

Sample Personal Statements

Major Code: SCP

Personal Statement

My academic goal is to obtain a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the field of psychology. I am the first person in my family to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Achieving my academic goal will also make me the first person in my family to receive a graduate degree. I am interested in the Social-Health program in the Department of Psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. My professional career plans consist of teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels and performing research.

My research interests include social development, social support, emotional development, emotion socialization, stress, coping and depression among urban ethnic-minority children and adolescents. Growing up in an urban community comprised primarily of Latinos and African-Americans has exposed me to variables that may influence these phenomena. These variables include the number of parents in the home, the number of adults in the home, and which behaviors are reinforced or punished. I aim to conduct research of these and other variables that may affect the previously mentioned phenomena. Research in these areas may inspire the development of techniques and guidelines appropriate for the caretakers, teachers and health care providers of urban ethnic-minority children and adolescents.

I have completed a pilot study on variables that may influence the emotion socialization of children under the advisement of [REDACTED], Ph.D. and [REDACTED], Ph.D. Emotion socialization (the means by which the understanding and expression of emotions are influenced by others) intrigued me because research suggests that it may affect pro-social behavior from peer to intimate relationships. The participants in my pilot study were all African-American mothers. I investigated the correlation between family emotion expression events and how mothers cope with their children's negative emotions. I used a questionnaire to assess the perceived frequencies of positive and negative emotion expression events in the home. Another questionnaire was used to determine how likely mothers would use parental-distress, punitive, emotion-focused, minimizing, encouraging emotion expression, and problem-focused socialization reactions in situations in which their children may experience a negative affect.

The results suggested that positive emotion expression events in the home correlated with all six techniques to cope with the negative emotions of children. Negative emotion expression events in the home; however, only correlated with parental-distress. I have also had the honor of having this research published in the Proceedings of the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. I will begin to collect data for the larger study of these emotion socialization variables in February 2000.

As a senior at [REDACTED], I am receiving a well-rounded education in psychology, complemented by additional studies in the basic sciences and humanities. The psychology courses I have completed include Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Psychological Statistics. I have also completed Experimental Psychology and Classical and Instrumental Conditioning, which are psychology courses with a laboratory component.

Additionally, I have been involved in the Minority Access to Research Careers/Undergraduate Student Training in Academic Research (MARC/U*STAR) program since May 1998. Some of the program's requirements are to perform off-campus research, present research at a regional or national conference each year, complete a research methods course and write and orally present a senior research thesis. The program also provides a partial tuition scholarship and monthly stipend for living expenses. During my first three years of college I worked at part-time jobs that were unrelated to my academic goal. The monthly stipend provided by the MARC/U*STAR program allowed me to focus more of my extra-curricular time on psychological research, campus activities and volunteer activities. The MARC/U*STAR program continues to be a substantial supplement to my curriculum and to greatly reinforce my interest in research.

It would be a privilege to join the distinguished class enrolling in the Department of Psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in autumn 2000. Overall, I feel that the opportunity for intensive research, exceptional curriculum and favorable ratio of faculty to students of this program will prepare me to achieve my academic goal and become an outstanding professional in the field of psychology.

Statement of Purpose

I am pursuing graduate psychology work to study processes through which individuals understand and navigate their lives, with the hope that this work may help inform interventions. My childhood experiences in New York City neighborhoods in which individuals faced varying environmental stressors and met with a diverse range of adaptive and maladaptive outcomes first aroused this concern. Research, educational, and clinical experiences, outlined below, confirmed and deepened my interest in clinical psychology, while also providing training necessary to begin pursuing my goals.

I have been fortunate, as an undergraduate, to work closely with both faculty and graduate students. As a participant in [REDACTED] honors' program, I meet individually with my research advisor, [REDACTED].¹ During Professor [REDACTED] weekly laboratory meetings, I have the opportunity to present my research ideas and findings, incorporate constructive feedback, and evaluate others' research projects. Additionally, graduate students trained me to use data entry programs (e.g., Excel), statistical packages (e.g., SPSS), and software packages (e.g., MEL) for computer-generated experiments. As a teaching assistant for Professor [REDACTED] *Social and Personality Development* this semester, my interest in teaching has also developed. At this position, I met with students during office hours, conducted in-class review sessions, and created and graded exam questions. Tutoring students and noting their improvement proved gratifying to me, and I look forward to taking a more leading role in teaching in the future.

Through the opportunity to enroll in graduate-level seminars, I also became involved in an ongoing project headed by Professors [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].² Attending their joint laboratory meetings, I have been exposed to new research questions and methodologies, and I greatly value the breadth this experience has added to my development as a researcher. For example, I am currently working with Professor [REDACTED] on a number of research articles.³ Under her guidance, the careful analysis with which we have methodically addressed reviewers' criticisms has provided me invaluable experience that I hope to utilize in writing reports of my own research in the future.

My clinical experience with troubled adolescents⁴ galvanized my interest in clinical psychology. Trained in devising and leading discussion groups, I subsequently conducted 2-3 group sessions per

week on topics including goal-setting and conflict resolution. Walking back to the subway from the Brooklyn youth shelter, I sometimes felt exhilarated by the progress of one or two youths. This excitement confirmed my commitment to a career in clinical psychology. Although sobered by the considerable challenge of implementing psychological interventions, I was inspired by these youths' potential for change and by the potential effectiveness of more theory-based, empirically tested interventions. Moreover, I saw how research advances can be practically applied. For example, my experience in Professor [REDACTED] laboratory led me to stress to the disadvantaged youths with whom I worked that their attitudes and intellectual abilities were malleable, rather than fixed entities.

Hoping to conduct theoretically interesting research that can be translated into practical interventions, I feel that NYU's clinical psychology program, through its emphases both on fostering quality research and also on providing serious clinical training, is an ideal environment in which to pursue my goals. I am especially interested in Professor [REDACTED] research investigating how one's construals of and reactions to others can be colored by the degree to which one perceives others to be similar to important people in his or her life. I would value the opportunity to contribute to efforts at further delineating this phenomenon. I am also drawn to Professor [REDACTED] research examining the processes through which marital adjustment affects children's home and school functioning.

Through graduate training, I look forward to applying and improving the skills I have thus far acquired. Thereafter, I hope both to obtain a faculty position at a university in which I can continue further research and also to offer some direct clinical services. Consistent with the scientist-practitioner model, my hope is that my clinical and research experiences can inform one another.

1 . Please see attached 1997 *American Psychological Society* Conference poster submission for a summary of my Honors' project.

2 . For one product of this work, please see attached 1997 *American Psychological Association* Conference poster summary submitted by [REDACTED], a graduate student, and I.

3 . I have enclosed a copy of one manuscript we recently submitted for consideration for publication in *Child Development*.

4 . Please see attached *curriculum vitae* for details of clinical experience.

Personal Statement

I grew up in Queens, New York. Earlier life experiences made salient to me various imbalances in social structures and unjust treatment of certain groups, particularly women. Since my teenage years, I have constantly questioned the development and maintenance of social injustices, and sought to explore possible intervention strategies. I have utilized my time at SUNY Stony Brook studying and researching psychological phenomena, such as prejudice, stigma, attitudes, social justice, and gender socialization. Taken together, my life and academic experiences provide a firm foundation for graduate training in social psychology.

In my first research experience, I sought to explore gender dynamics in the context of close relationships. A project of Dr. Arthur Aron's piqued my attention. My enthusiasm over this project stemmed from two primary sources. First, I participated in all phases of the experimental process, from forming the hypothesis to the data collection and analyses. Second, I gained insight into observing and measuring how women and men experience feelings of love. I developed valuable research and interpersonal skills as a result of conducting in-depth interviews, literature searches using the PsychLit database, and data analyses using Excel and SPSS. My effort culminated in a poster presentation at the First Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, entitled *Identifying, Eliciting, and Measuring Intense Feelings of Love*. Although this project aimed to explore the environmental stimuli that aroused strong feelings of love, themes of race, class, and sexuality clearly emerged from the stories told by the participants. Their stories engendered thoughts in me of how our findings would generalize to couples in which partners were of a different race or class, or of the same gender. This experience strengthened my quest to use social psychological research as a means of addressing theoretical and practical questions of social structures.

I then joined Dr. Marci Lobel's laboratory, where I studied some of the obstacles that are unique to women's lives. Specifically, I worked on a large-scale longitudinal project concerning how stress and social support correlate with pregnancy. My interest in participating in this project primarily arose from the desire to interact with a culturally and socio-economically diverse sample. I enjoyed the challenge of considering how culture and class may affect the efficacy with which women cope with pregnancy. Through the project, I enhanced my ability to interview participants, manage complex data sets, and present material in weekly laboratory meetings. In addition to learning new methodological tools, I valued listening to women tell their own stories. One-on-one interviews allowed me to both survey women and read their non-verbal cues. Often times, many participants exuded a sense of anxiety or shame, perhaps deriving from financial stress or limitations in communicating in English. This experience heightened my interest in learning theoretical bases and implications of being the object of stigma and prejudices.

The above experiences bolstered my ability to understand and study how gender, class, race and sexuality influence experiences. Consequently, having observed many unsettling discriminatory acts based on sexual orientation on campus, I applied to the Psychology Department's Honors Research Program in an attempt to study the nature of these behaviors. I hypothesized that ambiguous social norms and lack of explicit social policy surrounding gay and lesbian issues (e.g., hate crime legislation) may manifest in

contradictory expressions of attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. I sought to design and execute a study that addressed the vehicles through which college students express prejudice towards gay men and lesbians. Dr. Sheri Levy and I built on social influence paradigms and expanded the existing methodology to explore the effectiveness of possible socializing agents. The complex study design required the coordination of multiple experimenters and confederates. I tested the impact of the status of the influencer (peer vs. authority), the gender of the influencer (male vs. female), the direction of influence (low vs. high prejudice), and the participant's attitudes and subsequent behavior. Learning to be an independent researcher has equipped me with invaluable skills, such as the ability to conduct extensive literature reviews, prepare grant proposals, analyze data, and organize and coordinate a team of nine research assistants. Through weekly laboratory meetings and seminars, I gained comfort and confidence in presenting findings to other researchers. I plan to present my project later this year at the Stony Brook Undergraduate Research Conference, and submit a proposal to the 3rd Annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference.

In addition to research, I served as a teaching assistant for two courses: The Psychology of Women and Introduction to Statistics. I conducted periodic lectures, lead group review sessions, and tutored students during weekly office hours. I found the experience of watching students progress through the often difficult course material inherently gratifying. I continued mentoring students as the President of Stony Brook's Psi Chi Honor Society. In this position, I strive to promote the advancement of undergraduate research by linking students with laboratories and faculty, organizing informational sessions about graduate school, and hosting the annual Undergraduate Research Conference in Psychology. I look forward to enriching students' interest in psychology and serving as a mentor during my graduate and professional careers.

My interest in pursuing theoretically and practically challenging research will be well served by graduate study at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Pratto's research, which combines gender, culture, and political ideology in the Social Dominance theory, and Dr. Quinn's work on the self and being the object of stigma, are both excellent matches with my interests. I feel confident that graduate training at the University of Connecticut will provide me with the challenges, experiences, and training I need to reach my long-term goal of attaining an academic appointment that encompasses both research and teaching dimensions.