

*Notice that this statement begins with a personal anecdote, but one relating to the student's work in the field. The statement quickly moves to qualifications, and then to goals. While some of the material here goes unexplained—one might ask how the statistics session in the first paragraph changed or developed this student's thinking—the statement is able ultimately to present a narrative of development.*

As I sat in front of my computer, anticipating a long statistics session to analyze the results of my senior thesis, I started to realize that conducting social psychology research as a career would suit me very well. I felt excitement at analyzing the results of my year-long undergraduate Honors thesis project. I thought then that if I was actually enjoying an intricate statistical problem—something many of my fellow undergrads found onerous—then I should continue to develop methodologies and create programs of research for as long as I could.

Although my experience with my Honors thesis cemented my goal of becoming a social psychology researcher, the seed of the idea had been planted long before. From my first psychology class to my many senior seminars, my undergraduate psychology courses were complex and fascinating. A component of my psychological background unique to my alma mater of Trinity University was our year-long, intensive statistics and methods sequence. In this class I was first introduced to statistical software and the difficulties inherent in creating strong experimental designs. In fact, I so enjoyed this class that I spent my senior year as a peer tutor for the same class, working with the professor and other tutors to create interesting experiments for the students.

Since being introduced to issues of design in my statistics class, I have had many opportunities to implement what I learned. All of these research opportunities have been learning opportunities of their own—each research project has its own issues that need to be addressed in order for reliable research to take place. For example, my Honors thesis involved deception and the use of complicated computer programs in order to investigate my hypotheses successfully. In addition, after graduating I spent a year as Project Director of an NSF-funded social psychology laboratory, where I gained extensive experience in conducting carefully-controlled and intricate research into HIV prevention. The learning experiences here involved the administration of alcohol in accordance with federal regulations and IRB protocol. My appreciation of research and its inherent complexities has grown every time I had the opportunity to implement a research project and communicate its important findings.

The competencies that I have developed from these and other research experiences contribute to the intellectual merit of the research plan I have proposed. Additionally, my undergraduate academic record demonstrates my ability to devote myself to academics and dedicate the effort necessary to succeed. I graduated from Trinity University *summa cum laude* and with Honors in psychology. I also earned the psychology department's "Outstanding Senior in Psychology Award" and have been a member of the honor society Phi Beta Kappa since my junior year. Since beginning graduate work earlier this year, the University of Connecticut has awarded me their University Scholars Program Fellowship, which is granted to students with exceptional academic records in order to support their graduate study. These accomplishments have fueled my love of research and have contributed to my decision to enter the University of Connecticut for graduate study.

I chose the Social Psychology department at the University of Connecticut because of its strong reputation and because of the excellent opportunities it offered to collaborate with faculty members who are leaders of their fields. I was especially eager to work with my advisor, David A. Kenny. Our interests converge in many ways, one of which is an interest in quantitative analysis. He has provided invaluable assistance in teaching me how to analyze dyadic and other types of nonindependent data. This knowledge has been useful because my primary research interest—the mechanisms of interpersonal forgiveness—is an inherently dyadic phenomenon.

After I earn my Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Connecticut, I plan to become a professor at a strong research university. This position appeals to me because of its combination of teaching and research. Not only can I communicate my interest in research findings to the students in my class, but I can also concentrate on my own independent research and communicate those findings to other members of the field. Being awarded the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship would jump-start my career in academia and allow me to focus on creating new and original research methods to study the interpersonal phenomenon of forgiveness—a phenomenon that would greatly benefit from fresh ideas and unique approaches. This award would enable me to create original and quality research, using converging methods in order to understand completely the construct of forgiveness.

Understanding forgiveness has benefits for the entire community, above and beyond that of contributing to scientific knowledge. Although providing an original empirical framework outlining the effects of forgiveness and being forgiven would increase scientific understanding,

this research would have potential practical advantages as well. All people have made mistakes and have been affected by the mistakes of others. My research paradigm seeks to discover the easiest, most positive, and most effective way for both parties to respond to both of these types of mistakes. Although my work is basic research into the consequences of forgiveness, it is my hope that communicating my results and method would inspire applied researchers to apply the research to the areas of errors in the workplace and supervisor-employee relationships, in either marriage counseling sessions or in therapy sessions in which victims forgive the people who have wronged them, and additionally, after much more research has been conducted in this area, to mistakes against an entire groups of people. For example, after 9/11 crimes against people of Arab descent increased and Americans erected a memorial to remember those that died rather than forget the attacks. In contrast, the response of the Amish community to the recent hostage-taking in one of their schools was very different. The Amish people of the community reached out to the wife and children of the man who killed five of their own children. In addition, rather than create a memorial in the schoolhouse where the murders occurred, they instead leveled the building to convert it into a pasture. Which method, that of America after 9/11 or that of the Amish in response to the hostage-taker, results in more positive mental health and the most positive consequences for the direct victim(s), the transgressor, and also innocent people connected in one way or another to the transgressor, like Arab-Americans and the relatives of the Amish hostage-taker? At one time or another, we have all experienced the roles of both victim and transgressor, and research could provide strategies for effective coping that balance the needs of all the parties involved.

This field of research also has important potential applications in the area of clinical counseling in marital and family therapy. If the therapist knows from the literature what the effects of forgiveness are for both parties in terms of affect, likelihood of a repeat offense, and willingness to continue the relationship, then the therapist can address the needs of both parties in the counseling sessions very effectively.

An academic career would allow me to combine my creative abilities in designing new and exciting methodologies and my intellectual abilities in analyzing results and communicating my discoveries with other members of the academic community. In addition to intellectual merit, leadership is another important component of this career, and my experiences directing a laboratory and teaching others have left me well-equipped in this area also. Finally, my

extensive research experiences have taught me the skills necessary to create valid and replicable designs. I look forward to using all these abilities in a career filled with the excitement of innovative research design and the joy of discovery. Thank you for your consideration of my application, which is the first step toward new opportunities for me in research and academia.