

Statement of Purpose

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In the city with the highest number of psychologists per capita in the world - where a lay person can tell the difference between Freudian and Lacanian theories - every psychology student wants to go into clinical practice. Studying in Buenos Aires, I couldn't help but wonder why - in comparison to other sciences - research seemed to be from a bygone era. Steadied in my resolve to pursue a career in research, I needed to find an environment that would help me develop empirical research skills. To understand the biopsychosocial factors that shape health-behavior processes, it was imperative to learn from other disciplines, and I was committed to pursuing a career in research even if that meant leaving the comfort zone of local academia.

After two years of coursework at Birkbeck College in London, I went back home to the Universidad de Palermo with an even stronger interest in robust research methods. I was especially interested in two courses, Health Psychology and Public Health, due to their transdisciplinary approach to health and illness. After getting my BSc in Psychology, I was accepted into the Master of Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, supported partly by a P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship. In this academic health center that values translational research, I was able to acquire a strong foundation in biostatistics and epidemiology; powerful tools to approach scientific knowledge critically, to evaluate research methods, and to understand how bias affects outcomes. For my practicum I was awarded a fellowship to conduct research in Gujarat, India, under the guidance of Dr. Craig Katz. My goal was to explore the impact that an NGO had on beliefs about depression in rural communities. My thesis, comparing beliefs in intervention vs. control villages, was awarded Best MPH Thesis and was published in *Psychiatric Quarterly*. Pursuing my interest in socio-demographic inequities and how these affect psychiatric incidence also led me to conduct a systematic review and meta-analysis on mood disorders in first vs. second generation immigrants, under the

guidance of Dr. Paolo Boffetta. The resulting manuscript is currently in press with the British Journal of Psychiatry.

Through my position as a clinical research coordinator I was introduced to outcomes research, and became interested in how incorporating behavioral predictors and mediators can produce better outcomes for patients with chronic illness. I was recruited by Dr. Juan Wisnivesky to conduct structured clinical interviews in English and Spanish for World Trade Center rescue and recovery workers with asthma. These interviews furthered my interest in the psychosocial determinants of health disparities; as the differences in outcomes between first responders and Spanish speaking recovery workers was evidenced in both my interviews and the study results. Within eight months I was promoted to research project manager, a position that allows me to run four research studies funded by NIH, AHRQ and PCORI under Drs. Federman and Wisnivesky. In this role I manage both research and clinical interventions, including an RCT for elderly asthmatics with a community health worker component. I also conduct clinical interviews for a pilot study - a joint project with IBM's Watson Research Center - to explore whether a machine learning approach to semantic language analysis can help us screen for depression in the primary care setting. As a project manager, I gained experience in all aspects of research: overseeing subject enrollment, developing study timelines, submissions to sponsors and IRBs, developing study budgets, and doing grant submissions for R01, U01 and R21 studies. Additionally, my results from a paper on sub-threshold PTSD and PTSD symptom dimensions in WTC Rescue and Recovery workers (under review with the Journal of Asthma) were incorporated as preliminary data in a recently awarded U01 grant. The most rewarding part of my job has been participating in dissemination efforts, and I have presented posters at three national conferences, and am currently working on a manuscript exploring trends in health literacy and cognition in COPD patients.

I see myself spending my career primarily conducting research that is meaningful to clinical science, both in the generation of hypothesis and in the relevance of study results. As a principal investigator, I hope to be able to delve further into how behavior affects chronic

disease outcomes, and more specifically on the effect that language and ethnicity have on self-management behaviors – be it through hindering patient-doctor communication, or through attitudes and beliefs-. A position as professor in an academic health center would be the ideal way to achieve this goal, and doctoral studies are the logical next step in this direction. Further, I found the experience of teaching truly rewarding, and I am attracted by the prospect of teaching and mentoring students as part of my academic career. It is my conviction that the Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at [REDACTED] will help me formulate research questions grounded in current theoretical perspectives, thanks to the cutting edge work its faculty is pursuing. I would greatly benefit from the teachings of Dr. [REDACTED], and her work on self-management behaviors. Her recent paper “How aging affects self-reports” has been influential for me in the preparation of my manuscript on cognitive impairment in COPD patients, and in thinking about the study I manage that looks at improving asthma self-management behaviors in aging adults. And because of Dr. [REDACTED]’s interest in stress, I believe his teachings will be fundamental for my theoretical development. His work on the impact of stress on blood pressure directly aligns with the research I have done on PTSD symptoms and asthma outcomes.

I have developed a strong foundation in both psychology and methodology, and my research experience shows both my preparation for advanced graduate studies, and my understanding of what an academic career entails. The Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at [REDACTED] has everything I am looking for in a program, and I believe that my unique background in epidemiology and psychology will allow me to make contributions to the program and to the field in the future. My trajectory shows my commitment to academic endeavors, and has prepared me to enter a graduate program like [REDACTED] has to offer.