

Sarah E. Espinel

EDUCATION

- **Ph.D., Community Psychology, Concentration in Quantitative Statistics & Analyses**, University of Virginia (April 2025)
- **Graduate Certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies**, University of Virginia (April 2025)
- **M.A., Psychology**, University of Virginia (January 2023)
- **B.A., Psychology**, George Washington University, Magna Cum Laude (May 2019)

MAJOR APPOINTMENTS

- **Director of Research for the Purpose Science and innovation Exchange (PSiX)**
(July 2025-present)
The Director of Research (DR) partners with the Associate Dean of Outreach and Extension, the Director of the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research (BCTR), and the founding Director of the Purpose Science and innovation Exchange (PSiX) to design and execute the research vision and strategy, serving as the day-to-day driver of research planning, execution, operations, and staff coordination. This role oversees research execution and compliance, manages postdoctoral associates, and facilitates the translation of research findings into real-world contexts. The DR also supports the founding Director of PSiX and the Executive Directors of affiliated organizations including Purpose Commons and Lab of Labs in strategic decision-making and grant management. Finally, the DR collaborates on and approves research publications and communications and serves as the first point of contact for internal and external research requests.
- **Cornell University, Senior Research Associate**
(July 2025-present)
The Senior Research Associate supports and strengthens the research enterprise of the College of Human Ecology by coordinating and executing research activities, contributing to grant development and reporting, and enhancing partnerships with internal and external research collaborators. In this role I mentor undergraduate and graduate students, provide strategic support for funded and unfunded research initiatives, and facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration. I also contribute to the translation of research findings for academic and applied audiences and participate in college-wide initiatives focused on social impact and community engagement.

TEACHING

Courses Taught Elsewhere:

- Introduction to Social Psychology. University of Virginia Department of Psychology
- Introduction to Child Psychology. University of Virginia Department of Psychology
- Psychology Research Methods. University of Virginia Department of Psychology
- Race & Power. University of Virginia Department of Women, Gender & Sexuality

- Structural Equation Modeling*. University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development

* denotes graduate level course.

SELECTED RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- **The National Youth Purpose Survey (2025-present).** This mixed-methods project examines how young people across the United States cultivate and sustain a positive sense of purpose, and how purpose relates to health and well-being outcomes. The National Youth Purpose Survey is co-designed with researchers, youth, and youth-serving organizations and will engage 2,400 youth aged 15–25 in its first wave of data collection. At one-year post-baseline, at least 1,200 young people will be reengaged for a follow-up survey. Results are expected to provide critical insights into youth purpose development, generate new thematic research directions, and inform policies and practices to support youth thriving.
- **How race and anger expression affect the perception of police use of force against women suspects (2023-2025).** This project examines how gendered racial stereotypes shape perceptions of Black and White women’s anger expression and the perceived appropriateness of police use of force. White Americans’ judgments of anger in images of women suspects and their support for escalating police intervention were assessed. Results highlight how women’s race influences perceptions of subtle differences in anger expression and reveal patterns of bias that may contribute to disproportionate acceptance of police violence against Black women.
- **In their own voices: How fear & social media lead to youth and community gun violence in post-COVID Virginia (2023-2025).** This project examines how fear, social media, and post-pandemic conditions contribute to youth and community gun violence in Virginia. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people, community members, and stakeholders across affected areas, this project assesses how perceived threats and feelings of safety shape young people’s decision to carry firearms. Results highlight the disproportionate impact of these factors in communities of color and provide suggestions for policy and intervention to enhance safety and reduce violence across Virginia.
- **Medicare Advantage: Questionable use of health risk assessments continues to drive up payments to plans by billions (2023-2024).** This report examines the use of health risk assessments (HRAs) in Medicare Advantage and how questionable assessment practices contribute to increased payments to plans. Patterns in HRA use, diagnosis coding, and resulting payment adjustments were assessed using administrative and program data. Findings highlight the continued role of HRAs in driving billions of dollars in higher Medicare Advantage payments, raising concerns about program oversight and appropriate use.
- **Child and adolescent self-awareness and health study (2019-2020).** This project examines behavioral health trajectories and transitions to young adulthood among

perinatally HIV-infected (PHIV+) and HIV-exposed but uninfected (PHIV-) youth. Longitudinal data on mental health, sexual and substance use behaviors, treatment adherence, and social and contextual factors were assessed. Results highlight how HIV status, developmental risk and protective factors, and earlier behavioral health trajectories shape youth outcomes, informing intervention development and support during this critical transition period.

MEDIA COVERAGE

- Virginia Mercury (2025, November 14). New UVA research recommends gun violence prevention strategies for state, local governments. [New UVA research recommends gun violence prevention strategies for state, local governments • Virginia Mercury](#)
- 29 News (2025, November 17). UVA researchers use community voices to combat gun violence across Virginia. [UVA researchers use community voices to combat gun violence across Virginia](#)
- Richmond Times-Dispatch (2025, November 19). ICYMI: Fear, easy access to guns drives youth shootings, study finds. [Virginia: Study on youth violence says fear a driver](#)
- Sciencemag (2025, November 20). How White Americans' views shape abortion attitudes. [How White Americans' Views Shape Abortion Attitudes](#)
- C-Ville Right Now (2025, December 5). UVA researchers discuss the cause of gun violence among youth. [UVA researchers discuss the cause of gun violence among youth - Cville Right Now](#)
- C-Ville Weekly (2025, December 10). UVA report targets youth gun violence. [UVA report targets youth gun violence - C-VILLE Weekly](#)

PUBLICATIONS

- Block, A., Guarnera, L., Espinel, S., Watkins III, J., Zinzuwadia, N., & Bhardwaj, V. (2025). *In their own voices: How fear & social media lead to youth & community gun violence in post-COVID Virginia — and what state and community leaders can do to meet the challenge* (Report). University of Virginia, Gun Violence Solutions Project. <https://www.law.virginia.edu/document/their-own-voices-report/view>
- Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., Cooley, E., Espinel, S., Lisnek, J. A., Cipolli III, W., & McClelland, S. I. (2025). Investigating White Americans' mental images of who has abortions and its impact on attitudes toward abortion policies. *Communications Psychology*, 3(1), 164.
- Matsuzaka, S., Avery, L. R., Espinel, S. (2023). Black sexual minority women's internalized stigma and coping motivated alcohol use: The role of emotional suppression. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, 1-17.

- Matsuzaka, S., Avery, L.R., Stanton, A.G., Espinel, S. (2022). Online victimization, womanism, and body esteem among young Black women: A structural equation modeling approach. *Sex Roles*, 86, 681–694.
- Stanton, A., Avery, L., Matsuzaka, S., Espinel, S. (2022). Black women’s experiences of gendered racial sexual objectification, body image, and depressive symptoms. *Body Image*, 41, 443-452.

INVITED TALKS & PRESENTATIONS

- Espinel, S. (2025, February). *How race and anger expression interact to affect perceptions of police violence against women suspects*. Talk accepted for presentation at the University of Virginia’s annual Behavioral Science conference, Charlottesville, VA.
- Espinel, S., Guarnera, L., Block, A., Watkins, T. (2025, March) *Youth gun violence in Virginia: A qualitative study*. Talk accepted for presentation at the University of Virginia’s Gun Violence Solutions Project Brownbag, Charlottesville, VA.
- Guarnera, L., Espinel, S., Block, A. (2025, March) *Youth gun violence in Virginia: A qualitative investigation*. Paper accepted for presentation at the annual American Psychology-Law Society conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico.
- Stanton, A., Espinel, S, Matsuzaka, S., & Avery, L. (2022, March). *A multi-study investigation of how gendered racism shapes Black women’s mental health, sexual well-being, and body image*. Symposium presented at the annual Association for Women in Psychology conference, Chicago, IL.

GRANTS

- APA Division 35 Hyde Graduate Student Research Grant, \$500 (2024)
- University of Virginia Raven Society Fellowship, \$2,500 (2024)
- University of Virginia Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Council Research Grant, \$333 (2023)
- George Washington University Luther Rice Fellowship, \$5,000 (2018)

INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE

- University of Virginia Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Interdisciplinary Working Group Founding Member & Executive Board Member (2022-2025)
- University of Virginia Department of Community Psychology Colloquium Committee (2021 & 2023)
- University of Virginia Leadership Alliance Program Graduate Mentor (2021-2023)
- University of Virginia Department of Psychology Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Student Representative (2020-2022)
- George Washington University Writing Center Consultant (2016-2019)

WORKING GROUPS

- Cornell Social Impact Group (2025-present)
- University of Virginia Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Interdisciplinary Working Group (2022-2025)

CONSULTATION

- Research Consultant: The Purpose Commons (2025-present)
- Research Consultant: Albemarle General District Court (2022)
- Research Consultant: Piedmont Virginia Community College (2021)