October 25, 2021

To the International Society for Autism Research Student/Trainee Award Committee,

As a Postdoctoral Trainee in the Cognitive Neuroscience of Communication at the University of Connecticut, receiving a Diversity Award for the 2022 International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Annual Meeting will help me travel and present at the Meeting. Especially as a BIPOC immigrant to the United States, attending the Meeting will allow me to be in community and engage with diverse researchers, self-advocates, and stakeholders, which is rare at my predominantly white institution and in autism research.

My research addresses language acquisition in Black and Hispanic/Latinx autistic young adults with language impairment, as well as how their experiences through the lens of language relate to other life outcomes. I implement community-based participatory research methods to address my two main arms of research: 1) understanding language acquisition across adolescence and adulthood and 2) utilizing longitudinal knowledge of language development to support minority autistic adults with language impairment.

As for the first arm, major knowledge gaps involve connecting underlying linguistic and cognitive processing mechanisms (e.g., brain activation in terms of *signal strength* and *functional connectivity*) to real-world phenotypes (i.e., observable language outcomes) using assessments sensitive to variability in the low end of the normal distribution and in BIPOC populations. To address these gaps, I have collected comprehensive longitudinal behavioral data on speech and language to better understand diagnostic stability of language impairment in Black and Hispanic/Latinx autistic young adults. I am also collecting data using a novel fNIRS paradigm to explore the linguistic and cognitive factors in language acquisition.

My second and complementary line of research addresses underrepresentation in autism research using a Diversity Science approach, which considers the role of systemic factors in minority health disparities. This investigation brings together research team members who are diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern), gender, neurodiversity (neurodiverse, neurotypical), and stakeholder role (parent, self-advocate, practitioner, researcher). In establishing two community partnerships with Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities, this research aims to investigate how individual differences (e.g., language ability, cognitive ability) and systemic factors (e.g., social determinants of health) impact life outcomes. The ultimate aim is to translate this knowledge into a participatory framework for providing supports to BIPOC autistic individuals and mitigating health disparities.

In sum, the 2022 INSAR Diversity Award will allow me to travel the 2,000 miles from Storrs, Connecticut, to Austin, Texas. My research, stakeholder-related activities, and career goals make clear my commitment to producing impactful research in partnership with BIPOC autistic individuals and their communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

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