

Stories of crime and its effects on society follow us everywhere. In high school, I read news stories about crime in my hometown and developed an interest in criminal behavior. My interest in psychology developed in my high school psychology class when I learned that psychology and neuroscience can help explain the development of externalizing behavior. Intrigued, I decided to double major in psychology and criminal justice in hopes of gaining a better understanding of this relationship. While I have greatly increased my knowledge of externalizing psychopathology, I hope to continue my education through research. In particular, I am interested in the biological and psychological basis of substance use and antisocial tendencies; and the role emotion plays in these behaviors. I believe obtaining a PhD in Clinical Psychology at your university will allow me to further my education and contribute to this important field.

Early in my undergraduate career, I was eager to learn about the intersection of mental health and externalizing tendencies outside of class. Working with an Honors College advisor on a project using United States Census Bureau data, I examined the relationship between mental illness and crime commission. I found that untreated mental illness is associated with a lifestyle which increases the likelihood of criminal behavior. This experience exposed me to the research process and how this process can be used to broaden our understanding of the interaction between mental illness and crime commission. During the same semester, I also became involved as an undergraduate teaching assistant for an introductory psychology course. I held office hours, reviewed exams, entered class data, and proctored exams. Having the opportunity to work with other undergraduates and help them succeed increased my passion for disseminating knowledge.

Looking to expand my experience with psychology and neuroscience, I joined a lab which used electroencephalography to study emotion processing. I became deeply interested in an emotion regulation training study, which asked anxious participants to practice situation-focused emotion regulation strategies in five training sessions. My involvement in this study fostered a new interest in emotion regulation and how it may apply to individuals who externalize. I was able to understand this relationship from a different angle when I became an intern at a social service agency in between my junior and senior year, where I worked with at-risk youth. As an intern, I assisted with an adolescent substance abuse group, where I helped adolescents identify cognitive and emotional strategies they can use to manage stress and resist cravings. Helping run the substance abuse group exposed me to the relationship between emotion dysregulation, anti-social tendencies and substance use.

Over the course of my involvement in this lab, I developed many of my own research questions. Working alongside a graduate student in the lab, I developed a senior thesis project about psychopathy for which I am continuing to collect data at this time. I am passionate about this project, as understanding the capacity that individuals with psychopathic traits have to experience and regulate emotions has important implications for treatment. I will present my findings at an undergraduate poster session through my university this spring and at the Association for Psychological Science (APS) convention this summer.

I want to complete my graduate studies at your university because of its emphasis on research and teaching. These opportunities will aid in my development as an aspiring academic. I am particularly interested in one researcher's work with the developmental and biological predictors of adolescent substance use. Given my interest and familiarity with substance use research, I believe I would be a great match for her research lab. I would be interested in expanding on her work by examining the relationship between emotion regulation capabilities and adolescent substance use, and the potential implications this has for intervention. I am also interested in another scholar's research on emotion regulation in children, and would be particularly interested in expanding on his research investigating the relationship between emotion regulation capabilities and aggression and conduct disorder in children.

Understanding the neural mechanisms and emotion dysfunction underlying externalizing psychopathology is immensely important for society. In order to effectively treat individuals with substance use issues and aggressive tendencies, it is crucial to obtain a scientific understanding of their behavior. I hope you will consider me as a candidate for your university's Clinical Psychology PhD program, so that I can contribute to this extremely important field. I believe that my research experience, work achievements, and academic success have given me the foundation to successfully advance scientific understanding of externalizing psychopathology.