

I would like to develop a program of research focused on the broad question of how poverty impacts child development. My ideas about poverty and its effects are influenced by my family's experience with poverty and by the time I have spent as a researcher in the homes of disadvantaged families with young children. This exposure to families – my own and others – living in hardship has informed my reading of the literature on child development in the context of poverty and the questions I would like to answer about childhood poverty. In particular, my personal and professional experiences have convinced me that cognitive appraisals of inequality—a major topic of study in the literature on adult experiences with poverty—may also be an important mechanism by which the negative effects of poverty are transmitted to children. Thus, I have proposed in this application to study young children's perceptions of their own and others' experience of poverty, social inequality, and social exclusion.

This novel line of inquiry draws on knowledge and methods from sociology and developmental psychology and builds on ideas developed in the literature on health disparities. I believe that through my proposed studies, I can address a significant gap in the literature. As an aspiring academic researcher, I am excited to have identified a research area that will allow me to contribute new knowledge to the literature and to potentially develop a systematic program of study. I am also passionate about this research because the issues that it tackles and the focus that it adopts resonate with my own experiences. I can recall puzzling over my family's experiences at an early age, trying to understand what it meant for me that people in my family were living in poverty and experiencing its effects, and also trying to understand what it meant for them and for their futures. When I started reading the literature attributing dramatic health disparities to the psychological experience of social inequality, I was reminded of these childhood experiences, and I was surprised as I read further that I could not find literature that has addressed the psychological experience of inequality for young children.

Most of my family has not had access to higher education or career choice, and reflecting on my experience in contrast to theirs helps me recognize the exceptional privilege I have as a researcher to spend my time pursuing interesting, important questions. I believe I have two responsibilities to fulfill as a result of this privilege. First, I am committed to disseminating my findings to both scientific and lay audiences. Since starting graduate school I have published and presented my research, co-authoring two manuscripts (one published and one under review), one book section, and six posters (two presented and four under review). All of my research has been collaborative, involving other graduate students, faculty at my own and other institutions, and undergraduates. I have also worked to promote the understanding and utilization of research findings in the broader community. For instance, I have performed research on behalf of *Thrive in Five, Boston*, a network of educators, scientists, policy makers, government officials, and parents working to promote healthy early child development in the Boston metro area. My work has focused on identifying best practices for early childhood developmental and behavioral screening, and I have presented this work to the executive board of Thrive in Five. I will continue to work with them in a consultative capacity, providing guidance based on my own research and the research of others in the field.

My second responsibility is to engage undergraduates in psychological science. My university has the most racially diverse student body in New England, so it is an ideal place to support students from underrepresented groups in their own scientific careers. My experience to date with the undergraduate students at my university has convinced me that many of them have not had the mentorship and guidance they need to find positions as graduate students in the competitive field of psychology. In response, I have helped organize mentoring and educational

events for undergraduate students, facilitated ongoing mentoring relationships between undergraduate and graduate students, and served as a formal mentor to an undergraduate psychology major. In my advisor's lab, I have informally supervised the work of undergraduate researchers, providing them with guidance on the graduate school application process, engaging them in discussions about their personal research interests, and supporting their independent projects. When I begin my own data collection, I plan to include undergraduates as part of the research team helping with data coding and analysis.

Supporting undergraduates in their personal development as researchers is important to me, in part, because, unlike many of my peers, I did not “always” want to be a scientist. Neither of my parents graduated from college, so when I went to college it was with the sole goal of finishing my degree. And though many of my peers pursued Ph.D.'s, it always seemed to me that graduate education was for a different kind of person than I. My peers had parents who were professors, doctors, or lawyers; they had connections that helped them decide which experiences to pursue and which schools to apply to, and they seemed to know much more than I did about what it takes to get into graduate school. I, on the other hand, tried to pursue a more applied career path; interning at non-profits and foundations, where I imagined that I could engage my interest in child development by working to improve child welfare. I found, however, that—as meaningful as non-profit work was—I was also keenly aware in these settings of the lack of available knowledge on which to act. At the same time, I realized that I was more interested in developing the knowledge base than in writing policy briefs or mission statements based on what was already known.

My goal—a goal that I hope to pursue as a faculty member at a major research university—is to contribute new knowledge to our understanding of child development in the context of poverty. The faculty members in my department are committed to students' success, and I am confident that the intellectual and interpersonal resources of my department are more than adequate to support me in achieving my goals. Further, I have access to mentors both within and outside my department whose willingness to share their expertise with me will facilitate my engagement in high quality research. However, my department is not able to provide summer funding to support student research, and funding during the academic year is typically tied to responsibilities such as teaching. While I am interested in improving my teaching skills, a fellowship would give me the flexibility to pursue only those teaching responsibilities that contribute to my professional development and do not detract from my research training. Even more importantly, independent funding would allow me to fully dedicate my time during the summer to my research, rather than to supporting myself financially.

Thus, an NSF fellowship will give me the freedom to dedicate myself to my research program, beginning with the study that I have proposed in this application. Following that study, I would like next to examine whether disadvantaged children exhibit a physiological stress response when exposed to stories or cartoons that contain themes related to poverty. I am also interested in extending my work globally; for example, I plan to study cognitive responses to inequality and disadvantage in countries outside the U.S. to determine whether my findings differ based on the level of resource inequality in a nation or based on other factors such as absolute poverty. In partial pursuit of this goal, I expect to apply for supplemental funding from the NSF to do research in Sweden or Finland, where the level of resource inequality is dramatically lower than that of the U.S. An NSF fellowship would enable me to accelerate my progress toward these exciting research plans, allowing me to focus my time and energy on planning and implementing my research program.