

During my first year at Mount Holyoke College I was introduced to the field of psychology and was intrigued to learn that important questions examining human behavior could be systematically studied. My intellectual interest was captivated in my first psychology class, *The Brain and Mind*, and, as a result, I knew I wanted to conduct research in this field. Through additional coursework I found myself most interested in adolescent development, especially understanding how early experiences shape brain development, affect social-emotional adjustment and maturation, and influence one's ability to cope with adverse circumstances.

To pursue these interests, I conducted a Senior Honors Thesis under the direction of Professor Heidie Vazquez-Garcia. I designed and implemented a study examining whether parental racial socialization mitigates negative experiences of Latinos with darker skin. I prepared a proposal for my thesis committee, received consent from the institutional review board, surveyed over eighty Latina undergraduates, systematically gathered and analyzed the resulting data, and wrote my findings in an APA-style manuscript. My thesis was the first study to identify associations between skin color and parental messages about race to their children. Moreover, my results showed that participants' country of origin was significantly associated with the direction of findings. My thesis earned me an award of High Honor in Psychology, and I graduated Magna Cum Laude. This work culminated in a paper presentation at the 2004 American Psychological Association conference and a manuscript that is currently under review. The satisfaction I gained from my thesis solidified my desire to conduct research and pursue a doctorate in psychology.

During college I became very involved in the psychology community, and I held many leadership positions that piqued my interest in the field. I was elected by the Psychology Department as an Upper-Class Academic Advisor. I counseled underclass psychology students in their course work, their career goals, and their research skills. I served as a research coordinator under Professor Vazquez-Garcia and supervised twelve research assistants for whom I led research and statistical methods seminars. In addition, I was elected Vice President of the psychology honors society, Psi Chi. I organized and scheduled our chapter's 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Undergraduate Research Conference, selected and invited the keynote speaker, gave an address, and presented my own independent research. I reactivated and expanded the Psychology Club, and, as Club Chair, invited distinguished psychologists to campus to address our Psychology Career Panel. Through these positions I realized how much I enjoy mentoring and teaching, and they helped me further develop my organizational and leadership skills.

Upon graduation I received an Intramural Research Training Award (IRTA) at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) where I have been working in the Section of Development and Affective Neuroscience with Daniel Pine, M.D., since June 2004. Our lab investigates the neural and behavioral correlates of emotion regulation, development, and risk for anxiety and depression among children and adolescents. To this end, we use both computer-based tasks and functional MRI to tap into affective and cognitive processes associated with psychopathology. My experience has given me invaluable insight into how rigorous scientific investigations are conducted from hypothesis development to data collection and analysis to manuscript preparation. I have honed my analytical skills, my statistical analysis proficiency, and my ability to present research findings cogently, both orally and in writing. In addition to having the opportunity to explore my own interests and work independently, I have also learned to work effectively as part of a multi-disciplinary research team in which collaboration is essential to the success of the project.

I have been involved in all aspects of the research process in Dr. Pine's lab. Under my immediate supervisor, Christopher S. Monk, Ph.D. (now on the faculty at the University of

Michigan), I worked on a study examining adolescents at risk for depression. I collected and analyzed fMRI and corresponding behavioral data to compare the physiological and emotional responses of healthy adolescents with those at risk for depression. I was actively involved in this project, including the research design, data collection and analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation. I am a co-author on this manuscript, which has been submitted for publication. The most rewarding part of this study was gaining the experience to conduct a research study from its inception to its submission for publication, which helped me to pursue my own independent research.

While I was working on a project examining the cognitive and neural correlates of adolescent clinical anxiety, I became interested in how anxiety is manifested in healthy adolescents. I designed a study to characterize the cognitive and neurophysiological correlates of trait anxiety in healthy adolescents by using fMRI and a task that assesses attention to threat. I developed my research questions, analyzed behavioral and fMRI data, and learned how to interpret the brain imaging data. My findings were intriguing; the direction of behavioral and neural results was opposite to those reported in the literature on adolescents with anxiety disorders. I presented this work at the 2005 Annual Meeting for Cognitive Neuroscience. Furthermore, I wrote a manuscript, on which I am first author, which is now under review for publication.

My experience at the NIMH has been central to my decision to pursue a doctorate in developmental psychology. I have seen how families mollify or exacerbate mood and anxiety in their children, and this has solidified my interest in studying how family factors can affect adolescents' vulnerability for maladjustment. In graduate school I would like to study risk and resilience, particularly among youth living in poverty. I seek to explore how biological factors, social environments, and other variables such as gender, race, and immigration exacerbate or mitigate the negative experiences associated with growing up under adverse circumstances. I am interested in how resilience and competence develop and the processes by which families, peers, and communities influence adjustment and development during adolescence. By advancing our understanding of how risk manifests itself behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and physiologically, I hope to design interventions that can promote resilience and help children overcome adversity.

I am now ready to develop my theoretical and methodological skills and interests further by undertaking graduate study in psychology and am looking forward to the challenge of learning new facets of child and adolescent development. I am applying to UCLA because of its strength in developmental psychology, its outstanding facilities, its excellent faculty, and its Center for Culture, Brain and Development. I am particularly interested in working with Dr. Andrew Fuligni and Dr. Cristia Brown. The psychology graduate program at UCLA will prepare me well for a productive, successful research career in academia. As a result of my education and research experience in the field, I feel prepared for advanced studies and am committed to completing a doctorate in developmental psychology at UCLA.