I became a river rafting guide around the time I became interested in psychology. After my sophomore year of college I began guiding for a nonprofit organization that takes terminally ill people on outdoor trips. These trips gave me the opportunity to observe a wide spectrum of human behavior: I watched rafters learn to navigate a river, work as a team, and express joy in the midst of a rapid. The idea that billions of neurons created these cognitions and emotions fascinated me and helped shape my interest in the intersection of social psychology and neuroscience.

While majoring in psychology, I learned about the human mind not only in the lecture halls of the University of California Berkeley, but also in its laboratories. I made my first foray into research with Dr. Seth Roberts in the field of social psychology, testing the hypothesis that males create greater levels of conflict than females due to overconfidence in their beliefs. Working closely with a mentor to refine research hypotheses, develop assessment measures and analyze our results allowed me to gain insight into the processes of psychological research. Our collaboration continued when Dr. Roberts hired me to conduct research to form the curriculum of a new course on improving office design. Normally filled by a graduate student, this position required an interdisciplinary approach to reviewing and synthesizing an extensive body of literature spanning many fields. Our findings indicated that workspace flexibility and even small amounts of on-the-job exercise might improve long-term employee health and satisfaction. Entitled "The Post-Dilbert Workspace," this graduate course is still taught at UC Berkeley.

I continued my undergraduate work in social psychology under Dr. Christine Maslach, investigating the theory that homosexuality might be stigmatized because it is unfavorably perceived as a form of individuation. Helping to design measures and experimental conditions to test this hypothesis was an instructive exercise in using a creative approach to explain a common phenomenon.

My father suffered a stroke in my senior year of college, which catalyzed my interest in conducting research on the relationship between biology and the mind. To this end, I obtained a position with Dr. Mary Whooley at the University of California San Francisco VAMC, examining the relationship between depression and cardiac health. I found this work interesting because it made extensive use of physiological and psychological measures to explore a poorly understood mind-body connection. The preliminary results of this study, which indicate that depression affects cardiac health beyond quality of life indicators, are due to be published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

I have been fortunate to spend the last year exploring my interest in cognitive neuroscience under Dr. Michael Weiner, the Director of the Magnetic Resonance Imaging Unit at the University of California San Francisco VAMC. In this laboratory, I have been involved in studies using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and cognitive testing to study the neuropsychological effects of alcohol, HIV, Gulf War Illness, and dementia. However, my primary responsibility has been that of Study Coordinator for the multimillion-dollar NIH study entitled "The Prediction of Cognitive Decline." This study assesses the added value of MRI to cognitive testing for predicting cognitive decline in a group of elderly subjects with memory complaints. In this role, I have

learned from an interdisciplinary team of experts in the fields of psychology, radiology, neurology and psychiatry. I have supported Dr. Weiner in many different aspects of research, including subject recruitment, experimental design and execution, data analysis, and the supervision of study personnel. Assisting in the preparation of manuscripts for publication has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my work. I recently co-authored a poster on the incidence of psychological disorders in our cohort of Gulf War veterans, which was submitted for presentation at the VA National R&D Meeting. Currently I am co-writing an article that expands upon the data presented in the poster, and I am also conducting a literature review for an article on the prediction of cognitive decline. I plan to submit both of these articles for publication in January.

Sparked by my rafting experiences, my fascination with the mind has evolved through my research in social psychology, physiological psychology and neuroimaging. I am interested in synthesizing this experience to conduct research at the interface of social psychology and neuroscience. The endeavor to understand the relationship between the human brain and behavior is inherently interdisciplinary, and I believe that my diverse background has prepared me well for advanced study in this field. Specifically, I am interested in using psychophysiological measures (such as fMRI) and behavioral measures to study emotion, interpersonal communication and cognitive processes related to social behavior. I feel that these research interests fit extremely well with the psychology department at UCLA. The incredible opportunities for integrating social psychology with cognitive and affective neuroscience at UCLA make it my top choice for graduate study.

Four years of research experience have convinced me that my career path lies in conducting research and teaching at the University level. I am confident that graduate study at UCLA would provide me with the superior training required to attain my career goals and make a valuable scientific contribution to the field of psychology.

Additional Information

I would like to bring to the attention of the admissions committee the fact that I dropped Psychology 101 in the Spring and Fall of 2000. I did not drop the course for academic reasons. In fact, I was receiving an "A" at the time I was forced to drop the course in both instances. Unfortunately, I had overcommitted myself during this time and was engaged in writing an Honors Thesis with a full academic schedule while volunteering 30 hours a week to guide terminally ill people on outdoor trips. Almost inevitably, I contracted mononucleosis and was forced to decrease my course load. Once I was healthy, I took the course again and received an "A+" grade.