

AWARDS & HONORS SCIENCE & RESEARCH

Population Health Faculty Awarded NIH Early Independence Grant for Research on Food Marketing and Childhood Obesity

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Marie A. Bragg, PhD, a psychologist and assistant professor of population health, devised a study in which she ranked athletes who appeared in ads for nutrition-poor food and beverages. Published in 2013, the study found that Petyon Manning, Serena Williams, and LeBron James were the top offenders. The losers may have been kids and teens, given that other studies have found that children exposed to food ads are more likely to request the advertised food, and consume more food.

In an effort to understand the high prevalence of obesity among American youth, Dr. Bragg has focused her research on how food is marketed to appeal to children and teenagers. To delve more deeply into how celebrity endorsements and other types of advertising influence what kids eat, Dr. Bragg applied for the National Institutes of Health's [Early Independence Award](#). She is the first faculty member from NYU Langone

to receive this award.

The highly selective grant, awarded by the office of the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Frances Collins, MD, PhD, requires a round of intense interviews at NIH headquarters in Washington, DC. The winners, all junior scientists in the early stages of their academic careers, receive funds that enable them to focus more time and resources on their research. Just a few weeks ago Dr. Bragg learned that she was one of 16 recipients this year.

Rooting Out Early Causes of Health Disparities

Dr. Bragg will use the award to study food and beverage ads targeted at African American and Latino teens, groups perceived as "cultural trendsetters" by marketers. These same two groups have higher rates of obesity than non-Latino white youth (22 percent for Latino youth, 20 percent for African-American youth, and 14 percent for non-Latino white youth).

"Research has already shown that food companies are disproportionately targeting racial and ethnic minority youth with unhealthy products, which is concerning because it may exacerbate health disparities," said Dr. Bragg. "The NIH Early Independence Award gives us an exciting opportunity to examine how these racially-targeted food ads are affecting African American and Latino youth."

Dr. Bragg, who has a joint appointment at NYU's College of Global Public Health, earned a doctorate in clinical psychology from Yale University, where she trained at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. She directs the SocioEconomic Evaluation of Dietary Decision (SEED) Program, which conducts research on environmental and social factors associated with obesity, food marketing, food policy, and health disparities.

High Risk, High Reward

The Early Independence Award is one of four "High-Risk, High-Reward" grants from the NIH's Common Fund. These research grants are given to scientists proposing highly innovative approaches to major contemporary challenges in biomedical research. Awards support exceptional investigators pursuing bold research projects that span the broad mission of the NIH.

"This program has consistently produced research that revolutionized scientific fields by giving investigators the freedom to take risks and explore potentially groundbreaking concepts," NIH director Dr. Collins said on the organization's website.

Comments (6)



Congratulations Dr. Bragg!!!

Now we need to contact the athletes and pop stars and encourage them to glamorize natural foods and healthy eating habits.

Diane Haimeck October 21 11:50 AM



Congratulations on your award & work study!!! I also agree that healthy foods and habits need to be endorsed!!!

Robin Ndiaye-Reeder October 21 12:52 PM



Thank you, Diane and Robin! I would love to see athletes endorse healthy foods! Tom Brady was recently quoted saying soda and sugary cereals were 'poison' for kids. Excited to do more work in this area!

Marie Bragg October 21 9:33 PM



Way to go Dr. Bragg!!!!

Alana Sigmund October 22 7:58 PM



Such important work!

Liza Cooper October 23 10:42 AM



we have to change this - sadly there is no money to promote broccoli. One food for thought is to help make healthy eating fun - this is the game changer. Very important work, congrats Dr.Bragg

Kirti Shah October 27 4:05 PM

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