

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award

Reflective Essay

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Searching & Refining the Topic

Through the use of library resources, we decided to research this topic after learning that self-consciousness has not previously been considered as a prevalent factor of mental health. Pre-existing research was scarce, so we saw an opportunity to expand the knowledge. We completed background reading to understand the conceptualization of self-consciousness and how much information currently exists on the topic. Other information used to refine and influence our topic selection came from personal experience with self-consciousness and hands-on interactions with children and adolescents. We were able to narrow down our topic more specifically to how self-consciousness influenced depression rather than mental illness as a whole based on research and studies that supported the correlation to depression. The consideration of the scientific method helped us recognize what information was relevant and why refining our study topic was an effective and necessary step in our library research.

Research Strategies

Our overall strategy for finding information consisted of looking for relevant research that supported our topic and expressed how further research was still lacking. To do so, we made use of library databases to find reliable resources, as expressed in the Library Research Tools section below. Group collaboration was also a key factor within our research strategies. We found it very important to consistently work together in developing our research proposal to be clear and effective, as if to be written from one voice. Our goals within this research strategy were shared by everyone in our group throughout the process and reflected our desire to fill the gap in the literature with our study. We were able to organize our research activities and keep track of our sources/information by the use of an excel spreadsheet template developed by our research instructor. The completed spreadsheet consisted of where we got the information, the

correctly formatted citation, instruments/research strategies used in the study, key points we found useful, and a paraphrased form of the information. At no point during our study did we find it necessary to modify our *strategies* for finding information, although the *dependent variable* of our study was narrowed down to be more specific. We never found it necessary to modify our strategies simply because they were effective and adequate for obtaining the needed information and resources. Nearly all of our resources were determined as equally significant or adequate in contributing to the research process. We were able to use these resources to develop our project by providing information in support of our hypothesis and helping us to predict our outcomes. Our project was further developed by the use of quotes and paraphrased information to build on our existing knowledge.

Library Research Tools

To learn about library tools and how to find information on our topic area, we had the privilege of listening to K-State Academic Service Librarian, Kendra Spahr, present a lecture on how to use academic research databases and how to gain access to such databases through our affiliations with Kansas State University. This new knowledge included how to narrow our search through the effective use of key words, filters, and type of source. The use of these library tools helped us to find credible, relevant, and supportive resources for our study.

We focused on examining existing literature found through the use of Google Scholar, and the database of Sociological Abstracts found on the K-State Libraries page and ProQuest. We decided to use these specific library research tools based on the fact that these databases contained the limited amount of information that currently exists regarding our study topic. To find a range of information, we completed a variety of searches with different key words pertaining to specific qualities of information.

Finding Information

In terms of difficulty finding any particular type of information, we had to dig deep to gather information for our study due to the research topic not being commonly studied. It was also slightly challenging to find information supporting our hypothesis in adolescents (ages 9-12), as there have been many similar studies done on adults. We solved these problems or challenges by starting broad with our research. Our research began with a look at mental illnesses in general, allowing us to then direct our findings towards depression. We also still took into consideration the studies done on adults and were able to utilize some of this information to help us recognize the need for this type of study to be done on adolescents. Any difficulties faced within this project were taken as a part of the learning process. We found our initial searching techniques to be effective because they guided us towards the direction of considering the necessary approaches to developing our proposal.

Evaluating Information

To decide whether or not to trust the information we found in our sources, we considered: what institution the information was coming from, the credibility and background of the authors, and whether or not it was published within the last ten years. We have learned to do so through the progression of our research classes and training. These factors played a role in our decisions about what sources we would take the time to read carefully and use appropriately. Our methods for evaluating sources remained constant because we entered this study having the prior competence in knowing what to look for in a credible source. These expectations never changed.

Conclusion

This project provided a learning experience that reflected the influential abilities that effective research can have when taken seriously. Knowing how to complete effective research is

a skill that requires patience, commitment, and a desire to learn or explore information. We truly valued our time spent developing this project and appreciate the opportunity to share our work. We would like to thank you for any time or consideration given to our project as an applicant for the Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award.