In my senior year of high school I found myself needing an extra elective, and intrigued by the idea of learning about the minds of the disturbed and disturbing, I enrolled in Advance Placement Introduction to Psychology. Weeks into the class, I had already begun to realize that the study of psychology went beyond an exploration into the epidemiology of serious mental illness. More than that, psychology investigated seemingly commonplace behaviors and cognitions with a depth and perspective that gave them a whole new life. I became just as fascinated by the eloquent manner in which Maslow surmised our most basic human needs as I was by Freud’s bold look into the unconscious mind.

What is more, I also began to understand the far reaching implications that psychology had throughout the world and all of its cultures. It seemed as if everyone I knew had been affected, whether directly or indirectly, by mental illness of some kind and many had benefited from the various treatment advances in the field. It was then that I knew there was nothing I wanted more than to be a part of a field that could help so many people. The field of psychology has such an exciting potential for continued expansion in both research and practical application, and it is my strong desire to be a part of the growth in both aforementioned aspects.

It was during this time that my younger sister was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, and the world of clinical psychology became all the more real and fascinating to me. My image of someone suffering from a mental illness quickly shifted from the Hollywood images of Psycho and Silence of the Lambs to something so much more tangible. For years my sister suffered, waxing in waning from someone who had enough energy to re-arrange every piece of furniture in the house, to a girl who could not get out of bed for days. Yet, with the help of a professional, she was able to get the psychiatric help she needed and deserved. With time my sister’s behavior and mood began to improve and although she is far from relieved of all the symptoms of her diagnosis, seeing her transition into a happy and stable adult continues to amaze and touch me every day.

After deciding on a career in psychology I set about preparing myself for the graduate level training and coursework necessary to achieve that goal. While completing my undergraduate degree, I chose to minor in criminal justice, and this is when I began to realize what an amazing influence the two fields had on one another. I knew that I wanted to be a part of a field that integrated both psychology and the law, and naturally forensic psychology became the perfect fit.

While completing my master’s degree in forensic psychology, I completed courses in research methods, advanced research methods, as well an intermediate statistics class for behavioral sciences. These courses educated and trained me on the various approaches to research as well as the critical thinking necessary to overcome the various practical and ethical obstacles faced by researches in the field of psychology. Moreover, I enrolled in a course on advanced data analysis which helped me become conversant in several software programs, including SPSS, which would aid me the efficient entry of research data in addition to the calculations of many statistical tests. The work I accomplished in these courses proved invaluable to the research I would later conduct and will continue to bolster the research I will undertake in the future.

Furthermore, in addition to serving as a research assistant for both a Master’s student thesis and a doctoral dissertation, I have also served as a researcher on two very exciting projects. The first of these research projects was a joint research project with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Behavioral Science Unit and it explored ritualistic behaviors in serial rape cases. It was a truly rewarding experience for my fellow researchers and me to investigate an issue that had never been looked at before, and getting the opportunity to present our findings in front of the FBI’s Chief Psychologist and Chief Criminologist was a truly defining moment in my education. What is more, our research team was invited to present our findings at the annual Master’s Student Research Conference, held at our college.

Moreover, the most recent research I am currently undertaking involves assessing attorney’s perspectives on competency related issues involving their mentally retarded clients. This research has marked the first time I have ever undertaken the role of first author, and I am elated by the opportunity to take the lead and publish the findings. Ultimately, the research I have been a part of has shown me two things, that I am not only incredibly passionate about creating and conducting new research, but that I am also capable of conducting research and working together on a team to conquer the inevitable obstacles that accompanying any research. It is this passion and ability that I hope to hone and build on at the doctorate level.

Additionally, my in-field experience in clinical psychology has been as equally rewarding as my research experience. To start, I completed a 300 hour externship at the Kings County Psychiatric Clinic in the Supreme Court building of both Brooklyn and Queens, New York. The time I spent working with the psychologists and psychiatrists at the clinics was invaluable. I was able to receive first-hand experience in evaluating forensic psychiatric defendants for competency to stand trial, as well as assessing drug offenders for rehabilitation and MICA programs. The clinical staff working in these offices candidly discussed with me the various issues faced by those professionals working in forensic psychology, but also showed me just how worthwhile it was to make a difference in both psychology and the law. What is more, I was able to gain practical experience when I was allowed to conduct various assessments under the supervision of the psychology staff. Some of these evaluations included the WAIS IV, R-BANS, TOMM, PCL-R, and the SORAG.

Currently I am gaining even more clinical experience in the world of psychology as a result of my employment as a Community Liaison Worker in the Behavioral Health department of Kings County Hospital in New York. While my chief responsibilities involve following up with recently discharged psychiatric patients to ensure they are complying with treatment, the real satisfaction I get from this job is the few hours a day that I spend on the psychiatric unit itself. Here, I am able to interact with individuals suffering from a variety of mental illnesses with various degrees of insight into their condition. Some patients welcome my presence and are eager to learn what it is that I do at the hospital as well as share their concerns with me, others are withdrawn and require much more patients and time to get to know.

Moreover, I get to work hand in hand with the unit’s treatment teams and help to identify each patient’s unique needs challenges. While challenging at times, I have discovered just how remarkable it is to be able to provide even the smallest amount of aid and relief to a person struggling with a mental illness, and the experience has also shown me just how fascinating the therapeutic side of psychology can be.

My experience in psychology has been an amazing and rewarding endeavor, and I know that it is only just beginning. No matter the challenges and obstacles, I have known what my passion was since that first day of my senior year in high school, and since then this passion has never wavered once.