public health research, I am grateful that STRIPED has given me this opportunity like no other to advocate for the safety and wellness of my peers.”



Destiny Jackson

“Through STRIPED, I am working with incredible mentors to evaluate inequities in harmful “wellness” supplements. Thanks to STRIPED, I have had unparalleled exposure to eating disorder research and have learned how I can leverage equity-focused research to drive policy solutions. I feel empowered to make further contributions to this research area.”

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Keeping Tabs & Holding Social Media to Account

In the year since Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen captivated the nation with her riveting testimony before the US Senate on the dangers social media posed to everything from teen mental health to democracy itself, STRIPED has been laser focused on bringing our unique research-to-policy-translation acumen to bear on this increasingly worrisome social problem. Here are a few samples from our expanding portfolio:

- ◆ **Soon after the whistleblower hearings** and with generous support from the Becca Schmill Foundation, we launched a pilot study capitalizing on our mix of legal, neuroscience, and public health expertise to chart legally viable, evidence-based strategies to strengthen regulation on social media to protect teen mental health. Our pilot study opened doors for us to federal and state policymakers and attorneys general from across the country to share our findings and inform state-level policy action. Next to building on or initial pilot research, we are scaling up our research to craft a roadmap, based on our legal analysis and synthesis of the research, to offer guidance to state policymakers on how to establish much-needed accountability from social media companies to ensure their algorithms do not put young people in harm's way.
- ◆ **Led by STRIPED's newest faculty member Amanda Raffoul**, we are conducting an innovative study investigating the promotion of diet-related products on a leading social me-

dia platform. Our preliminary findings show videos on the platform almost exclusively feature young people and make unsubstantiated health claims. We are beginning next steps to plan analyses of the videos and text data we culled and are looking ahead to ways to disseminate our findings widely.

- ◆ **After Google announced a new policy to restrict ads** for noxious skin-lightening products, we rolled out a rapid policy evaluation study of the policy change with the expert input of STRIPED Visiting Fellow Sook Ning Chua (*see pg. 3*). Recognizing the dual impacts of colorism and weight bias on body image for youth worldwide, especially in the Global South, STRIPED has expanded our portfolio of projects to investigate often toxic consumer products, which like diet pills, can be dangerous and are aggressively marketed online, exploiting the body image struggles of young people for profit. Our in-progress study will shed light on whether Google's new ad policy will make a difference in the colorist content of ads or if the policy may be more bark than bite from the Big Tech behemoth. Stay tuned for more updates on this and other STRIPED studies in the works.



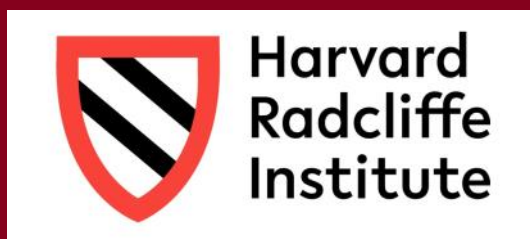
Is It Time to Rethink Body Mass Index?

In public health, we devote our careers to developing, refining, and disseminating interventions and tools designed to improve health and reduce inequities. This is time well spent when what we've developed is effective. But what happens when something we thought was helpful turns out to cause more harm than good? This doesn't happen too often, but when it does, we've got a whole new set of hurdles to surmount to *de-implement* an intervention or tool gone wrong. Unfortunately in the case of the metric body mass index (BMI), this is exactly what happened. BMI as a metric was invented almost two centuries ago by a Belgian mathematician and then resurrected by insurance companies in the mid 20th Century. Over the past few decades, in part because of the metric's simplicity and negligible cost to use, enthusiasm got ahead of the science, making BMI a household word and the go-to metric for all things "obesity" in clinical medicine and public health. What we know today, though, is that BMI is used in clinical medicine in all sorts of ways it was never intended. BMI is frequently collected even when

weight data are not needed for clinical decision making, and its use ends up being a barrier to care for many who have experienced eating disorders or weight stigma in healthcare.

So how do we *de-implement* something that has become this ubiquitous? With the support of a grant from the renowned Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, we set out to answer this question by convening a group of 15 leading scholars, clinicians, and community advocates for a two-day exploratory

workshop, "[Re-envisioning the Future of BMI Surveillance: Critical Reflection on a Contested Tactic of the 'War on Obesity.'](#)" After exploring the historical ascendance of BMI as a metric and its noxious effects on healthcare access, quality of care, and weight stigma and discrimination, we led expert participants through a collaborative process to identify promising and appropriate sites for *de-implementation*. Drawing from the insightful solutions generated in our exploratory workshop, we are well on our way to producing a final report pinpointing actionable steps for public health and healthcare professionals to *de-implement* BMI surveillance where it does more harm than good. Keep an eye out for more on our recommendations soon and read more from STRIPED faculty on concerns about BMI's overuse [here](#).



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Welcome to New STRIPED Fellows!



Ariel Beccia

STRIPED welcomes two new scholars to our team this year: **Post-doctoral fellow Ariel Beccia**, who comes to us from University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School in Worcester, MA, where she earned her doctoral degree in epidemiology, and **predoctoral fellow Nat Egan**, hailing from University of Cambridge in Cambridge, UK, where she is working on her PhD. **Ariel** is a fellow with both STRIPED and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Health Equity Research Collaborative, also based at Harvard and Boston Children's Hospital. Supported by a highly competitive, three-year grant from the US National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, Ariel will be focusing her research on population-level eating disorder inequities, specifically on the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health and economic policies on mental health inequities affecting diverse LGBTQIA+ communities. **Nat**, who is Harding Distinguished Postgraduate Scholar in the Medical Research Council Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge, is conducting her doctoral research examining the social construction of "obesity" in public health policy. She is also an integral part of our planning team for the STRIPED/Radcliffe exploratory seminar on de-implementation of universal BMI surveillance (*see pg. 2*).

Welcome, Ariel and Nat!



Nat Egan



Emilio Compte

STRIPED also welcomed four international visiting scholars this year: **Emilio Compte**, **Sook Ning Chua**, **Trine Tetlie Eik-Nes**, and **Stacie June Shelton**, who all gave illuminating virtual lectures sponsored by STRIPED and our partners at the Harvard Chan School and Boston Children's Hospital. They also took part in collaborative research and policy advocacy initiatives, sharing their vast expertise and experience with our STRIPED community of scholars, clinicians, and trainees. **Emilio** is Assistant Professor of the

Eating Behavior Research Center of the School of Psychology at Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Chile and the Director of Research at

Comenzar de Nuevo Treatment Center in México. **Sook** is Founding Director of Relate Malaysia, the leading not-for-profit organization in Malaysia dedicated to mental health services, education, training, and policy advocacy. She is also a New World Social Innovation Fellow with the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Center for Public Leadership. **Trine** is Associate Professor in the Department of Neuroscience and Behavioral Medicine at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She is currently collaborating with

previous STRIPED Visiting Fellow Laura Hart on adapting Laura's Confident Body, Confident Child program, a new evidence-based program for parents of children ages 2-6 years, for implementation in Norway. **Stacie** is Global Head of Education and Advocacy for the Dove Self-Esteem Project, based in London, UK, where she leads programs and interventions designed to improve body confidence and self-esteem in young people around the world.

Welcome, Emilio, Sook, Trine, and Stacie!



Sook Ning Chua



Stacie June Shelton

STRIPED Faculty

S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director
S. Jean Emans, MD
Erica Kenney, ScD, MPH
Josiemer Mattei, PhD, MPH, FAHA
Sarah Pitts, MD
Amanda Raffoul, MSc, PhD
Tracy Richmond, MD, MPH

Staff

Jill R Kavanaugh, MLIS
Monique Santoso, BA

Collaborating Mentors

Jerel P. Calzo, PhD, MPH
Nancy Costello, JD
Allegra R. Gordon, ScD, MPH
Michael Long, ScD, MPH
Rachel Plummer, MPH
Rachel F. Rodgers, PhD, FAED
Kendrin Sonnevile, ScD, RD, LDN
Alvin Tran, ScD, MPH
Davene Wright, PhD

International Expert

Advisory Panel

Debra Franko, PhD
Jess Haines, PhD, MHSc, RD
Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, PhD, MPH, RD
Susan Paxton, PhD

Trainees

Ryan Ahmed
Upanita Barman
Charmaine Chan
Cindy Chwa
Ryan Dunk
Valeria Duran
Nat Egan
Gwen Feeny
Destiny Jackson
Madeline Jones
Junjie (Anderson) Lu
Egbe Ndip-Agbor
Oluwadunni Ojumu
Rakesh Kathiresan
Mary Lee
Rebecca Sutton
Samantha Turner
Dunni Ojumu
Funmbi Okoya
Meg Salvia
Samantha Turner

Fellows

Maya Azar Atallah, MSc
Ariel Beccia, MS, PhD
Sook Ning Chua, PhD
Emilio Compte, PhD
Nadia Craddock, EdM, PhD
Katelyn Ferreira, MPH
Monica Henderson, MPH
Flora Or, MHS, ScD
Stacie June Shelton, MPH
Iyiola Solanke, PhD
Trine Tetlie Eik-Nes, MSc, PhD

Spotlight on STRIPED Youth Corps!

Our Youth Corps knocked it out of the park with another exciting year featuring their TikTok videos, news articles, op-eds, youth surveys, and virtual press conferences. With their passion for advocacy and policy translation, these high school students from across the country bring their creativity and commitment to bridge the gap between the science and their own lived experiences to advocate for a safer society for all young people. This year, they used their voices to raise awareness for eating disorders prevention policy initiatives in no fewer than eight US states — California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Texas — to support a common-sense measure to ban the sale of toxic and deceptive over-the-counter diet pills and muscle-building supplements to children.

STRIPED Youth Corps & Trainee Journalists Make Their Mark

- ◆ **In New York**, Youth Corps members Joanne Chung and Stanley Huang coauthored an [incisive op-ed](#) in the *New York Daily Post* on the deceptive messaging of diet pills and muscle-building supplements that prey on vulnerable youth. Ryan Ahmed published a [news piece](#) in the *Science Survey*



on the role of youth advocacy at the state level to keep these harmful products out of kids' hands. Saaben Khalid reported on [the passage of the New York S16D Bill in the state Senate](#) in *The Iris*, a New York City publication expressly designed for high school journalists.

- ◆ **In California**, Youth Corps member Chuying Huo published several pieces in [The Stanford Daily](#) and [Los Angeles Times High School Insider](#) on efforts in the state legislature to ban the sale of over-the-counter diet pills to children.
- ◆ **In Massachusetts**, Suffolk University undergraduate and US National Team figure skater wrote a [hard-hitting op-ed](#) in *Commonwealth Magazine* on the insidiousness of the diet pills industry luring aspiring young athletes with its false promises and toxic products.



STRIPED's New York Youth Corps In Action!



Passionate about promoting legislation that protects children from predatory diet pills, the New York STRIPED Youth Corps brought forth their talents in directing, video editing, and scriptwriting to advocate for A431C/S16D in front of Governor Hochul's 5th Avenue office this summer.

In record time, these passionate youth produced a three-part video series highlighting this pressing issue for the Governor. Stay tuned for more updates on their advocacy efforts soon!

- ◆ **On the national stage**, Youth Corps member Caroline Hodi teamed up with Harvard College STRIPED trainee Danni Ojumu on an op-ed they published in the national maga-

zine *Common Dreams* on a [much-needed youth perspective](#) on the debates on Capitol Hill and across the country about strengthening regulations on social media – a debate that has been almost universally dominated by adults without much input from young people themselves.

STRIPED Youth Corps Brings Youth Perspectives to the Policymaking Process

- ◆ **Offering testimony** in a hearing before the California Senate Health and Judiciary Committees, STRIPED Youth Corps members Kelsey Wu and Najman Mahboubia shared their insights as California teens with state lawmakers on the harm caused by dangerous over-the-counter diet pills.
- ◆ **Bringing together** pediatricians, parents, lawmakers, and youth advocates, STRIPED Youth Corps members organized powerful virtual press conferences in both New York and California to rally support and mobilize constituents for efforts in the state legislatures to ban the sale of dangerous diet pills to children.

- ◆ **Sharing findings** from the Youth Corps' survey of peers across the country, STRIPED Youth Corps members

Ryan Ahmed and Joanne Chung were



Ryan Ahmed

invited to travel to Washington, DC, to present their poster on Youth Corps advocacy successes at the annual 2022 [Society for Public Health Education's \(SOPHE\) Advocacy Summit](#).

Check us out at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped



To make a gift, visit <https://goo.gl/MyI7Wl> & select the fund option "Eating Disorders Prevention (STRIPED)"

Newsletter by: S. Bryn Austin, Jill R. Kavanaugh, and Monique Santoso