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## UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

October 15, 2021

Dr. Jessica Barlow
School of Speech, Language & Hearing Sciences
San Diego State University
SLHS Building Room 221
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182

Dear Dr. Jessica Barlow,

I am applying for the Assistant Professor position in the School of Speech, Language & Hearing Sciences at San Diego State University. I have a Ph.D. in Child Language from the University of Kansas (KU) and am currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the T32-funded Cognitive Neuroscience of Communication program at the University of Connecticut. My background in education, linguistics, neuroscience, and language disorders puts me in an ideal position to conduct research at the intersection of language, neuroscience, and autism. In addition, my research, teaching and mentoring, and community service activities and aims align to all eight of the BIE criteria.

**Research:** My research addresses language acquisition in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) autistic youth and how individual differences (e.g., language ability) together with systemic factors (e.g., social determinants of health) impact life outcomes. I am especially interested in how language learning at the levels of *phenotype* and *brain* changes across the lifespan. To pursue this, I collect data using behavioral assessment, functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS), and community-based methods. I am also collaborating with community stakeholders, practitioners, and other researchers to obtain data using novel self-report measures on self-determination.

I have two main aims in my research: 1) better understanding language learning and language impairment across adolescence and adulthood and 2) utilizing longitudinal knowledge of language learning to support BIPOC autistic adults with language impairment. Major knowledge gaps involve connecting underlying linguistic and cognitive processing mechanisms (e.g., patterns of 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 minority populations. To address these gaps, I use direct behavioral assessments plus neuroimaging methods that are suitable for autistic youth. 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 adolescents. I am also collecting data using a naturalistic movie-watching paradigm and fNIRS to explore the linguistic and cognitive factors in real-time processing.

A second line of research addresses underrepresentation in clinical research using a Diversity Science approach, which considers the role of systemic factors in racial and ethnic disparities. For example, in implementing a community-based approach to recruit Black and Hispanic/Latinx

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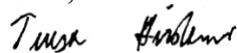*An Equal Opportunity Employer*

autistic young adults with language impairment to research, I found that removing systemic barriers to participation in research resulted in 92% retention over four years. Ongoing research with this group plus Black minimally verbal autistic children recruited through an additional community partnership investigates the importance of individual differences (e.g., language ability) and systemic factors (e.g., education access and quality, sense of belonging to one's community) in life outcomes. The long-term goal is to develop a participatory framework for providing supports and mitigating minority health disparities through a Diversity Science lens.

**Teaching:** I have taught phonology and syntax to undergraduates as a Teaching Assistant in Chinese, academic and vocational skills to autistic youth as a classroom teacher, and First Language Acquisition to undergraduate and master's students as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. I also mentored 16 diverse students during my Ph.D. These experiences showed me that teaching is a process of co-learning and facilitation. My role as a teacher and mentor is to empower students by providing accessible learning opportunities and equitable instruction. I have honed my teaching skills as a Postdoctoral Trainee by coordinating the Clinical Connections Seminar, which brings together stakeholders, researchers, and clinicians around topics in communication disorders (e.g., autism from intersectional perspectives), and mentoring Ph.D. students. At KU, my lectures and hands-on labs as a Graduate Teaching Assistant were relevant to Linguistics and Child Language (e.g., language acquisition models, language disorders).

**Diversity:** As a transracial and international adoptee, I empathize with the barriers that minority students face in higher education. To advance equity and justice in CSD and higher education, I co-founded the KU Student Equity & Inclusion Workgroup and developed comprehensive programming in research, institutional advocacy, and mentorship. This work resulted in one journal article, a plenary and a keynote, an Equity in Health Award from the Black Economic Union of Kansas City, and systemic change at KU and in state-level education policymaking. Further, I serve on the Council for Academic Programs in CSD DEI Committee, the Asian & Pacific Islander Speech-Language-Hearing Caucus board, and the Universitas 21 Autism Research Network, a global initiative to increase diversity and inclusion in autism research.

San Diego State University is an ideal fit for me. The mission and reputation of the university, including the School of Speech, Language & Hearing Science, the Center for Clinical & Cognitive Neuroscience, and the Department of Psychology, are appealing to me for the purpose of carrying out impactful research in a productive environment. I am excited about collaborating with faculty in and beyond the department, such as Sonja Pruitt-Lord, Tracy Love, Miguel Villodas, and the Brain Development Imaging Laboratories team. In all, my research, teaching, and career goals make me a strong candidate for the Assistant Professor position. Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Teresa Girolamo, Ph.D.

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