

Karoline Trovato
Library Award for Undergraduate Research

One of the most meaningful experiences of my undergraduate academic career at the University of Maryland (UMD) has been completing an independent research project through the Department of Psychology Honors Program. Through the support of my faculty mentor, coursework, and resources provided by the UMD library system, I designed an innovative video intervention to teach young women the power of equitable relationships, confront their assumptions about women's roles, and enable them in their relationship and vocational aspirations. Over 100 women on campus have viewed my intervention and initial feedback suggests its effectiveness. For example, one student wrote: "I think communication in a relationship is vital and sharing these tips with women is a great way to teach a new generation of women how to stand up for themselves."

I began my project by curiously exploring literature on topics related to the psychology of women. To contribute to psychological science, I first had to understand what we already know and where further research is needed, so I turned to the library's online search tools. I used PSYCinfo and similar databases to search collections of information applicable to my interests. I also connected Google Scholar to my UMD library account, further expanding my search outlets. After identifying several articles of interest, I met with my thesis advisor, Dr. Karen O'Brien, to discuss my ideas. Together, we identified questions regarding women's relationship satisfaction that would inspire and guide my search through a wide array of publications to eventually write an exhaustive literature review, create hypotheses, and design a study, all of which the library provided invaluable support towards through direct access to research articles, interlibrary loans, computer access, and a quiet space to think and work. Ultimately, my genuine curiosity, passion for women's equality, and Dr. O'Brien's guidance prompted me to explore women's relationship satisfaction, partner communication, and family work distribution. This was an enormous undertaking and would require years of work, yet I felt excited to embark on this new challenge and learning experience.

To complete the exhaustive literature review for my proposal, I made use of certain criteria to narrow my search. I excluded research older than 10-12 years, to ensure I cited relevant rather than outdated research. I also ensured that my sources were largely based on U.S. samples, since my research would examine women in the U.S., and I needed my sources to reflect this. The library's database search features helped me select sources meeting these criteria by allowing me to tailor my search based on year and population.

As I identified potentially relevant sources and read abstracts, I made particular use of interlibrary loan. I requested articles I did not have access to through interlibrary loan services and continued reading. After finding relevant articles, I often would comb through the reference list copy and pasting titles of additional articles of interest into my database search bar. This technique proved particularly helpful in identifying sources to inform my theoretical framework and literature review. I discovered theories other studies used potentially applicable to my own project and research I would have otherwise missed. For book sources I did not have online access to, I reserved them for pickup and then used the index and table of contents to hone my search through hundreds of pages. The library's resources and my research techniques streamlined my process of discovery and inquiry allowing me to freely and efficiently explore my research questions and examine the literature. Not only was my research process aided by the

library's access to data, but I also have spent countless days and hours in McKeldin Library when I needed a quiet space to work or access to a computer when my laptop broke senior year.

My mentor, Dr. Karen O'Brien, provided invaluable support in the research process helping guide me each step of the way. As I exhausted the literature search, Dr. O'Brien helped point me in different directions to narrow my search and effectively comb through the wealth of research related to my thesis topic. She assisted me in synthesizing the information I found, identifying areas of strength, and areas further inquiry was needed. My research on relationship communication culminated in the development of my own model of couple communication I taught to women through the video intervention I created. Dr. O'Brien's research expertise and encouraging mentorship improved my knowledge and confidence regarding scientific inquiry and helped me effectively engage in the research process.

Completing this research project was an immensely valuable learning experience providing insight and a springboard into my desired career path as a counseling psychologist. Each step of the research process confirmed my appreciation for scholarship as I learned to exhaust the literature to develop the groundwork for my study and use library resources to my advantage working smarter, rather than harder. I have applied these skills to other research and class projects teaching younger students to utilize these resources as well. In analyzing, evaluating, and applying sources to my research project, I gained a better understanding of research methodologies and advanced knowledge and skills in counseling psychology, which I have used to empower women and prepare myself for future research and scholarship. I was thrilled to recently accept an offer of admission to UMD's Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program, through which I intend to continue my advocacy and research for years to come.

Reflecting back on my experience, one thing I might change is access to scientific research that often felt stonewalled by paywalls and availability barriers. Having access to all American Psychological Association publications would have reduced the number of steps required to access an article typically locked behind a paywall. Interlibrary loan largely reduced the inaccessibility I encountered, although without this resource so much of the research would be unattainable for me. Ultimately, I am extremely grateful for the immense access and support I received through the library's resources assisting me in my efforts to contribute to psychological inquiry and more deeply understand and advocate for equitable relationships through my thesis project.