Research Statement for a Research-Focused Institution

Research Statement

According to evolutionary theory, human beings, in order to survive and pass on their genes, must engage in certain tasks such as eating, sleeping, and mating. Moreover, the efficiency with which they accomplish these tasks predicts how successful they will be in passing on their genetic material. One of the more effective ways to en-sure success in these tasks is to make decisions about them automatic, therefore, increasing the efficiency of finding food, locating a safe place to sleep, and securing attractive mates. In fact, automaticity is so valuable in these tasks that its loss or failure to develop can lead to mental dysfunctions. Based on these tenets, I have established a well-funded program of published research that identifies cross-cultural universalities in people's automatic thinking about eating, sleeping, and mating.

Section one establishes the importance of the field, captures readers' attention, and provides a summary.

Establish the existence of a fundable, publishable program of research as early as possible.

Overview of the Field

Evolutionary psychology applies the theory of natural selection to the understanding of mind and behavior. The basic approach of the field is to formulate predictions about how psychology should work based on established principles in evolution, then test the consistency of those predictions in the real world, preferably across cultures to better demonstrate evolved, not cultural, explanations. Mating behavior is the most heavily-researched area of evolutionary psychology, and there are well-established characteristics of desirable mates that influence the selection of partners across cultures. Less work has emerged on food selection and eating behavior, but research suggests that there are important visual and taste cues that drive the selection of food. For example, sweet and fatty foods are universally preferred parts of the human diet from birth onward. Because decisions about mates and food are so important, the human mind seems to have evolved the capacity to automatically process them with little need of conscious monitoring. Research from my laboratory shows that evaluations of mates and food occur with similar accuracy regardless of the time provided. In addition, conclusions about food

Section two outlines the general field in language accessible to nonspecialists, even to people outside of psychology.

Emphasize the use of theory to guide research questions.

Emphasize important individual contributions to the field without overstatement.

This material is a companion to *Becoming a Psychology Professor: Your Guide to Landing the Right Academic Job*, by Guy A. Boysen. An overview of the book can be viewed on the American Psychological Association website (https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4313054).

Additional supplemental material is available on the book's companion website (http://pubs.apa.org/books/supp/boysen/).

and mates can be reached even through exposure to information at subconscious levels.

Section three outlines a program of research, giving specific examples to illustrate productivity.

My Current Research

Evidence for automatic mate and food evaluations have been replicated in Western cultures but not across cultures. The work also has not expanded to include sleep, which is another important determinant of human health and safety. My past research and plans for future research address these gaps in the literature.

Establish the existence of a gap in the research literature.

Cross-Cultural Automaticity

In my postdoctoral work with Dr. Aldwin Crasher, I led the development and validation of a procedure for evaluating the speed and accuracy of individuals' judgments of the desirability of objects. I then utilized the procedure to demonstrate that people's evaluations of mates and food occurred with similar accuracy when conducted automatically versus intentionally and that accuracy was not as high when they evaluated objects without evolutionary significance such as modern clothes and tools. I published this work as lead author in *Experimental Psychology: General*. I have now begun a project replicating these findings in Eastern cultures. In collaboration with colleagues in China, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, we have collected data from over 1,000 participants and have submitted an article for publication that demonstrates the cross-cultural validity of the effects.

Research-focused institutions will appreciate connections with prestigious scholars as a sign of potential for productivity, but be sure to establish the ability to do independent work as well.

Highlight first-authored work because research-focused institutions will consider it separately and give it more weight.

Emphasize journal names when they are the top outlets in the field.

Outline potential for ongoing, productive collaborations without seeming overly reliant on others for ideas or resources.

Expansion to Sleep

During my postdoctoral study, I also expanded this research to include people's evaluations of places to sleep. Based on past animal research, I theorized that humans have preferences for protected sleeping areas with single entry points but easy access to cosleepers. Survey research documenting support for these predictions among college students and married adults is currently in press at *Evolutionary Behavior Sciences*. I also recently presented experimental research on this topic during a symposium at the APS Annual Convention. The results demonstrated that variations in evolutionary-salient sleep factors outperformed other factors in predicting people's preferred sleeping locations at home, in hotels,

Separate the statement into sections if it helps to communicate the existence of simultaneous research areas.

Signal the existence of continued, programmatic research with high likelihood of being published.

and while camping. I am currently drafting this work for submission to an evolutionary psychology journal.

Indicate the existence of research in press, under review, in preparation, underway, and being planned.

Future Plans

Research

Section four summarizes the next steps in the program of research.

My immediate research plans are to expand my previous work on sleep to include investigations of automaticity and cross-cultural validity. I am in the process of validating an automaticity procedure that can be used for sleep, and I plan to conduct a conceptual replication of the food and mate selection research using the new procedure. I will expand the East Asian cross-cultural project to include the sleep procedure once the method is pilot tested. Furthermore, I plan to conduct a secondary analysis of a large data set collected from several sleep laboratories to determine if variations in the physical laboratory facilities themselves are significant predictors of self-reported sleep quality. My intended outlets for these projects are the same APA journals as my previous studies.

Be as specific as possible when outlining future research.

Emphasize access to data sets that might be a source of ongoing publications.

Establish the intention to publish all research in the best journals possible.

My long-term research plans are to expand the automaticity of mate, food, and sleep preferences into the area of mental health. I believe that diagnosable mental disorders related to these areas of human life represent, in part, dysfunction in people's automatic evaluations. My previous research demonstrated substantial individual differences in the efficiency of people's automatic evaluations and significant correlations between this efficiency and self-reported satisfaction with mates, food, and sleep. Thus, I plan to extend these studies to include individuals with diagnosable mental disorders to determine the differences in satisfaction extend to clinical dysfunction.

Indicate both short- and long-term goals as evidence for a coherent program of research.

Funding

Establish the fundability of future research projects and plans for securing funding.

My current research is funded by a $10,000 renewable grant awarded by the Sleep Foundation of America (SFA), and I have immediate plans to apply for the same grant and an additional $50,000 grant from the SFA's parent organization, the International Sleep Foundation (ISF). The SFA grant will fund my continued work on automaticity in sleep evaluation, and the ISF grant will go toward

expansion of the research across cultures. After establishing my laboratory as an Assistant Professor, I plan to apply for a NIMH grant (R01) related to sleep or eating disorders in order to begin the expansion of my research into the clinical realm.

Mentorship

My future plans include securing funding to expand on the pattern of mentorship that I have established in postdoctoral study, which has been productive for both students and myself. I have instituted a train-the-trainer approach in which advanced researchers mentor novice researchers on basic skills, with me overseeing the fidelity of the training. The approach accomplishes both the imparting of basic scientific skills to graduate students early in their careers and the learning of mentoring skills among advanced students. In addition, I form small research teams that include students of various levels of experience and assign them responsibility for solving a research problem. Once I approve their solution, they take charge of conducting the study and publishing or presenting the results. These methods have led to me being the mentor for over two dozen student presentations and publications during my postdoctoral study, and I expect that level of productivity to only rise once I establish my own lab.

Indicate the intent to fund and train graduate students as part of a program of research.

Provide evidence for a thoughtful approach to the mentorship of graduate students.

Emphasize the research productivity of protégés.