

## *The Impact of Psychological Trauma on the Lives of Black Males* By Martin Pierre, Ph.D.

The experiences of sexual abuse and trauma-related stress have a profound impact on the psychological functioning of African American youth, in general, and Black males, in particular. Many African American males live in neighborhoods where violence and other forms of chronic stressors can negatively affect their social, emotional and psychological well-being (Kulka et al., 1990). Furthermore, racism and discrimination may exacerbate trauma-related symptoms and influence the development of maladaptive behaviors and poor health outcomes among African American males.

Although Black males comprise less than 6% of the U.S. population, they occupy a very large space in the American psyche and imagination. Black males in American society have been marginalized and seen as deviants. Historically, they have been the target of negative media stereotypes and objectification. In film and literature, they are often depicted as villains, con artists, buffoons, hypersexual, and sociopathic.

The mental health profile of Black males is equally alarming. Since 1980, suicide rates of Black males aged 18-24 have surpassed those of White males in the same age group (National Research Council, 1989). This statistical trend is particularly disheartening because historically, Black men have experienced lower rates of suicide than any other demographic group (Gary, 1981).

Sexual abuse among black males is a chronic stressor that often goes underreported and unaddressed due to the stigma and shame associated with gender role norms and masculinity in the Black community. Child victims often delay disclosure of sexual abuse for fear of negative reactions from caregivers or being harmed by their abusers. Research findings indicate that 1 in 6 Black boys has experienced childhood sexual abuse. Of those, 26% were between the ages of 12-14 and 34% were younger than nine years old (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2009).

The movie *Precious* highlights the sexual abuse of African American teenagers in its depiction of a 350-pound illiterate teenage girl who is pregnant for the second time by her father and horribly abused by her mother. More recently, the film *Moonlight* depicts a coming of age story of a young Black man growing up in Miami. His developmental journey to manhood is guided by violence, pain, the beauty of falling in love, and coming to grip with his own sexuality. However, what is absent in the narrative of these and other movies is the chronic and complex sexual abuse often experienced by young men of color.

*(Continued on next page)*

### In This Issue

- ♦ **The Impact of Psychological Trauma on the Lives of Black Males**
- ♦ **“Red Monster”**
- ♦ **Black History Month**
- ♦ ***WJC in Action***
- ♦ **The Harris Racial Identity Theory: Reflections of a Transracial Adoptee**
- ♦ **Celebrating Student Leaders with a Strong Commitment to Social Justice**
- ♦ **Immigrant Stories: A Student Panel**
- ♦ **Save the Date!**
- ♦ **Holidays & Observances**
- ♦ **Community Events, Workshops & Conferences**
- ♦ **Current Events**

## *The Impact of Psychological Trauma on the Lives of Black Males*

When youth are exposed to reminders of painful and unspeakable events, they tend to respond as if they were traumatized all over again. Their behaviors are often misdiagnosed or under-diagnosed by mental health providers. Alarming, teachers, administrators, law and court officers tend to label their behaviors as oppositional, defiant, acting-out, impulsive, problematic, truant and delinquent. However, these behaviors may be best understood as an attempt on the part of highly traumatized young African American males to minimize objective threat and regulate their emotional distress.

When teens and adult males are unable to achieve a sense of control and stability as a result of negative life experiences (e.g., chronic childhood sexual abuse), they become helpless. If they are unable to identify their importance, how their life is meaningful, and make desired changes, they may go immediately from stimulus (fear) to response (fight/flight/freeze) without implementing effective coping strategies that allow the production of adaptive behaviors. Unless mental health providers understand the context and meaning of these behaviors within a trauma-informed lens, they will continue to provide inadequate and unethical care to African American males.

Thus, more culturally-responsive treatment approaches are needed and they must incorporate several key elements. Treatment should account for a neurobiological system that has been altered by traumatic experiences and a social environment that has difficulty helping the individual regulate his emotions. There must be an acknowledgment that African Americans have relied on a belief and value system that represents a collective identity, spirituality, oral communication and oneness with nature. These belief systems are based on an African-centered worldview that has the potential to increase healing and agency in boys of color. For example, adopting a system of care approach for children and adolescents by working collaboratively with social service agencies, community programs, educational institutions, faith-based agencies, legal services, and social networks can foster healing. This approach appreciates the integration of the social-ecology, neurobiological, and behavioral systems that promote healthy adaptation.

Group therapy has been offered as an effective intervention for African American males. Groups are perceived by clients as less stigmatizing and compliment the worldview of African American culture (e.g., community, village). For example, rap therapy and spoken words represent culturally-sensitive interventions that consider the social, political, spiritual and emotional contexts within which Black males' lives are embedded. These young men can use spoken words (i.e., rap, poetry, and personal life narratives) to connect with their inner-self while giving voice to silence. Forms of stylistic expressions that allow Black men to become rhythmically engaged offer a unique way of accessing a full range of emotions and physical sensations, and can serve as catalyst for change toward optimal psychological health and well-being.

One of the most important components of successful therapy is a positive therapeutic relationship. This dynamic can be further intensified for Black males who live in marginalized social environments and/or have experienced racism and other forms of discrimination on a regular basis. A prerequisite for developing a therapeutic alliance is for therapists to considering the stressful experiences of Black males in the United States. They must also be prepared to provide support and explore how these stressors may be exacerbated by the experiences of sexual abuse.

### **References:**

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# "Red Monster" — Film Screening & Panel Discussion

February 7, 2018 -- 6:00 to 8:30 p.m.

William James College

"Red Monster" depicts the racial and psychological dimensions of sexual trauma and trauma-related stress in the life of Malik, an African American male. Malik shares his story by wading through the emotional currents of his personal experience as a victim of chronic childhood sexual abuse. One of the goals of the film is to raise awareness of the impact of sexual abuse on African American males.

The panel discussion that follows the film will examine ways in which traumatic experiences leave their imprint on young Black men's mind, body and soul. Many of these young men are living in urban environments and routinely face traumatic stressors in the form of sexual abuse. Researchers have documented a strong and consistent relationship between experiences of sexual abuse and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Van der Kolk, 2014). The behaviors of young Black men who have experienced sexual abuse are often labeled as oppositional defiant, acting-out, impulsive, problematic, truant, sociopathic, and delinquent. However, these young men's behaviors must be understood from a trauma-informed and culturally-sensitive lens.

Being a member of a racial/ethnic minority in American society is a risk factor for traumatic stress largely because racial/ethnic minorities are more frequently exposed to events that produce posttraumatic disturbance (Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen, 2011). As a result, effective trauma therapy involves an understanding that trauma reactions are culture-bound, and trauma can have damaging long-term consequences (Mueser, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 2009). Furthermore, acknowledging and celebrating the cultural legacy of African traditions can promote optimal functioning. The presenters will recommend a healing paradigm which takes into account the living condition in which a person exists (i.e., cultural context), the geo-political context in which the individual is embedded (e.g., racism and discrimination), and the development of multi-dimensional understanding of "self" (i.e., African centered).

The traditional Africentric worldview approaches humanity collectively rather than individualistically. Researchers suggest that this view leads to feelings of shared concern and a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others (Akbar, 1984; Ho, 1987; Houston, 1990; Schiele, 1990). This worldview has particular salience for African-American men. It acknowledges and affirms the culturally congruent values of community, wholeness, and striving for system maintenance over individual personal gain. It also views individuals collectively in terms of their group membership.

## Film Credits

The Film, *Red Monster*, was:

- ♦ Shown at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Run&Shoot Filmworks: Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival (Aug. 7, 2017).
- ♦ Screened at the *Massachusetts Psychological Association's 2017 Annual Conference* (Nov. 4, 2017).
- ♦ Awarded a grant by the Boston Foundation (2017) for a play adaptation titled "*Triggered*".
- ♦ Profiled in the *Boston Banner* (<http://baystatebanner.com/news/2017/jul/06/triggered-one-man-show-reveals-reality-abuse/>)

The film will be screened at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual National Association of Black Social Workers National Conference on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018.



## **“Red Monster” (cont.)**

***The film screening of “Red Monster” will be followed by a panel discussion on the social, emotional, behavioral, and psychological impacts of sexual abuse and trauma on Black males. Members of the panel will include:***



### **Martin Pierre, Ph.D., Panel Moderator**

Dr. Martin Pierre is a staff psychologist at Brandeis University Counseling Center. He earned a Master’s degree in Counseling from Lesley University and a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology from Boston College. He is the co-founder of Ashmont Counseling Associates, a group practice that provides psychological services to children, families and adults. Dr. Pierre serves as a Board Member for both the Massachusetts Psychological Association (MPA) and the Boston Ten Point Coalition. In addition, he is the former co-chair of the MPA’s Committee on Ethnic Minorities Affairs. Dr. Pierre co-authored the script for the film “Red Monster”.



### **Mariano Humphrey, B.S.**

Mr. Humphrey is a Student Support Service Coordinator out of the Office of Special Education for the Boston Public Schools at Community Academy Alternative High School. Mr. Humphrey is presently a student in the dual degree program in Clinical Social Work and Education at Boston University.



### **Keith Mascoll, SAG-AFTRA, AEA**

Mr. Mascoll is a Founding Member and a part of the artistic team for The Front Porch Arts Collective. Mr. Mascoll earned his B.A. in Theatre at the University of Massachusetts.



### **Michael Mobley, Ph.D.**

Dr. Mobley received his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the Pennsylvania State University in 1998. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Salem State University.



### **Ulric Johnson, Ph.D.**

Dr. Johnson is the founder and director of **TAGV: Teens Advocating a Global Vision AKA Teens Against Gang Violence**, a peer leadership, youth and family development program. Dr. Johnson received his doctoral degree in Cross-Cultural Psychology from Southwestern University.



### **Walter Raleigh Higgs, III, M.Div., MACM, MSW, LCSW**

Mr. Higgs is a Clinical Social Worker for the Boston Public Health Commission under the Homeless Services Bureau. He obtained a Master of Divinity/Master of Arts in Church Music from Morehouse School of Religion and a Master of Public Health from Morehouse School of Medicine.



### **Byron Beaman, B.A.**

Mr. Beaman is the Dean of Students at Prospect Hill Academy Charter School in Cambridge, MA. Mr. Beaman attended Boston Public Schools and went on to attend Western Connecticut where he majored in Drama.

# Why We Celebrate Black History Month

Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements made by Black Americans and a time to reflect on the central roles of African Americans in U.S. history. The celebration can be felt nationally as many organizations, cities, and states host events to raise awareness of Black culture, and honor prominent Black individuals who have shaped the course of American history.



In 1915, recognizing the dearth of information on the accomplishments of African Americans, **Dr. Carter G. Woodson** founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, now called the **Association for the Study of African American Life and History** (ASALH, 2017). The group sponsored a national Negro History Week in 1926, choosing the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass (Zorthian, 2016). The event inspired schools and communities nationwide to organize local celebrations, establish history clubs, and host performances and lectures.

This celebration was expanded to include the entire month of February in 1976 after President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month. President Ford called upon the public to “*seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history*” (The Library of Congress, 2017). Since then, every American president has endorsed a specific theme for Black History Month. **The 2018 theme, “African Americans in Times of War,”** commemorates the centennial of the end of the First World War, and explores its complex meanings, implications and aftermath (ASALH, 2017). The theme suggests that contemporary conditions give us cause for critical pause to consider the specific and unique issues faced by African Americans in times of war. These issues include repression of opportunities during wartime, lack of opportunities for advancement, the struggle to integrate the military, and the experiences of veterans once they return home.

Black History Month is an integral part of our nation’s tradition in which we continue to promote positive examples of historical events, exemplary leaders, and steps towards societal change. This remembrance is not only deeply meaningful for the African American community, but imperative for the greater understanding of U.S. and world history.

## References

ASALH. *The founders of Black History Month*. Retrieved January 11, 2018, from <https://asalh.org/about-us/our-history/>

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## Commemoration of Black History Month in the Greater Boston Area

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- **Black History Month Celebration.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **African-American Patriots Public Tours.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **Frederick Douglass: Images & Words.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **The Lost Tapes: Malcolm X.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **Hibernian Hall.** [Read More Here.](#)
- **Boston Black Pride.** [Read More Here.](#)



# WJC in Action: Practicing What We Teach

## WJC Students Volunteered at Local High School

By Meghan O'Dell, AmeriCorps VISTA Project Coordinator

Six Scholars from the Black Mental Health Graduate Academy at William James College volunteered to engage students at Urban Science Academy (USA) in conversations about the profession of psychology. USA is a Boston public high school located in West Roxbury, MA. The curriculum at USA emphasizes science and technology to prepare students for STEM success in college and other vocational schools. Each January, USA holds **Science Week** to inspire, educate, and provide an opportunity for hands-on experimentation. Over the course of the first two days, USA welcomes successful scientists in the community to open discussion about their respective fields. The third day is dedicated to the Science Fair where students from grades 9 to 12 present the experiments that they designed and ran during the past month. The week culminates in field trips to local scientific institutions, including the Museum of Science and the New England Aquarium.



Nathalie Alexis and Darryl Sweeper, Jr. spoke with students at Urban Science Academy.

This year, Science Week took place from January 16<sup>th</sup> to January 19<sup>th</sup>. On Tuesday and Wednesday, **Damon Pryor, Nathalie Alexis, Darryl Sweeper Jr., Sade Callwood, Kwame Dance, and Oluwafunmilayo Aguocha** joined science classrooms to present on their career path in psychology – where they are, where they're going, and how they got there. The Academy Scholars shared personal anecdotes about the experiences that ignited their passion for psychology, practical challenges they faced in attaining higher education, and their goals post-graduation. The presenters dedicated part of the class period to dispelling popular misconceptions about psychology, therapy, and trauma as well as reviewing the different subfields housed within the discipline of psychology.



Kwame Dance and Fumi Aguocha led a class discussion at USA.

On Thursday, **Amanda Korff, Michelle Botus, Charline Melon, Sheila Gomez, Meghan O'Dell, and Sarah Zieminski** served as judges for the Science Fair. Prepped with the school rubric and a brief introduction to judging, the volunteers entered the gymnasium to find over 100 student projects already set up, complete with detailed poster board displays, photos, and demonstrations. The projects ranged from the mechanical properties of collisions to the causes of tooth decay to an analysis of NBA player statistics against team victories. Flipping the script from the previous two days, student-scientists took the lead on presenting their projects to individual volunteer judges. The students introduced their hypothetical questions, testable hypotheses, materials, experimental procedures, data, and conclusions. Judges, in turn, asked the students to clarify, expand, consider alternative experiments to address the same hypothetical question, and describe how to design a future experiment based on the data gathered. As of this publication, the winners have not yet been announced; the top five projects will be encouraged to apply to the city science fair.



Sarah Zieminski, Meghan O'Dell, & Sheila Gomez served as judges at the USA Science Fair.

Our deepest gratitude goes to **Mr. Ernest Coakley, Ms. Olinka Briceno, and the entire science department** for hosting a successful Science Week. We would also like to thank **Mr. Jeff Cook, USA's Headmaster, and Ms. Jenna Parafinczuk, Student Support Coordinator**, for making this opportunity available to the WJC community. Our volunteers felt welcomed and enjoyed interacting with the youth. We are looking forward to continuing this partnership with Urban Science Academy through the spring semester and beyond!

# WJC in Action: Practicing What We Teach

## Students and Faculty Led Expressive Arts Groups for Syrian Refugee Children

In partnership with the Jewish Family Service's *Syrian Refugee Resettlement Project*, Global Mental Health Concentration students, **Donicka Suprice**, **Sarah Gonzalez**, **Meghan Gowan**, **Carol Rannie**, **Shelby Ripa**, and **Patrick Sviokla**, and Global Mental Health faculty, **Dr. Jill Bloom**, **Dr. Yousef AlAjarma**, and **Dr. Stanley Berman** recently led expressive arts groups with Syrian refugee children, and a parenting group for Syrian parents. Eight Syrian families have resettled in metro Boston during the past year. William James College, and the Global Mental Health (GMH) Program have partnered with Jewish Family Services to provide social-emotional support to the families. In addition to the recent groups, a Women's Group, co-led by GMH student **Monica Moawde**, has been meeting since early summer.



STANDING UP FOR THOSE LEFT BEHIND



The mural is a joint drawing by parents and kids of "home."

**March 26th, 2018 | 11:00 am - 1:30 pm**



**Susan Harris O'Connor, MSW, LCSW, ASQ/CQIA** will introduce her racial identity model and theory told within her racial identity autobiographical narrative, which she performs. Her model is directed toward transracial and international adoptees and has important implications for clinical practice, personal development, and training for mental health providers.

Susan has delivered this narrative over 40 times since its creation in 1999. It has been presented at such places as the Harvard Medical Conference Series, Smith College Summer Lecture Series, NAACP/Boston, Starbucks Coffee/Saugus and keynote addresses to DMH, DYS and DCF.

***This event is supported by the Dean of Students Office.***

**March 29th, 2018 | 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm**

an **invitation-only Dinner and Dialogue** hosted by the Black Mental Health Graduate Academy to celebrate students, across WJC departments and programs, who have committed their efforts and energies to promoting social justice [via leadership activities, program development, and community service] and addressing mental health disparities in underserved communities.



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## Immigrant Stories: A Student Panel



(From left to right:) Natalie Gajda, Yafit Zilberberg, Karam Hanna, and Yana Kazekamp

On January 22nd, CMGMH and the Dean of Students Office hosted an event titled ***“Immigrant Stories: A Student Panel.”*** Four William James College students from Iraq (Karam Hanna), Israel (Yafit Zilberberg), Poland (Natalie Gajda), and Ukraine (Yana Kazekamp) shared their personal journeys of migration to the U.S. The students are currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Counseling Program at WJC and are specializing in Couples and Family Therapy.

Dr. Nilda Laboy, Chair of the Counseling Department remarked, “[The students] did an outstanding job! I am very proud of all of them for the courage they have had in confronting adversity, their resilience, and their willingness to share their stories with us. It was a reminder to never assume anything about anyone and to work each day to bring kindness to the lives of others, especially those who are new here and adapting to our country.”

## Save the Date: Upcoming CMGMH Events

The following events will take place at WJC:

- February 7: **Black History Month Event: Film Screening of “Red Monster”.** 6:00pm—8:30pm
- March 26: **Transracial Adoption and Identity.** 11:30am-1:00pm
- March 29: **Celebrating WJC Student Leaders with a Strong Commitment to Social Justice.** 6:30pm—8:30pm
- April 6: **Conference on Latino Mental Health.** 9:00am—4:30 p.m.
- April 28: **LGBTQ Youth: Magnifying the Splendor of the Rainbow.** 8:30—4:30pm
- May 5: **Biannual Conference on Haitian Mental Health.** 8:30am—5:00 pm

To learn more, contact [cmgmh@williamjames.edu](mailto:cmgmh@williamjames.edu)

## February Holidays & Observances

- February 1: **National Freedom Day.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 1-31: **Black History Month.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 11: **International Day of Women and Girls in Science.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 11-17: **Random Acts of Kindness Week.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 13: **Mardi Gras.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 13: **Maha Shivratri.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 14: **Ash Wednesday.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 14: **Valentine’s Day.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 16: **Chinese New Year.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 19: **Presidents’ Day.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 20: **World Day of Social Justice.** [Read Here.](#)
- February 28: **Purim.** [Read Here.](#)

# Community Events, Workshops & Conferences

- February 1st, 2018: **"Native American Resilience Through Art Opening Reception"** [https://www.umb.edu/news\\_events\\_media/events/native\\_american\\_resilience\\_through\\_art](https://www.umb.edu/news_events_media/events/native_american_resilience_through_art)
- February 22nd, 2018: **A Presentation on "Success for our Sons: The Village Responds."** [ConspiracyofCare@cosecoc.org](mailto:ConspiracyofCare@cosecoc.org)
- March 9th or 16th, 2018: **Sexual Assault & People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Adaptations to Treatment.** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sexual-assault-and-people-with-intellectual-and-developmental-disabilities-adaptations-to-treatment-registration-41239823422>
- March 15th–17th, 2018: **10th Annual Muslim Mental Health Conference.** <http://mailchi.mp/380d7527b397/muslim-mental-health-conference-call-for-proposals-399495?e=5ba106d246>
- April 7th, 2018: **EMI to IDEAS: 30 Years Later, Persisting in Challenging Times.** <https://sites.google.com/edcollab.org/ideasconference/home?authuser=0>
- April 9th, 2018: **NAMI Massachusetts Advocacy Day.** <http://namimass.org/event/nami-massachusetts-advocacy-day>
- April 14th-15th, 2018: **GHIC 2018: Global Health & Innovation Conference.** <http://www.uniteforsight.org/conference/>
- April 19th-21st, 2018: **Society for the Study of Psychiatry and Culture's 39th Annual Meeting.** <https://psychiatryandculture.org/#!/event/2018/4/19/society-for-the-study-of-psychiatry-and-culture39th-annual-meeting>
- May 4th-5th, 2018: **LGBT Health Workforce Conference.** <http://bngap.org/lgbthwfconf/>
- May 19th, 2018: **NAMIWalks Massachusetts.** <http://namimass.org/event/namiwalks-massachusetts>
- June 22nd-23rd, 2018: **The Inaugural Convention of Asian Pacific American Feminist Psychologists.** [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfakVku2K0tughv74SR8oVwM\\_SKR1nW\\_-hgDfc6p2eHeBh77g/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfakVku2K0tughv74SR8oVwM_SKR1nW_-hgDfc6p2eHeBh77g/viewform)
- June 29th-July 1st, 2018: **Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues' 2018 Summer Conference.** <http://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?pageId=480>
- July 1st-5th, 2018: **International Congress of International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP).** <http://www.iacpp.org/node/627>
- July 9th-13th, 2018: **Biennial International Seminar on the Teaching of Psychological Science.** <https://bistops.org/>
- October 5th-7th, 2018: **7th International Conference of Community Psychology, Chile 2018 .** [https://www.cipc2018chile.cl/modalidades-de-trabajo/?lang=en#presentacion\\_carteles](https://www.cipc2018chile.cl/modalidades-de-trabajo/?lang=en#presentacion_carteles)
- October 10th-13th, 2018: **5th World Congress of the World Association of Cultural Psychiatry.** <http://wacp2018.org/>
- October 18th-21st, 2018: **The National Latina/o Psychological Association Conference.** [www.nlpconference.org/](http://www.nlpconference.org/)
- November 12th-16th, 2018: **Caribbean Regional Conference of Psychology.** <http://crpc2018.org/>

## Current Events Corner

### Mental Health in the News

- **"Survivors of sexual and physical abuse need #youtoo."** *WHO*. In the past few weeks, the outpouring of #metoo stories in social media has opened the world's eyes to a significant, yet often hidden public health concern. [Read Here.](#)
- **"Now is the time for well-being programs to focus on mental health."** *Forbes*. Employee well-being is something that increasingly interests managers. What investment extends into mental health? [Read Here.](#)
- **"A cultural necessity: The APA's new multicultural guidelines."** *Psychology today*. The need for the profession of psychology to integrate awareness, knowledge, and skills of the cultural dynamics that present themselves in a person's mental health. [Read Here.](#)
- **"Feds freeze mental health practices registry"** *CNN*. Federal health officials recently froze a program aimed to educate the public and provide information about evidence-based mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. [Read Here.](#)
- **"Oregon state athletes promote mental health awareness with social media campaign."** *Sports Illustrated*. Oregon State athletes are leading a campaign to propel mental health awareness in college athletics into a national discussion. [Read Here.](#)
- **"How a government shutdown could affect your health."** *PBS*. The federal government shutdown will likely have widespread and long-lasting consequences for public health [Read Here.](#)