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BECOMING A PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENTIST: A SERIES TO SUCCESSFULLY APPLY TO GRAD SCHOOL AND HELP DIVERSIFY THE FIELD:

SESSION 5: SELECTING A PROGRAM THAT IS A GOOD FIT FOR YOU (LIVE Q&A, JAN. 31, 2023)

TRANSCRIPT

Shandol Hoover: Hello everyone, and welcome. I'm Shandol Hoover, Science Programs Officer at the American Psychological Association. Thank you for joining us today. Please let us know where you're from by saying hello in the chat. Today's program is the fifth session of *Becoming a Psychological Scientist*, a six-part webinar series about navigating the application process for doctoral programs in psychological science.

Applying to graduate school can be challenging and deeply personal, but it's worth the effort and we hope our time together brings you closer to success. Today's topic is selecting a program that is a good fit for you. Before we get started, I want to share a few quick announcements. First, many thanks to those of you who submitted questions for today's program. We'll try to get as many of those questions as possible. You can also ask questions during the program using the Q&A feature on your dashboard, and we'll add them to our list. Also, this program is being recorded. Everyone who registered will receive an email with a link to the recording in about two weeks. Without further ado, I will turn things over to Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler, Deputy Chief for APA Science Directorate.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Wonderful, thank you so much Shandol. Thank you everyone for joining us today. We're so excited to have this webinar and I am very excited to be joined by our panelists today. What I will do is provide some brief introductions for each of them, and then we are going to go straight to questions. There are many that were submitted in advance, and we'll start with those. Then we will keep an eye on the chat and answer as many of the ones that come in live as we can.

What I'll say to our panelists is that think of this as a dialogue today. I'm going to be asking each of you questions, but if someone else has something that they'd like to add or if maybe they have a different perspective, please feel free to do that, we want to have this feel like, I don't know, like we're live sitting in a coffee shop or something like that. I will start introductions with Bri Baker. Bri is a third-year doctoral student, and thank you for the wave, in the counseling psychology program at Columbia University. She was an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and graduated with degree in psychology and African American community health and resilience.

Her research interests broadly include sociopolitical determinants of mental health, positive Black youth development, and ameliorating social historical racial trauma through

community-focused program development. She was recently named a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Research Scholar, and is the founder of Girls Reaching Optimal Wellness, which is a school-based mental wellness program for young women of color in the Southern United States.

Next, we have Rafael Leite. Rafael is a fourth-year doctoral student in clinical health psychology at the University of Miami. He is committed to research aimed at understanding the relationship between physical and mental health and addressing health disparities. Specifically, his research interests include the prevention of chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes, and health promotion among underserved minority populations.

Rafael currently serves on the APAs Science Student Council, so welcome. Also joining us is Dr. Suparna Rajaram and she is distinguished professor of psychology and former Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs at the College of Arts and Sciences at Stony Brook University. She studies human memory and the psychological mechanisms of memory, transmission, and collective memory. Her research has been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and Russel Sage Foundation, and Google. She's also a Guggenheim Fellow, and happy to say that she also serves on APA's Board of Scientific Affairs so welcome Suparna.

We have APA's very own Derek Snyder, who is Senior Director of Science Partnerships Center Outreach here at APA, where he manages a broad portfolio of programs that serve behavioral scientists and promote their work. Derek is trained in neuroscience, in experimental psychology, and in his life part APA he was an academic researcher studying how sensory cues in food guide behavior. Again, welcome to all of you. I'm going to just jump right in with the questions so that we can get in as many as we can. Maybe Suparna I'll have the first one be for you, and that is, how important is it to identify with the subject of research that the professors are studying in certain programs?

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: That's a great question, and as these great questions go, there's actually no one answer, but I think it's important to know the pros and cons of each variation of how you might prepare, and that can help guide the choices you make based on the options you have. If you identify and connect with the subject of the research area of a particular program or a professor, that's an excellent match and you are immediately connecting with specific programs in ways that would be very, very helpful for you to get noticed.

That said if you are seen as being very particular about that area of research, professors who might be in adjacent areas or related areas, but the relationship is not immediately obvious to you, then you might miss out on their attention because they'll see your interest as being already solidified, and specific. You might actually miss the opportunity of casting a wider net for getting interview calls or getting offers. It goes two ways. If you're absolutely clear that this is what you want to study in your doctoral training, then, by all means, seek out opportunities in that domain. If you haven't been able to get those opportunities, you shouldn't worry about it too much because there are different ways to get noticed in an application pool.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Okay, thank you. Does anyone else have a perspective on that or have anything to add?

Rafael Leite: I would say when applying to work with a specific faculty member in the ideal scenario, you would have very similar but not the same research interest. I think it's also important to be flexible in terms of if you have a research interest that your faculty member of interest does some work on, but they also do some other work in some other area. As long as there's some similarity there, I think that'll be important because you definitely don't want to go to a lab that, as research is something that you have no interest in. You'll just end up being miserable and will not be helpful to your graduate school career and journey. I think having some overlap is definitely beneficial.

If it comes to the case where you end up joining a lab where maybe the interests aren't what you expected it to be, maybe the work that they're doing is different than what it seemed to be in the beginning. I think just thinking about what you can gain from that experience. Whether you're doing research in one area or another, you're still doing research. What can you learn from the research process itself and how can you apply that for the future when you decide to research your things related to your own interests? Learning what you can, learning what the research process entails, how to do a randomized controlled trial, if that's what your lab is doing, and gaining those experiences and then later on applying it to your own area of interest.

Dr. Derek Snyder: I would add that it's important to remember that this is a training experience. When you first get started in a professor's lab, you'll probably be working on things that are mostly in their portfolio and that they're interested in. You should treat those things as training experiences, ways to learn how to do the types of things that scientists in that particular field of endeavor do to perform their research. Then over time, as you develop experience and expertise in those methods and with that research lab, you will no doubt be encouraged to start to apply some of those things to questions that you're interested in. You'll, in the best-case scenario, be encouraged to carve your own niche within the lab. That takes time, that takes getting to know each other, that takes getting to know the staff of the lab and the personalities of the people involved, and the style of the professor and developing trust in both directions.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you. Thank you all. Let's see, the next question I'm going to direct to Brianna. What would you tell your younger self to be the one regret you should know when you choose a program?

Bri Baker: The one regret I should know?

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Yes. The one regret you should know. Yes.

Bri Baker: [laughs] Well, I think that, I wish I could tell my younger self to apply to more places. I think the previous question when I applied, I was really, really, really stuck on having to get this identical research fit and some of the other factors of choosing a program such as locations, such as even just making sure I get along with the research team and

with the advisor, making sure the school is a good fit, making sure that the school is engaged with the community, which is something I was big on.

Some of those things I didn't really pay as much of attention to as I wish I had, because they ended up being more important than having this really granular fit with a certain professor. I ended up in a great place, ended up in a place that I really liked, but I wish that I had had the opportunity to interview at other places because I really, really siloed myself thinking that I had to find someone who researched Black women's wellness and that was it, and that's a very small amount of people.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Right.

Bri Baker: I think that I definitely would've broadened my net. I also wish that I had had a little bit more confidence in my application. I think Suparna had said, there's other ways to highlight yourself and to stand out as an applicant, and I didn't really know that as an applicant. I thought that I just had to have the most superior GRE scores and research that already been completed and wasn't sure that there were other things about me that other people would find appealing. Had I known that, I may have been a little bit more confident in applying to different types of programs, to different people who I maybe didn't align with as much, I just would've taken more risk.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you for those insights. That's a good question. I'm wondering if anybody else wants to share what their answer might be.

Dr. Derek Snyder: I really liked the point about taking chances. In this line of work, you're always taking chances whether you are meeting with a new colleague or testing out a new research question. You should start that process of experimenting with what it is you want to do with your time and your life as quickly as possible, as early on as possible. Yes, you will make some zigzags and some potential errors along the way, but none of those errors is irreversible and that's how you figure out in this line of work what it is that you really want to do with your time and with your resources, so, take chances early and often.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you Derek. The next question I'm going to pose to Raphael. What advice would you have for someone taking a year off before applying to graduate school?

Rafael Leite: I myself took two years between undergraduate and starting graduate school. I think if someone were to take one year off, definitely getting as much research experience as they can. Thinking of timeline, one year can be a short amount of time. Let's say if you graduate in May or June and you apply in December, that gives you maybe six months or so to get that research experience. So, it can be a short amount of time. I think it's doable to add some things to your CV, but I think if someone were to have the time to add an extra year between that, that gap time would be even more beneficial because you're able to be involved in more research with the lab that you do join post undergrad, get more opportunities to publish, to present.

In terms of seeking out those research opportunities, I think ideally, we would like a paid position, if possible, but also thinking, if it's something that's in your means offering to

volunteer. So, I myself, after undergrad, I volunteered in a research lab because they didn't have a paid position, didn't have a full-time position, so I volunteered part-time and worked in a non-psychology related area part-time as well to supplement my income.

That later turned into a full-time paid position later on and I think I would also add not being afraid to cold email people. Sometimes we look a lot at listings, what research jobs are being offered, and that's something that I definitely did after undergrad when looking for research positions, but the position that I ended up finding was me just looking at a department's page, looking at the faculty members at their interest and just cold emailing some faculty members one ended up working out, and it's how I shot that position and gave me so much experience and made me competitive for graduate school. Yes, not being afraid to cold email people and reach out and just see if they have any opportunities available for you to work with them.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you. There's a related question that came in. There's some overlap, but I'm wondering if I could ask this question next to maybe get the student and the faculty perspective. Bri and Suparna, I'll ask for your thoughts. The question is, what are the pros and cons of taking a gap year before graduate school?

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: Bri, you want to go ahead?

Bri Baker: Sure, yes, I can. Just to give the student perspective, so as Raphael mentioned, one year is really, really really short and that's what I did. I had actually applied to graduate programs when I was a senior in college, didn't get a single interview and was like, oh man, what do I do now? I have to find a job. Finding a job was actually probably my Plan Z, but it ended up being the best thing that could have happened to me. I took a gap year working in the intersection of psychology and public health, so working at more of a large think tank type of place, doing a lot of different research projects.

I felt that during that time it gave me just the right amount of time I needed to refine my interests, to develop my confidence as a researcher and my confidence in what I wanted to study. It also broadened my horizons as to what is possible, so seeing other types of careers that psychology could bring me, I had never even seen psychologists working in the public health sector, so I thought that that was really cool. I only have good things to say about my gap year. I definitely didn't lose any skills as far as being able to write a paper because I was doing that on the job because I was fortunate to get a job in research.

I'm trying to think of a con of taking a gap year. I think that honestly, it's more personal. I felt really behind. I think that there's such a push for people to start PhD programs at 22, which is really strange when you think about it, but that was my line of thinking. I thought that, I had to go straight to graduate school. You see your friends going into medical school or law school where it is more common maybe to pursue a graduate degree right after. When you're entering something like the social sciences, a research degree, having more life experience, having more just experience working or in research, will only benefit you.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you, Bri.

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: These are all such important points that have been raised. I can only underscore every single point that has been made so far. I think taking a year off or two years off. I think the most important question to ask yourself is what am I going to do with that year or with those two years? You could go off and do something completely unrelated, that will hurt you if you apply to graduate schools, or you could go and do something like maybe you needed-- Not everyone can take time off, we all need to make a living.

Let's say that you ended up working in a supermarket, but you ended up managing their inventory. That's a very quantitative job. Can you look at that job as the skill that you will leverage when you will get into a lab where you have to organize people, you have to organize information, you have to be quantitatively oriented. You have to see what's coming in, what's going out. If you can relate those meta skills to graduate school, and you can say that in your statement, well, I needed to get a job, but here's what I learned in the job that I see as being applicable to graduate school, that's one way to handle. I think it's-- I want to frame this as a process versus a goal, right?

You have to look at the process of what you're doing in your time off, by time off I mean this gap here, and see whether that you can see for yourself how that process is taking you one step closer to what you will do in your doctoral training. The ideal situation would be what Rafael first pointed out, get a paid research assistant or lab manager position or something like that. That's ideal, but those are, obviously not as many number as there are people who want them. The second is part-time, the third is hourly. The fourth is if you can afford it after a 40-hour job per week, a few hours of voluntary research because that really communicates both your love and commitment for what you want to do. It is so powerful to read that in a statement.

It is so powerful to get letters from supervisors who are not even in the research area saying, I see the love shining in this person's intellect for these parts of the position and you can see how that relates to the doctoral training. You need to understand what's involved in doctoral training and connect it. This actually also addresses the question, Adrienne, that came out in the Q&A, what would be some of those other ways to stand out? These are some of the ways you can stand out by not losing focus on where you are going even as your path is taking twists and turns, as Derek said. Every part has stop goals that relate to your goal. If you can see it, you'll be able to communicate it. That's very powerful.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: So true. So true. Thank you, Suparna. Thank you.

Dr. Derek Snyder: Can I say something too?

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Absolutely.

Dr. Derek Snyder: I'm going to raise the thorny issue that what if you didn't plan ahead? What if you took that year and surfed on a beach in Hawaii or backpacked across Europe or did something that, on the face of it seemed like the getaway of a lifetime? You want to

think about how you can frame that experience in a way that indicates that you learned something about yourself that will help you in your journey ahead as a graduate student.

Maybe you met people from different cultures and developed an appreciation for learning about people from different cultures that could be useful for you. Maybe you worked out some personal issues that were really important to clearing your own head space and preparing you for the rigors of being a student. My point is that it's okay to do things in a gap year that are for you and that benefit your social and physical, and mental health. You do want to consider while you're doing those things, what you're gaining from them that will make you a better student when you come back.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you. Overwhelmingly I hear, there are just pros in terms of taking a gap year. Thank you. Derek, I am going to pose the next question to you on a completely different topic. That question is, how much do rankings or prestige of the school really matter?

Dr. Derek Snyder: Oh, that is a complex but important question. Especially in an environment where many people choose a college based on rankings and prestige, I'm going to go into this by saying that choosing a graduate program is different. It is a more personalized experience, and it is truly an experience that's going to prepare you for your career ahead in a lot of fundamental ways. Do rankings help? Of course, they do, on the face of it, rankings can always open doors, but it is far more important that you find fulfilling work with supportive people in an environment that truly moves you forward as a scientist. Rankings are something that you should consider only as superficial measures and almost as icing on the cake in the end. What you really want to be considering are questions like, is this a place where I want to spend the next several years of my life working hard and working with these individuals on this topic that I find fascinating?

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you, Derek.

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: May I chime in?

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Absolutely, yes, please.

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: I really cannot agree more with everything, Derek, you just pointed out on this question. Rankings, Ivy Leagues, names, all of these open doors, they give you a lot of social network. The perks are obvious, what's not obvious is whether you'll actually be happy and whether you'll actually be productive because you are happy, and whether you will feel as if you are growing as an individual, a scientist, and a professional. If you're in a very aversive environment, which could happen anywhere. It's not tied to rankings. It can happen anywhere.

The point is that if the environment doesn't match the growth prospect for you, then it's not going to yield the results you're looking for whether you are in a highly ranked program, the best-fit program on paper, or maybe something that was at the bottom of your list. Really try to not pay so much attention to that. As Derek said, that's icing on the cake. If it comes with the package, wonderful but if everything else in the package fits except that, then it's not anything that's going to hold you back in the long run. In the short run, it might

matter, but in the long run, this is a marathon. This is a marathon. You're not looking at how you're doing at mile 10, you're looking at whether you're surviving mile 26. That's the way to approach it. That is by being healthy and happy.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: I love that answer. Thank you. The next question is on the topic of admissions. That is if I'm offered a spot in one program, but wait-listed at my preferred program, how do I navigate that choice? I'm going to ask-- maybe actually Suparna, I'll ask you to start that question off, and then maybe Raphael if you could give us a perspective as well.

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: First I would say congratulations. If you have an offer and you're wait-listed, that's the kind of problem you want to face. It's actually not such a complicated situation as it may seem. It's also a very good diagnostic for the kind of mentoring and supporting environment each program will turn out to be. When you have an offer, tell them that you're considering other offers to come through and resolve them and a good mentor and a good program will say, "Yes, you should go for what's best for you." We hope that we will be best for you but obviously you have until April 15th, and you have every right, and you have every obligation to yourself to check out what's best for you. Let's keep this conversation completely open so you keep me informed where you are."

Don't hide things because if you've decided you're not going to your program, it's best for them to know because somebody else is wait-listed who might want to come to that program. That gives a very good measure of who you are. You are gauging, taking a very good measure of who your potential mentor or what the potential program is going to be like. This is actually a very good testing situation for the match you want to find in a program.

I would say that without leaving all your cards on the table, be as open as you can be, be as respectful of yourself and of them and of the potential applicants who are waiting in line to see where things shake out. I think if you approach it that way, you are going to score great points even if you don't get into a program, people will remember you. They'll say, "I want to be in your mentorship circle in the long run because you clearly know what you're doing and we want to see you succeed, and we want you to be the future of our discipline, even if we couldn't do this for you today."

I think being open is important, but I would love to hear the perspectives of the students on this panel because this is my perspective, but it's much more important to see how things look from your end.

Rafael Leite: Yes, I completely agree with everything that was said. I think it's important to keep in mind that you have until April 15th, and you shouldn't feel pressured to make decision before if you're not ready, if you're still waiting for that number one program that you're wait-listed for. I think if you do feel that pressure, as it was mentioned, it's a really good indication of the type of mentor that that person is. If you're feeling pressured to make a decision before that deadline, it's a really good indication of what your experience may be like if you were to choose to work with that mentor. I think just keeping-- not letting that pressure get to you. Once you have come to the final decision, thinking of--

release that offer as soon as you can so it can be offered to other people. I agree with all those points.

Bri Baker: Can I jump in to?

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Yes please.

Bri Baker: I think that this situation happens often just because the interview dates are different for each program, and the timelines for every program are also different. I remember for me, I was so scared to tell someone no because I felt like I was being like ungrateful or whatever it may be, but it really does all fall into place. Whoever is meant to be there will end up filling that position or being a student in that cohort.

The other thing that's something I didn't really consider is that there's going to be opportunities to work with whoever you want outside of your doctoral program.

Just because you enter one program doesn't mean that you can't connect with another researcher down the line or forge a relationship with someone. I'm still in touch with people that I applied to work with, but I wasn't accepted, or people who I had to unfortunately say no to. Psychology is really small, and chances are your niche of psychology is even smaller. Getting to connect with people, even if they aren't your direct advisor, is definitely a possibility.

Dr. Derek Snyder: Yes, I would agree with that as well. I was in that position as a graduate student coming into my first graduate program. I was fortunate to have really good advisors on both sides of this choice, who were really willing to talk through the issues and help me develop a better sense of what the communities were like for each program. They connected me with other students who were already in the program so that I could talk to students.

That ended up helping too, because the students then went back to their program and said, "Hey, we had a really good conversation with this person. We hear they're on the waitlist, and we think they'd be a really good fit for our program." That actually ended up making the decision a sweeter but more challenging one because I ended up being accepted by the wait-listed program, and then I had a real choice to make. Having that conversation with people at both institutions really helped me to develop a better understanding of the two environments that I was choosing between.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you all. This is a question related to the environment of grad school. I'm going to actually first pose this to our students on the panel, and Bri, I'll start with you. That is, "how should we evaluate the environment of the grad school we choose?" Not the academic environment or the work that you're doing, but rather the place itself, the city and town.

Bri Baker: That's such a good question. When I interviewed, it was early 2020. I had the luxury of going in person. I don't even know if that's a thing anymore, I don't know if graduate school interviews still happen in person or not, where you get to tour the campus, but it was very helpful. Even before that, before you even get to the interview stage, I spent

a lot of time on each program's website. I spent a lot of time researching the faculty, even the ones that I wasn't specifically applying to work with to get a handle on some of them on social media, just to see what kind of people they are. Evaluating a person as a human being, would I like to be in a space with this type of person or this specific person?

Once it got to the interview stage for me, I paid a lot of attention to how the students interacted with each other. Is it a competitive atmosphere or do people seem to get along? Do people seem stressed? You can feel tension in the air. Do students talk openly while their advisor is around, or does it seem to be a more tense atmosphere? It's something I looked at as well. For me, my identity, my racial ethnic identity is really important to me. Do I see other black students on campus? Are there opportunities to join a Black graduate student association? Am I going to feel supported? Again, me as a human was a really big thing for me as well. That extends beyond, unfortunately, what you can read in a diversity statement, or what necessarily is going to be posted.

Also, something I didn't do that I wish I did, was just reaching out to graduate students who are already a part of those programs to see what their experience has been like, and getting to ask them some of those questions that you don't necessarily want to ask during an interview, or ask your potential advisor, asking them if they like it. Are there things to do around the city? Do you have friends? Do you feel connected to the campus community?

Graduate school is so different than undergrad, so there may not be a whole bunch of student orgs. You probably don't have time to join them. At the same time, it is important to find spaces where you feel connected and where you are able to cultivate some sense of community. I would say definitely reaching out to people who are there, taking your time to research the atmosphere and the surrounding area, and also looking at faculty and just how they behave without their research hats on.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you Bri. Raphael, how would you respond to that question?

Rafael Leite: I think it's really important to consider your personal interests. For example, if you're into running, if you're into hockey, is there a running club in the city? Is there a nitty club? A hockey team, Ultimate Frisbee team, whatever it may be because you're a person outside of being a graduate student. Can the city and town fill your cup in those other ways? Also considering the demographics of the town or city that you are choosing to potentially move to. Is it more of a college town? Is it a town of retirees? How would you fit in in that way?

Other things that I think are important that people may or may not consider is the weather, the climate. Is it something that you can adapt to? Is it something that you're used to? Will you have to adapt to being in the snow for however many months a year? I think also distance from home. Is it easy to catch a flight from that city or town to go home for the holidays? Do you have to drive 3 hours to the airport and then take three connecting flights to get home? I think those are all important things to consider as well in terms of the overall environment of where you choose to move to.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: All super important points. Very good, thank you. Anything else that Suparna or Derek that you would add to that?

Dr. Derek Snyder: I would say that all of those things are very important. Some of those things are situational, some of those things are more existential. The existential things definitely take priority there. If you don't find that the city that you're considering going to can meet your needs as a human being culturally and in terms of your identity, then that's a big red flag that you should consider. There are other concerns though, that are a bit more situational, and it's important to realize that you're not going to be here forever.

You're going to be in this place for a few years of your life and you're going to spend a lot of that time working hard. Weather is important and can have some health implications. On the other hand, if you've never lived in a place that has winter, maybe this is a good opportunity to try that. You may find that you're not a winter person and that's okay, but now you know. There's a fair amount of exploration that you'll want to do here, and a fair amount of new experiences that you'll want to be open to. You also do need to be aware of how the place that you're considering can meet your core needs.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you, Derek. Thank you all. Let's see, there are a couple of questions that are about advisor/mentor. Question is, "What are some important things to consider when deciding if a potential advisor is a good fit?" Another question, "What's a green flag? How do you know that the match is good, and the fit is good?" I'll ask first for a volunteer for that question before I say, pick a box.

Rafael Leite: I'd say one thing that comes to mind is whether any kind of activities that the lab does together, for example, if the faculty member does any like lab, Banja activities, things outside of research, do they post-holiday parties, whatever it may be, I think I really appreciate that personal side of team bonding and working together. I think, talking to graduate students when I was applying, and hearing that they were these events, and these initiatives that were put on by the lab, really made me feel like it was a secure place where people, got along, and they wanted to spend time with each other outside of the workspace.

Dr. Derek Snyder: I really liked the answer, and it speaks to the issue of what kind of culture and community is your potential advisor trying to create and part of that is, does the lab enjoy spending time together doing things potentially outside the lab, but also, how is the lab run internally? If this is a lab where everybody is in their own silo, and nobody ever talks to each other, and everyone's hiding their lab notebooks, then that is a potential red flag because then you're not getting a great sense of community from all of these people around you, you're in fact being encouraged to hide your work and to be very secretive and I don't think that that's a really healthy way to become a colleague. You really want to be taking a look at the type of environment that the PI, the advisor that you're considering taking on is trying to cultivate.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you. This is a good question. What are my options if I choose a program that turns out to be a poor fit? Like, what are the options? What do you do? Maybe I'll start with Derek, and then invite others to also answer the question if they'd like to.

Dr. Derek Snyder: Okay, this is a very thorny issue and if you end up finding yourself in it, you're going to be asking yourself a lot of difficult questions, namely what are the consequences if I step out of this program that I've invested time and energy in? Will people see me as a quitter? Will it kill my chances for joining another program or another lab and I'm going to argue that if handled right, this can actually help you. Everyone in this field knows that becoming a scientist is a very personal and a very complicated and very challenging journey and sometimes, the situation you find yourself in just isn't meeting your needs.

One question to ask yourself is, is this situational?

Maybe you just don't like writing or maybe you just don't like doing certain things in the lab and I would say to that, that we all have parts of our jobs that are less pleasant than others and there's a certain amount of learning to cope with the things that you don't like that this is essential in any career but then there are deeper issues where maybe you're experiencing conflict with people in your lab or with your advisor and you've tried to work these out in informal and amicable ways and it's not working out. My response to that would be that you have options, and you should seek trusted counsel, in terms of other students and other faculty to discuss what those options might be for you. You should consider carefully whether or not changing programs or labs is a good idea.

If you're in an abusive situation, or one in which you're being made to feel less than then absolutely, your first obligation is to yourself, and you should start to develop an exit strategy, that exit strategy should be developed in a diplomatic fashion because you don't want to burn bridges. You want to have a professional and collegial conversation with your current advisor about the possibility that things aren't working out and how would they recommend that you proceed.

If you make them part of your exit strategy, chances are, they're going to understand that your interests have diverged and in many cases, they're going to try to help you find a solution that works for everyone, they don't want to develop the reputation that they aren't great people to work with and they also don't want to force you to stick around if you're miserable, because that also can prove to be detrimental to the overall success of the lab. To encapsulate all of that, you have options, but treat them as professional issues that need to be handled with care and with diplomacy.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you, Derek. Any other thoughts on that thorny question?

Bri Baker: I just want to underscore and retweet everything you just said, I feel very similarly as someone who just switched advisors last month, it doesn't always have to be, I guess, a bad thing and I think that there are those feelings of okay, I'm unhappy, or things aren't working out, where do I go from here? Do I look like quitter? Am I going to be a failure, all this sort of thing, but involving trusted individuals and your current advisor and, again, that exit strategy or that changed strategy that you were talking about will make a world of a difference because ultimately, the program wants to graduate people, they want to graduate, successful and happy people. Advisors, for the most part, usually are good

people who accepted you with the intention to train you and if they can't, they're going to try and find you somewhere that can, and I think that that really helped me on this very thorny issue.

Things are going to happen in a program that may upset you, also it's a long time of a lot of work and so it's easy to get stressed out, it's easy to have a lot on your plate. I think differences are going to happen, I think challenges are going to happen, so maybe not jumping to just like leaving the program is like your number one strategy, there are a lot of options out there if it's the need to cultivate community, are there people in surrounding areas or other students that you can connect with? If it's a matter of not getting the opportunities clinically or research-wise that you want. Again, is there someone else that you can connect with that may be able to supply you with those? If it's fit and location that's bothering you, are there places that you can go where you do feel like you are connected, or where you can pursue interests that have more to do with things that make you happy? I think there are a lot of options that are difficult to see when things are so difficult, but they are they're

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Very true. Thank you.

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: I suppose there's a couple of things I want to say. First of all, every single point that Derek and Bri made just now are so critical and important in thinking about the situation, because the very first thing you want to do is to not think about it as anyone's failure. I think if you start from that point, that you've just discovered that there's some mismatch for you and it's a question of how you're going to negotiate that mismatch because you could have gone to a professional job and found that it's a really bad match and then you want to leave that but you want to stay in that industry, you want to do the same thing, you don't want to make enemies, you don't want to upset people, you don't want to upset yourself, but you want to find a path where you can get to a better place or a better match. If you think of graduate school in the same way, I think it's really true, neither students nor advisors want it to go bad and there is no reason for it to.

The other point I want to make is it does help to take time to understand what it is that's not working for you. Actually, it's surprising how often we attribute the situation to one thing when it's actually something else. Maybe you really enjoy the stats courses, but you really don't enjoy certain other types of research. Now, yes, to get a doctoral degree, you have to do everything, but it is possible to identify that there are these things that you just don't like, and there are these other aspects of the training you really like.

Have that conversation and you might be surprised how willing the program might be to adjust the situation for you within the parameters so that you can actually finish the degree in a way that capitalizes on your strength and interest without completely leaving the requirements behind. I think that also is a way out. Then you go get a job that matches those skills rather than going to a research or an academic position. There are many ways to capitalize on the training without actually reaching the same goal that you started out with on day number one because as Derek said, "This is the process of discovery." You want to maximize your connections, not see it as failure or success.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you so much, such good answers to that question. Very helpful. Thank you. Let's see, I think that maybe we have time for one more. Two of them are related, so I'm going to try to combine these. These are questions about the nature of the experience or what you need to get into programs. Research, job experience, and scores and how important these things are and where to put your effort if they're limited efforts and time. I don't know if you can say what's more important, but if you can speak to how important is it really to get those best GRE scores or get that direct research experience? Any takers for that?

Dr. Suparna Rajaram: I want to jump in. I think that getting research experience is perhaps the most important variable for doctoral training. I think increasingly, at least from where I'm sitting, that's been the most important factor that I see in graduate admissions. I've been a professor now for 29 years. The GRE scores in certain programs, they're important. In clinical doctoral programs, they are much more important. In other programs, they may or may not be. It's much more in the context of, does this applicant understand what graduate school is all about?

The most unique training aspect of graduate school is this doctoral level research training. Any experience that one may have picked up ahead of that training prepares the applicant much better to hit the ground running. A lot of the difficulties in the first year come up because the research environment is so unique and so different that if one has not had any exposure to it, the entire year is just spent trying to absorb that, and that can give a sense of falling behind. It isn't actually just in case you're in that situation. It's great learning, but I think that I have seen as being very important. I always emphasize it to my undergraduate students to try and pick up some type of research experience or take courses where hands-on research is emphasized, something that you can use to signal that you understand what happens in doctoral training and you have a good view of it.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Thank you, Suparna. [silence] Any additional thoughts about that question before we close? The hour goes so fast.

Dr. Derek Snyder: I absolutely agree with what Suparna just said. The skills that you bring to bear on being a scientist are skills that are challenging to develop anywhere else. It's hard to know whether being a scientist is going to be right for you unless you do some work as a scientist and learn about those skills and learn how well you acquire them and how well you enjoy them. Getting that research experience is by far the most important indicator, both for a potential graduate program, but also for yourselves in determining whether you will flourish at becoming a scientist.

The GRE scores, the GPA, I think most programs these days understand that there are so many factors that go into developing as a scientist that not all of them are related to age-old standards like grades and scores. While those things will be taken into consideration if there are, say, lapses or trouble spots in those numerical indices, you should take the opportunity to explain those and to help the people who are evaluating an application understand some of the challenges in your own life that might have led to those outcomes. That also might have prepared you in other fundamental ways for the challenges of being a scientist.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: Derek, speaking of research experience, before we go, I'm wondering if you might want to say something about SUPER, which has just been blasted out for folks in the chat.

Dr. Derek Snyder: Hey, Adrienne, it's like you're asking me a leading question.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: What?

Dr. Derek Snyder: SUPER everyone is our brand-new summer undergraduate psychology experience in research. This is a fellowship program that we have launched this year to offer stipends to undergraduate students who have linked up with a faculty mentor. We will pay for a \$4,000 summer stipend so that you can spend time in the summer working with a researcher. We will also throw in some money for the researcher as a token of appreciation for their time. There'll be some career development seminars that we'll be hosting with these fellows.

Perhaps best of all, in terms of your trajectory as a scientist, your summer experience will culminate in developing an abstract to be presented at the following year's APA convention. We're helping to get students from underserved backgrounds some important research experience that they can also use to develop presentation skills and meet some other scientists and some peers that will be a good professional network as they move on their journey to becoming a psychological scientist. We've put the link in the chat. We hope to see some applications from all of you. The deadline is February 15th, so if you are interested, please go to the website, check out the application, and feel free to contact us with any questions you may have. Thanks, Adrienne.

Dr. Adrienne Stith Butler: You're welcome. Thank you, Derek. We're just about out of time. I want to say a huge thank you to Bri and Raphael and Suparna and Derek for your time today and for participating with great answers to some great questions. Thanks to the audience for joining. I'm going to turn it to Shandol to close us out.

Shandol Hoover: Thanks so much for joining us today. Thanks to our panelist. We appreciate everyone's questions and the wonderful discussion. We'll be sending you a one-minute survey after this broadcast. We value your feedback, so let us know how we're doing. Feel free to share topics you'd like us to cover in the future. You can email us at science@apa.org with your recommendations. We also invite you to visit our webpage. I just dropped a link into the chat. Text us all previous recordings in the series and we also invite you to follow *Science Spotlight*, our newsletter that has opportunities, events and funding and research and things going on in the field. Thanks so much and we wish you all the best. Have a great day. Thank you.