



## Q&A with Leah Lessard

### **What is the basic premise of your research?**

My research focuses on how peer experiences contribute to educational and health trajectories during the adolescent years – a developmentally critical time when the stakes of achievement rise and health behaviors are established. In particular, to support healthy development for youth at heightened risk for peer mistreatment (e.g., those with high body weight), I seek to identify relational and contextual factors that promote social inclusion within the school setting.

### **What are your future directions for your research and what do you hope to accomplish while at the Rudd Center?**

I am excited to extend my research beyond the school grounds by considering the potential of structural mechanisms (e.g., policies, laws) to support healthy development for marginalized adolescents. For example, can weight-based anti-bullying policies improve the social wellbeing of youth with obesity in ways that promote educational and health outcomes? Inspired by the Rudd Center's commitment to improving policies related to public health, my goal is to elucidate points of intervention across multiple levels of influence (e.g., within laws, schools, families, peer groups) so that all youth – regardless of their body weight – have the social resources critical for academic and health-related wellbeing.

### **Where are you from?**

Boston, MA

### **What is your favorite food?**

Watermelon. Each bite tastes like summer!

### **What is your favorite movie?**

Mighty Ducks. I watched everyday when I was a kid, so it has a special comfort feel now.