Dr. Angela Chia-Chen Chen is an Associate Professor who conducts research focused on health promotion among vulnerable youth and young adults through culturally and developmentally appropriate, technology-based interventions. She grew up in Taiwan and earned her BSN from National Taiwan University (NTU), and received her MS and PhD from University of Washington in Seattle. She is also a national certified Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurse Practitioner who provides direct care to individuals with mental and behavioral issues. Dr. Chen has always enjoyed working with adolescents and focuses her research on ethnic minority and immigrant youth and young adults. Read more about her current research projects below!

Please tell us a bit about your educational background and interest in research as a career.
I majored in nursing at NTU, with pediatrics and psychiatry/mental health as my two specialty areas. I was very fortunate to have enormous learning opportunities to take care youth for their physical, mental, and behavioral issues at hospital and community settings. Because I received BSN from NTU, I had the privilege of working at the NTU hospital’s psychiatric unit (the best hospital in Taiwan) to further strengthen my clinical knowledge and skills. During the 2nd year there, I had a unique opportunity to work with a distinguished professor and psychiatrist, Dr. Hou, on his multi-facet research project consisting of 5 subprojects regarding psychiatric symptomology, caregiver burden and other key aspects of mental health care. I had never thought about getting my PhD prior to this experience. Since I enjoyed the work so much, I decided to pursue graduate degrees in the United States with full support from my family, boyfriend (husband now) and professors at NTU. I have special memories from the University of Washington (UW) School of Nursing and considered Seattle my 2nd hometown. I received my master and PhD degrees at UW and feel I had one of the best educational experiences. I was also accepted to the PhD program at University of California San Francisco (UCSF), another prestigious and research one (R1) university, but decided to stay at UW because it allowed me to continue to work with and learn from my mentors. As a nurse practitioner, I continue providing direct patient care to address mental and behavioral issues on top of my faculty obligation as a scientist. I appreciate the opportunity to remain in clinical practice as it benefits my research, teaching/mentoring and service.

Discuss the scope of your current research projects. How do they contribute to the health of the communities you aim to serve? How are they innovative?
My research is prevention-oriented and focuses on mental and behavioral health promotion among vulnerable youth. I often tell students and communities that my research is all about “sex, drugs, and depression” to make it easier to understand. I never struggled choosing my population as I have always enjoyed working with youth. I use a socioecological lens to examine and understand factors associated with youth’s health, including mental health (depression, anxiety, PTSD, eating disorder etc.), risky sexual behavior engagement, and substance use. I have begun working on technology-based interventions for prevention, including web-based intervention to prevent STI/HIV among Latina adolescents, tailored education for parents with teenage children to promote HPV vaccination and prevent HPV-related cancers. It’s not too surprising to hear that some parents believe their teenagers won’t get HPV or other sexually transmitted infections (STI) so vaccination is not necessary. When they learn it from the cancer prevention angle, they see the long-term benefits of the vaccination and share with me that “I want to get my child vaccinated to project his/her life.” I have collaborated with a transdisciplinary team of colleagues from nursing, medicine, computer engineers/gaming, health communication, theatre/media studies, psychology, public health, sociology, statistics etc. on my projects. One of my current projects uses “game” as an intervention to promote the HPV vaccination among adolescents. We invited a group of adolescents and their parents to gather ideas on game design, content, and items think adolescents will benefit from. We recently completed the usability testing and, after small revisions, will implement it in clinical settings. This step will examine the game’s feasibility, acceptability and preliminary effectiveness.
My other ongoing project engages college students in analyzing current HPV vaccine messages on YouTube and creating educational videos to inform their peers about the benefits of the vaccine. We have groups of undergraduate and graduate students from health disciplines and theatre/media studies working together to create 2-3 minute, public health, YouTube-based HPV intervention messages to encourage college students/young adults to be vaccinated against HPV and its associated cancers. We plan to collaborate with ASU Student Health Centers when the intervention is developed. Students will watch the videos prior seeing their providers and hopefully facilitate their communication with providers about the HPV vaccine and receiving the vaccine at the same visit. There are many myths about the vaccine that scare people away and it is important for us to know and understand those myths so we know where to focus our research moving forward. These technology-based, tailored prevention interventions are designed for parents, youth and young adults to promote health. We just presented a paper based on the HPV game project in the 7th International Conference on Serious Games and Applications for Health in Japan and received very positive response. We hope to disseminate findings from our other HPV projects as soon as they are completed; students involved in these projects are excited about the presentation opportunities!

**What makes you most enthusiastic about research?**

I enjoy working with people too much! One of the most interesting parts for me is implementing the research. I enjoy interacting with parents and adolescence during data collection process and find it very fulfilling that I have the opportunity to work with researchers from many different disciplines and different parts of the world to promote individual health! One of the most unique projects I have involved is the NSF funded Katrina study. When Hurricane Katrina occurred, Professor Dr. Wei Li, of ASU’s Geography and Asian American Studies, invited me to do some work in that area of Louisiana. We quickly assemble a team consisting with scholars from history geography and sociology at ASU and Ball State University, to develop a proposal for this devastating disaster. We focused on evacuating process and decision-making and health issues among Black and Vietnamese immigrant communities in New Orleans. We received the grant and were one of the first groups to visit New Orleans after Katrina. This project provided an unexpected opportunity to engage most vulnerable population in the area to understand their experience and how to address the complicated issues involved prior to, during and post disaster. It is a good feeling to know that my research is able to contribute to individual health in meaningful ways.

**What advice would you give to early career researchers?**

PERSISTENCE! I want to pass that on to the next generation of scientists and students. I remember one of my professors at UW telling us to put “persistence” as our middle names in order to become successful researchers. It’s so true! You will not always get research funding at the current funding climate. It’s considered normal to receive rejections from journals, but you will have the opportunities to modify your work and move on to the next opportunity. Don’t be discouraged by rejection and use it as an opportunity for improvement and growth. I’ve had many unexpected experiences that actually benefitted my career and personal life in the long run. For instance, I had to postpone my PhD graduation when my husband and I found out about an unexpected pregnancy toward the end of my doctoral program. I decided to take more courses and complete my clinical internship to fulfill nurse practitioner requirement so I could take the board exam to become a Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. It was very challenging for me given the physical and mental demands required for the NP degree and pregnancy, not counting that I still had to complete my PhD requirement and worked at the same time. I was in Seattle alone, without family support (they were all in Taiwan), and my husband was pursuing his PhD in California; however, that was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life! We had a healthy baby and I completed both PhD and NP education. Unexpected changes can create new opportunities. Failure is part of life and the process of overcoming those challenges will help you grow and become a better and stronger person. So be persistent in all you do…all aspects of your life!