

I plan to become a university professor, researching human behaviors and relationships from an evolutionary perspective. Although, I was not always captivated by learning and researching evolution, this is because I came from a small town that was extremely religious, where evolution was the forbidden fruit. Evolution was taught once in my hometown during my high school biology class. My teacher had barely begun to explain the definition before my fellow peers complained that evolution does not exist and with that, the discussion was finished. Years later in physical anthropology lab, I saw first-hand how our ancestors have evolved. In lab I was exposed to different skulls of our ancestors (i.e., from Aegyptopithecus through Homo Neanderthal). This proved to me that my peers from high school were wrong and evolution did exist.

Having evolution proven was not what sparked my quest for knowledge about human evolution though. What really interested me was the way Homo Neanderthals buried some of their dead. This fascinates me, because we still perform a variation of this ritual. Knowing this ritual is still being passed down to modern day society, made me wonder what else is still being passed down. Finding the answer is what led me to where I am today, a graduate student at Oklahoma State University under the direction of Dr. Aaron Lukaszewski where I will be studying this question in various mechanisms that still exist, for example friendships.

Much like how seeing the evolution of skulls changed my path to become a researcher, I did not originally want to become a professor either. This changed once I began teaching inner city children and saw firsthand how education can change their fates. I know people speak of the great poverty and violence in other countries, but I have seen it within our borders. I have taught children who grow up in urban neighborhoods of poverty that are controlled by gangs. I have witnessed gang members trying to recruit my students. What is worse is that if they do not have a strong support system around them, they usually become said gang member. I have worked with children to challenge and change this cycle of poverty and gangs.

One of my many stories of breaking this cycle is one of my students who at the age of 7 wanted to become “a prisoner as [his] adult job like his parents.” I invited him to also consider other options, encouraged him to strive for better, and taught him ways to achieve his goal. By the end of the year not only had his grades drastically increased, he wanted to become a doctor, and still does. This experience makes me extremely proud to know that I aided in his development. I want to be able to inspire more young adults and college students by becoming a faculty member and pushing them to strive for more and achieve their dreams.

As I mentioned above, this kind of change needs more than just one person, it needs a support system to encourage this development. While obtaining my Bachelors of Science in Psychology and minor in Anthropology at the University of North Texas, I was involved in two Psychology labs. In the Cross-Cultural Attachment Lab under the supervision of Dr. Chiachih DC Wang I focused the majority of my research on one of these types of support systems, marriages. Specifically, I focused on discrimination on individuals who are in an interracial/intercultural marriage. In conjunction with other projects, I found ways to buffer these negative effects of discrimination presenting three posters, completing my honors college capstone thesis, and publishing two articles.

Another form of social support needed to elicit change in an individual is mentorship. Though mentoring I found a way to merge my love of research with me love of teaching. During

my senior year of my undergraduate career, I began to assist underclassman with posters, proposal writings, and overall research techniques. I have also already begun mentoring some of the undergraduates in my current lab at OSU. After graduate school, I plan continue mentoring students as a professor.

Another form of social support needed is friendship. Friendship is now my main area of interest. I want to research friendship from a functionalist prospective. Think about your own life, who do you call when you are in trouble, in need of a last minute babysitter, having car troubles, or want guidance on an issue? Although our ancestors did not have cellphones to call up a friend at a moment's notice or cars for that matter, they did have friends to depend on. Furthermore, they had more than one type of friend, just like modern day humans do.

I want to see how the mechanisms of friendships that have evolved effects modern day friendships. What types of friends do we have? Who do we depend upon in varying situations? What types of friends are necessary to survive verses just nice to have? I plan to answer these questions and more. Additionally, I want to find ways to use this information to improve friendships and social support to help elicit change. After all, how can we improve upon something if we do not understand how and why it developed?