

Enrica Bridgewater



Academic Statement of Purpose

Communication and Media PhD

On December 16, 2015, I was asked the age-old question that every college student has dreaded since the beginning of time: “*So, what do you want to do after you graduate?*” It was a little after 10:00AM and I was finishing up the final exam for my Introductory Child Psychology course, when my professor, Dr. Louise Hainline, sprung this question on me. I was initially surprised because no one had ever really asked me that before, but I confided in her that I wanted to enter graduate school to get my PhD. Although pursuing an advanced degree has been my goal since high school, I had no idea how I was going to achieve it. She encouraged me to apply to RISE, a program that assists underrepresented students in STEM in their journey to graduate school. Little did I know that sending an inquiry email to the program coordinator would set the stage for the rest of my years as an undergraduate and my future career.

As a RISE scholar, I was intrigued by the idea of “conducting research”, but I was unsure about what topics I was interested in. That completely changed when I took a Psychology of Adolescence course with Dr. Erika Niwa in the fall of 2016; it was in this class that I became fascinated by the complexities of adolescent development. I particularly enjoyed learning about how young people come to know who they are and the ways in which society tells them who they should be and grew eager to learn more once the class ended. This drove me to join Dr. Niwa’s adolescent development lab a year later.

In the summer of 2017, I was accepted into the NSF Psychology Research Experience Program (PREP) REU at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Under the supervision of Dr. Karl Rosengren, I designed an original project that examined death portrayals in children’s animated films and whether watching these films together may help initiate parent-child conversations about death. My next research opportunity came in the fall of 2017, when I completed an independent honors research project and honors thesis with Dr. Niwa that examined how age-related changes during adolescence, such as puberty, may affect the self-esteem and emotion regulation of middle and high school students enrolled in a Brooklyn College Community Partnership (BCCP) after school program. We later expanded on this project by exploring whether one’s identity (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, and ethnic identity) can influence self-esteem and emotion regulation in BCCP youth. I also worked with Dr. Niwa on

another project that examined the effects that the Gender-Role Discrepancy Strain (i.e., a mismatch between how a man believes that men “should” act and how he lives up to these expectations in his own life) can have on the self-esteem of male and female Brooklyn College undergraduates.

Although my academic background is in Psychology, I have fostered a deep appreciation for the interplay between media and identity. Through my various research experiences, particularly working on my summer project during the PREP REU program, I became really interested in the role that the media plays in the lives of children, young people, and emerging adults and how this influence may lead to negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Being a graduate student at the University of Michigan would be a great opportunity for me to further explore my interests, as many faculty members are already investigating these topics. One being Dr. Kristen Harrison, whose line of research I will continue to expand on by examining how exposure to certain types of media (e.g., those that portray violence) can affect the psychological health of children and young people. I would also like to add to the work of Dr. Sonya Dal Cin, by offering a new perspective into how media representations of minority characters alter the ways that minority youth think about themselves and others. If possible, I am also open to co-mentoring opportunities with these faculty members.

After graduate school, I hope to lead my own lab at a governmental research agency as well as collaborate with policymakers, lawmakers, and film executives to help shift the lens that young people, particularly those of color, are seen through and thought about both on and off-screen. I can also see myself creating and working with programs like RISE and PREP to assist first-generation, underrepresented, and low-income youth in accomplishing their goals and provide them with the encouragement and resources to do so. Knowing how much these programs have done for me, I want to pay it forward to other students. Although I am not sure where the next few years of my life will take me, I hope that my academic journey will continue in the Communication and Media PhD program at the University of Michigan, where I will not only gain invaluable insight into the questions that are being asked in the field, but also where I can discover ways to help answer them.