

Personal Statement

Nana Otaka

As an immigrant and woman of color, I am passionate about social justice, civic engagement, and advocating for accessible and affordable mental health care. I hope to become a mental health professional in the future and am interested in studying clinical, social, and developmental psychology through a culturally-informed lens, with a focus on intergenerational trauma and movement/dance therapy. Specifically, I would like to work with children and adolescents from under-resourced and historically marginalized communities and investigate the developmental intricacies of growing up as a minority individual in the United States.

Too often, scientific research is conducted without giving much thought to the nuances of sociocultural impacts on children and adolescents. By employing a culturally sensitive viewpoint, I believe that children can be more accurately assessed and appropriate interventions may be prescribed to mitigate their distress. I am particularly interested in investigating intergenerational trauma, especially in children identifying as part of a marginalized group, in addition to movement therapy as an effective intervention method for bodies of all abilities.

Within my artistic endeavors, I aim to be a storyteller. To bring written words to life, transcend the limiting boundaries of language and static images, and use movement as a mode of communication to evoke powerful feelings like love, remorse, surprise—all without exchanging a single word.

I want to address tough, stigmatized topics such as disability within a heavily ableist society, racism and xenophobia, deep-rooted and systemic issues with the criminal justice and foster care systems, period poverty, climate change, and fetishization of “exotic” men and women, among many others. These issues are extremely prevalent in our society and yet are seldom talked about with the intention of educating and resolving.

Movement is powerful. In a time where the internet and social media provide instant gratification and impossible standards, movement stops time and provides the truth in its most beautiful and most gruesome form. I believe movement is the only method of communication that transcends visual conversation into the realm of visceral transmission to offer a novel way of seeing and feeling. I wish for audiences to have honest, visceral responses to the stories being relayed and experience kinesthetic empathy no matter how painful it may be. My hope is that by feeling indescribable emotions and a sense of connection to an absolute stranger, the audience will be moved to create conversation and advocate for change in whatever capacity is available to them.