

AHOO YARA, PH.D.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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I am Dr. Ahoo Yara (she/her/hers), formerly known as Sadaf Lotfalian, a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in private practice and a scholar focused on mindfulness in mental health. My clinical training spans psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, third-wave (including dialectical behavior therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and mindfulness-based approaches), somatic therapies such as Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. I am also a certified Qigong and pranayama practitioner and a student of Sufi mysticism and Jungian psychology.

My peer-reviewed research has examined mindfulness-based yogic breathwork as an effective intervention for addictions, including smoking. I have completed advanced training in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy with institutions such as COMPASS Pathways and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where I co-facilitated psilocybin sessions.

I have provided education on the therapeutic applications of psychedelic medicines for trauma, depression, and anxiety at institutions including UCLA Counseling & Psychological Services and Georgetown University. I am a grant awardee from the Psychedelic Medicine Coalition for *Reclaiming Safe Psychedelic Spaces*, a project addressing harm and neglect within plant medicine communities while advancing best practices in facilitator training.

My professional service includes work with the Asian Psychedelic Collective as a Psychedelic Medicine Integration Specialist and with the Psychedelic Liberation Collective as an educator focused on social justice in psychedelic medicine. I am also a contributor to *The Maryland Psychologist*, writing on the role of integration in promoting psychological safety.

Currently, I serve as Program Developer, Chief Culture Officer, and Chief Wellness Officer at Niroomand Foundation, a mental health organization dedicated to serving the Iranian community. I have also recently joined the team at Obsidiana, where I contribute to integrating Indigenous wisdom, spiritual philosophy, poetry, Sufi practices, and Western psychological knowledge in the creation of intentional spaces for transformation, embodiment, and reconnection.

Born in Tehran, Iran, I lived there until age 13 and now identify as an immigrant and Third Culture Individual, having resided in Stockholm, Vancouver, Baltimore, New York City, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Lisbon. My work is grounded in a commitment to cultivating safe, brave, and compassionate spaces for individual and collective healing.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Clinical Psychology

July 2020

The Catholic University of America (APA-accredited)

Washington, D.C.

Advisors: Sandra Barrueco, Ph.D., David A. Jobes, Ph.D., ABPP, Andrew J. Waters, Ph.D., Claire Adams Spears, Ph.D.

Dissertation: Mindfulness, Negative Affect, Craving, and Smoking Behavior in a Predominantly Underserved Sample

Doctoral Internship (2019-2020): UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services

Postdoctoral Fellowship (2020-2021): Arlington | DC Behavior Therapy Institute (ABTI)

Master of Arts, General Psychology

May 2015

American University

Washington, D.C.

Behavioral Pharmacology and Health Promotion (BPHP) Laboratory

Advisor: Laura M. Juliano, Ph.D.

Thesis: The Effects of Mindfulness-Based Yogic Breathing on Craving, Affect, and Smoking Behavior

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology

May 2012

University of British Columbia

Vancouver, B.C.

Knowledge, Imagination, and Development Studies Centre

Advisor: Susan A.J. Birch, Ph.D.

Emphasis: The Role of Perceived Similarity in Empathic Behavior

SELECTED CLINICAL PRACTICUM

UCLA Counseling & Psychological Services

Georgetown University Counseling and Psychiatric Services

The Capital Institute for Cognitive Therapy

Donald Delaney Eating Disorders Clinic, Children's National Medical Center

Neuropsychology Associates of Fairfax

Community Connections Trauma-Informed Care

New York State Psychiatric Institute, Columbia University Irving Medical Center

Behavioral Pharmacology Research Unit, Johns Hopkins University of Medicine

SELECTED ADVANCED CLINICAL TRAININGS

Psychobiological Approach to Couple Therapy (PACT) — Level 1

Compassion-Based Therapy

Emotionally-Focused Couples Therapy (EFT)

Culturally-Informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Integrated Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT)

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBSR, MBCT)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Time Limited Psychodynamic Therapy (TLPD)

Motivational Interviewing (MI)

Unified Protocol (UP)

Interpersonal Process Group Facilitation

COMPASS Pathways Psychedelic Clinical Research and Therapy Training

Legal and Ethical Issues in University Counseling Centers: A Review and Update
Suicide Assessment, Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention on University Campuses
Body Inclusivity & Positivity in Patient Centered Care, Eating Disorders Assessment and Treatment
Multicultural Supervision: Making the Invisible Visible
Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS)
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Smoking Cessation
Substance Abuse Population Interaction Training
Mindfulness-Based Interventions
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for the Development of Mindfulness and Meta-cognition
Applied Behavior Analysis Training for Autism Spectrum Disorder

PREVENTION, POSTVENTION, AND OUTREACH

Psychedelic Medicine (Arlington | DC Behavior Therapy Institute)
Understanding Trauma in Adults (George Washington University)
Psychedelic Clinical Research and Peer Support (UCLA)
Psilocybin and Spiritual Practices (UCLA)
Self-Care Through Art Expression (UCLA)
Trauma-Informed Healing Circle (UCLA)
Emotions, Communication, and Boundaries (UCLA)
Suicide Safe Training (UCLA)

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP

Clinical Lab
Introductory Statistics for Psychological Data
Research Methods in Psychology
Psychology of Women and Men (Grader)

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Lotfalian, S., Spears, C.A., & Juliano, L.M. (2020). The effects of mindfulness-based yogic breathing on craving, affect, and smoking behavior. *Psychology of Addictive Behavior*, 34(2), 351-359. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/adb0000536>

Spears, C.A., Bell, S.B., Scarlett, C.A., Anderson, N.K., Cottrell-Daniels, C., Lotfalian, S., Bandlamudi, M., Sigurdardottir, A., Grant, A., Carter, B.P., Abrams, L., & Wetter, D.W. (2018). Text messaging to enhance mindfulness-based smoking cessation treatment: Program development through qualitative research. *JMIR mHealth and uHealth*, 7(1), e11246. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2196/11246>

Spears, C. A., Anderson, N. K., Lotfalian, S., Abrams, L., & Wetter, D. W. (March 2017). Qualitative study of text messaging for smoking cessation. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, San Diego, CA.

Lotfalian, S., Spears, C. A., & Juliano, L. (March 2017). A laboratory study comparing the effects of mindful breathing, cognitive strategy, and no treatment for smoking cessation. Poster presented at the annual meeting of The Catholic University of America Research Day, Washington, DC.

Lotfalian, S., Wiseblatt, A., Spears, C. A., & Juliano, L. (November 2016). A laboratory study of the effects of brief mindful breathing on cravings, withdrawal, and smoking behavior. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy, New York, NY.

Lotfalian, S., Cassels, T., Lui, J., & Ongley, S. (June 2011). The relationship between perspective-taking and empathetic behaviour in children. Jean Piaget Society (JPS) Conference, University of California, Berkeley.

Lui, J., Cassels, T., Lotfalian, S., & Ongley, S. (June 2011). Empathy in children with conduct problems and the mediating role of callous-unemotional traits. Jean Piaget Society (JPS) Conference, University of California, Berkeley.

Lotfalian, S., Cassels, T., Lui, J., & Ongley, S. (April 2011). The role of perceived similarity in empathetic behaviour. Psychology Students' Association (PSA) Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Lui, J., Cassels, T., Lotfalian, S., & Ongley, S. (April 2011). Emotion-regulation in children with conduct problems and the mediating role of callous-unemotional traits. Psychology Students' Association (PSA) Conference, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

GRANT ACTIVITY

Community Grants Program ([Psychedelic Medicine Coalition](#)), Lead Facilitator. Reclaiming Safe Psychedelic Spaces: Restorative processes to address harms in the DC psychedelic community

Mellon Award (American University), Principle Investigator. Effects of deep breathing practices on craving, mood and withdrawal symptoms in abstaining smokers: A laboratory model