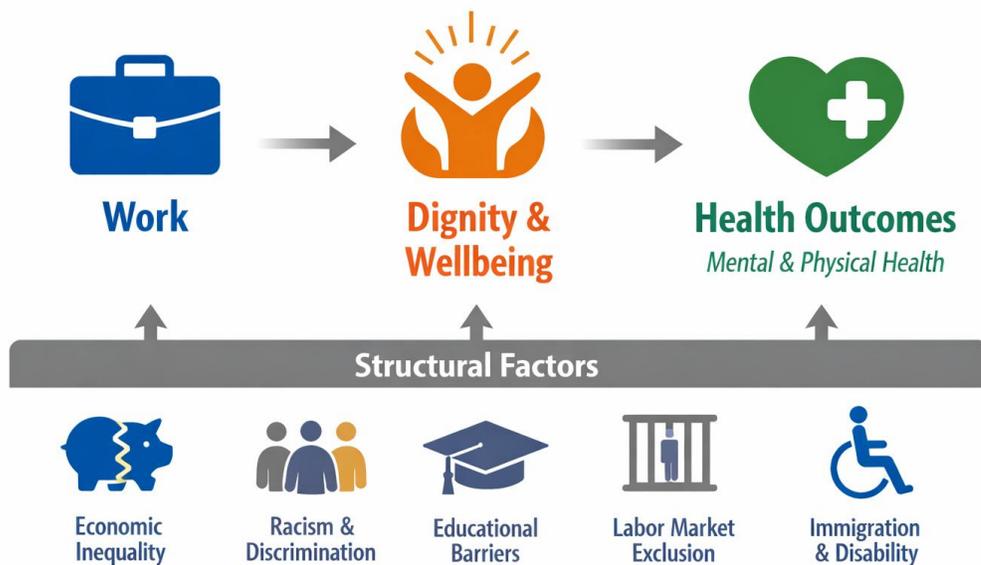


## Work, Dignity, and Health Lab

**Work is more than employment; it is a pathway to dignity, belonging, and health.**

The Work, Dignity, and Health Lab studies how work systems shape human dignity, opportunity, and health across the lifespan. Our research examines how economic inequality, labor market barriers, and systemic marginalization influence vocational development, wellbeing, and access to dignified work. We seek to understand how labor systems can either reproduce inequality or serve as pathways to dignity, opportunity, and human flourishing.



### Lab Framework

Structural conditions shape access to work and experiences within labor systems. These work-related experiences influence dignity, belonging, and wellbeing, with important consequences for both mental and physical health.

### About the Lab

The Work, Dignity, and Health Lab investigates how work functions as a structural pathway to mental and physical health. We examine how economic precarity, labor market exclusion, educational inequality, and systemic marginalization shape vocational development, psychological wellbeing, and long-term health outcomes across the lifespan. Our research uses longitudinal studies, surveys, and community-based research to examine how work conditions shape psychological wellbeing and health across diverse populations.

We define dignity as the recognition of a person's inherent worth and the right to participate in meaningful, socially valued work. Our research explores how labor systems can either support or undermine that dignity, with important consequences for psychological and physical health.

Grounded in vocational psychology and the Psychology of Working Theory, the lab advances a dignity-centered framework for understanding how labor institutions shape psychological functioning and wellbeing. We begin from the recognition that individuals do not enter labor systems on equal footing. Workers experience different degrees of structural vulnerability shaped by poverty, racialized inequality, immigration status, disability, and other forms of systemic marginalization. These conditions influence both the work environments people encounter and the psychological resources they bring to those environments.

Within these contexts, labor institutions communicate signals about human worth through policies, organizational norms, productivity expectations, and everyday workplace practices. Workers interpret institutional signals through dignity appraisal—the process through which people evaluate whether their worth and contributions are recognized or treated as conditional.

From this perspective, work is not simply employment. It is a social determinant of health that organizes opportunity, dignity, belonging, and human flourishing. Our approach recognizes that work includes not only paid employment but also informal and caregiving labor, such as childcare, elder care, and other forms of unpaid contribution, that structure daily life and wellbeing.

## **Research Themes**

### **Structural Inequality and Vocational Development**

We examine how structural economic stress, educational inequality, and social marginalization shape adolescents' academic engagement and motivation while simultaneously influencing the early development of vocational identity and future career opportunity.

### **Access to Decent Work**

Our research explores how economic constraints, social identity, and structural barriers shape work volition, access to decent work, and work-related wellbeing. We investigate how labor market conditions affect individuals' ability to pursue meaningful, stable, and socially valued work across diverse contexts.

### **Dignity Appraisal and Psychological Wellbeing**

A central focus of the lab is understanding how social and labor systems communicate signals about human worth. We study how individuals interpret these signals through dignity appraisal, the psychological process through which people evaluate whether their inherent worth and contributions are recognized within the contexts that organize their work and productive activity.

This work is guided by the emerging Dignity-Regulation Theory (DRT), which examines how structural vulnerability shapes exposure to institutional signals of worth and how individuals interpret those signals through dignity appraisal, influencing experiences of belonging, identity

threat, and psychological wellbeing. Through this framework, we investigate how experiences of dignity, or its erosion, shape wellbeing, engagement, and human flourishing across institutional contexts.

### **Relational and Community Pathways to Opportunity**

We investigate how families, mentors, schools, and communities support vocational development in contexts of structural constraint. We also examine how culturally responsive, school- and community-based interventions can strengthen vocational agency, expand opportunity, and promote mental health.

### **Global and Community Engagement**

We are especially committed to amplifying underrepresented voices in both U.S. and international contexts, including sustained research partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our work bridges vocational psychology, public health, and community practice to inform policy, educational systems, and workforce development efforts.

### **Training and Mentorship**

The lab trains graduate and undergraduate researchers to conduct structurally informed, justice-oriented science. Students develop strong methodological skills across quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches while learning to situate vocational experiences within the broader social and economic structures that shape opportunity and work.

Lab members are encouraged to pursue collaborative research, develop independent ideas, and engage with community partners and policy conversations related to work, opportunity, and health.

We believe that promoting health requires more than individual-level intervention. It requires confronting the structural conditions that shape access to work, dignity, and opportunity. Through this work, the lab seeks to advance research that expands opportunity, affirms human dignity, and promotes health and flourishing across diverse communities.

## **Meet Our Team Members**

### **Alona Armour**

Hi! My name is Alona Armour, LCSW (*she/her/hers*). I'm a proud double (*pending triple*) Tiger alumna! I've earned a B.S. in Psychology and Masters in Social Work at University of Memphis. My relevant work experience includes residential treatment, medical social work, group practice, psychiatric hospital, and private practice. I have internship experience in college counseling.

My research interests focus on how early life adversity shapes career paths for those in marginalized communities and how distressing content online impacts the mental health of Black young adults. My hobbies include: making memories with my family, playing tennis, and traveling.



### **Kaley Fluke**

My name is Kaley Fluke, a first-generation college graduate and failed rodeo-queen. I earned an Associate's degree in Photography/Studio Art in San Diego, CA before completing my Bachelor's degree in Psychology at the University of New Mexico. I spent much of my twenties and early thirties working in the music industry and traveling, including time in Cairo, Egypt and Havana, Cuba, where I engaged in refugee and cultural studies. These experiences

continue to inform how I think about people, identity, and context. I am especially interested in how individuals make meaning and navigate uncertainty during periods of transition. My work reflects an ongoing effort to bridge creative, clinical, and research perspectives in ways that feel both rigorous and deeply human. When I'm not trying to save the world, I maintain a creative practice in photography that continues to shape how I attend to detail, pattern, and lived experience. You can see for yourself here: [www.fossilblossomstudio.com](http://www.fossilblossomstudio.com)



### **Shantta Robertson**

Hello! I'm Shantta Robertson (she/her/hers). I'm a first-gen college grad and the oldest of 6, born and raised in a tiny city called Thibodaux, LA. I'm a LSU alumna. Fun fact: My school mascot has been a tiger since high school, whose symbolism I align with. I have work experience in education and ABA therapy, which is where my interest in neurodevelopmental disorders began. My research interests include the effects of race on neurodevelopmental assessments/ diagnoses, and anything pertaining to college students' mental health. My hobbies include bonding with loved ones, traveling, listening to music, and painting.

