I am a PhD candidate in the Personality and Social Contexts area studying stress and close relationships. Different people respond differently to stress. Some people may turn to others, whereas others may engage in aggression or social withdrawal. In my research, I am interested in why people respond differently to stressors, especially within romantic relationships.

Theoretical work suggests that differences in stress responses are related to differences in the evolutionary challenges that men and women faced. Specifically, women were responsible for caring for offspring, creating the adaptive challenge of protecting both the self and the offspring. Therefore, there were greater selection pressures for affiliative stress responses in women, instead of aggressive or withdrawn responses that may compromise the safety of the offspring. However, another theoretical work suggested that affiliative responses may result in selective advantages for men as well. In my research, I am interested in examining predictors of within-sex variance in stress responses.

With the help of the EHAP Research Award, I was able to work on developing a lab paradigm to examine stress responses in couples for my dissertation. Currently I am involved in pilot testing a stressful lab paradigm. Results from this pilot study will inform my study procedure as I proceed with my dissertation work.