

How are attitudes formed and altered? How do attitudes interact with other contextual and psychological variables to influence perceptual, evaluative, and decisional processes? These are the questions that I wish to pursue. In this research, I hope to employ a multi-methodological approach—from lab experimentation to physiological measurements and neuroimaging—with the aim of applying my findings to real-world domains such as marketing, morality, and politics. Ultimately, I believe that NYU is an ideal place to pursue this type of research, and I am confident that my academic background and interests make me an excellent fit for the Social Psychology PhD program.

I pursued my first research opportunity at Carleton College when Dr. Barbara Allen hired me to translate ads for a project on the 2008 US general elections. My role evolved from coding ads to data analysis, and Dr. Allen, Dr. Dan Stevens, and I have a contract with Lexington Press to produce a book outlining the nature and effects of truthfulness in ads aired during the 2008 US electoral campaigns. I am also preparing a manuscript focusing on the relationship between audio-visual cues and misinformation in political ads. Through this project, I developed an interest in the psychology behind political attitudes, and how those attitudes influence the perception and evaluation of political ads.

With a growing excitement for investigating psychological phenomena, I received funding from Carleton to conduct an independent eye-tracking study on the perception of political ads. Additionally, through my research assistantship in the Department of Political Science, I led a research team that examined the impact of death-related primes in TV news and political ads on physiological activity, civic duty, and intergroup bias. Through these experiences, I gained insight into the relationships between affective, evaluative, and perceptual processes.

Inspired by my interest in attitude research, I applied for a scholarship funded by the Swiss government, through which I worked with Dr. Marco Steenbergen at the University of Zürich to examine the measurement of ambivalence towards political parties (partisan ambivalence). In particular, I examined the advantages and shortcomings of several distinct ambivalence measures; investigated personality correlates of partisan ambivalence; and utilized principal components analysis to reveal latent elements of social attitudes. The breadth of my experience excited me about the variety of perspectives within social psychology from which attitudes can be studied.

My undergraduate theses also resulted from my fascination with attitudes. For my political science thesis, I examined the relationship between presidential emotions and violence reciprocation during crisis decision-making, finding that anxiety was related to deviations from reciprocity. This experience furthered my interest in the interaction of emotion with other cognitive processes. Moreover, my cognitive science thesis explored the interaction of argument strength and cognitive ability in the development of partisan ambivalence. Specifically, I hypothesized that individuals

able to exert control over automatic evaluations would be persuaded by strong—but not weak—belief-inconsistent information, thereby becoming more ambivalent. Although my findings were inconclusive, the project solidified my desire to study the psychological mechanisms involved in forming, maintaining, and altering attitudes.

Following graduation, I joined Dr. Kathleen McDermott's Memory and Cognition Lab at Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL) to work with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and confirm my desire to pursue a graduate degree. At WUSTL, I have assisted on an fMRI investigation of mnemonic processing in parietal cortex, as well as a multi-investigator endeavor to create ultra high-resolution functional brain maps for single individuals. I have also attended a graduate course on functional neuroimaging methods and gained significant experience with preprocessing and analyzing fMRI data. Through these opportunities, I have developed neuroimaging skills that I hope to apply to the study of attitudes and evaluative processing within the field of social neuroscience.

NYU is a perfect fit for my research interests. I find exciting Dr. Van Bavel's work on the dynamic nature of evaluation and its implications for moral cognition. It would be valuable to apply this approach to consumer and political psychology. Additionally, I am interested in Dr. Van Bavel's research on the top-down influence of social identity on cognitive processing. The notion that self-categorization can alter presumably automatic processes is truly fascinating.

Moreover, I am interested in Dr. Jost's research on the psychological underpinnings and effects of political ideologies, especially in relation to attitudes and information processing. I also appreciate Dr. Jost's advocacy for the use of neuroscientific models and methodologies in political psychology. Additionally, I find compelling Dr. Phelps's multi-methodological work on the influence of emotion on episodic memory, valuation, and social interaction. Further, I am interested in Dr. Amodio's interdisciplinary research on the causes, consequences, and regulation of prejudice and stereotyping, as well as Dr. Glimcher's utilization of diverse approaches in studying valuation and choice in human decision-making. Overall, the faculty's collection of interests makes NYU an ideal place to pursue my graduate studies.

The Psychology PhD program at NYU would provide fantastic preparation for an academic career. The program's collaborative and interdisciplinary nature would train me to synthesize findings and methodologies from different areas and approaches. Additionally, NYU boasts a number of research centers—including the Center for Experimental Social Science, Center for Social and Political Behavior, and Institute for the Interdisciplinary Study of Decision Making—that match my research interests and would offer tremendous training and collaboration opportunities. Ultimately, NYU's active research culture would prepare me for a faculty position at a research university, where I would realize my passion for scientific education and investigation.