Metro students present work at national psychology conference

Sub: Metro’s psychology research colloquium provides a training ground for students

Ed Day

[Yu5187lu@metrostate.edu](mailto:Yu5187lu@metrostate.edu)

Turning everyday questions into noteworthy research seems far-fetched, but not for those in the field of psychology, which, broadly speaking, is the study of people and their behavior.

So that’s exactly what Megan Siedschlag and Katelyn Schwieters, students in Metropolitan State University’s applied psychology master’s program did when they presented their research at a national conference in late January. Their proposals for the Society of Personality and Social Psychology (the SPSP) were reviewed and accepted.

Siedschlag and Schwieters are in the University’s applied social psychology master’s program. While both majored in psychology as undergraduates, the focus of Metropolitan State’s program has been an eye-opening experience.

“It’s totally rocked my world,” Schwieters said. “The progress I’ve made here is enormous.”

For Siedschlag, who earned her bachelor’s here, being a confederate in an experiment using human subjects as an undergraduate research assistant, provided the wow factor to the topic.

Applied social psychology involves using research in a community to answer a questions in a specific area of human behavior, including but not limited to political psychology, gender studies and body image, and marketing and branding.

Both students had a chance to warm up for the national conference by conducing full presentations in front of about 50 people at the University’s fifth annual Psychological Research Colloquium and Workshop last November.

The colloquium provides a forum for students to share research while also serving as an introduction to the field, according to faculty coordinator Mark Stasson, who is also director of the University’s Center for Psychological Research. The most common misconception new students have is that psychological research is limited to library research and case studies, according to Stasson, but it is more dynamic and interactive than most people realize.

This year’s colloquium had a new wrinkle, concluding with a workshop on applying to graduate programs, which both Siedschlag and Schwieters said is important for pursuing a career in the field. And attending events like SPSP is a great way to network and generate new ideas.

But the driving force in applied psychology will always be an interest in people and behavior.

**Siedschlag’s Research: Domestic Violence**

Siedschlag’s presentation on “The Role of Sexism in Perceptions of Domestic Violence” started when she realized that almost every notice for domestic abuse hotlines and shelters were all geared toward women.

“I’m really interested in gender differences and stereotypes,” Siedschlag said.

Her research explores the differences in perceptions in same-sex relationships (both male-male and female-female) and male-female couples (including if the gender of the victim makes a difference). People answered survey questions on a 1 to 7 scale – strongly agree to strongly disagree – regarding a variety of scenarios involving a slap or a punch as the form of violence. The results of some of the 420 participants taking the survey are still pending, but Siedschlag has already noticed one strong trend.

Preliminary findings include discovering that violence perpetrated “in same-sex couples is not perceived as domestic violence.”

She can build on this research to conduct future studies of domestic violence as her findings could raise additional questions. Other forms of physical violence can be analyzed as variables, as well as branching off to verbal and emotional abuse, Siedschlag said.

**Schwieters’ Research: Smartphones and Stress**

There’s nothing like getting home from a hard day of work and unwinding by scrolling through your social media feed. Or so Katelyn Schwieters thought.

“I ended up feeling more stressed,” Schwieters said, adding that it created “a state of constant chaos.”

Not to mention a small bit of irony, as Schwieters works as a yoga instructor.

Sparked by personal experience, it was a matter of looking at the issue on a broader scale and ask “Why are people plugged in all the time?”

Her study identifies three aspects of being plugged in: addiction, feeling a rush from being plugged in; dependency, the actual behavior of checking notices; and obsessive passion, the cognitive aspect of constantly wondering what is happening on social media (“I wonder if anyone liked my photo?”) even if your phone is not with you.

The measure of techno-stress melds the three components discusses above.

Because social media is new, Schwieters had to construct a method of measurement. After consulting about 10 other scales, she developed her own – taking relevant queries from the others and adding specific questions of her own.

The short answer to her research is, “Indeed, yes!” people who are plugged in all the time are more stressed that they would be otherwise.

The 1,000 people in the study were broken down into three general groups: Generation X, Millennials and the next generation—the group that doesn’t know a world without smartphones and social media at all.

Again, as initial research, the findings are a little general, but exploring the differences among those three groups with distinct life experiences regarding their relationship with social media is important to know.

And possibly be a topic for next year’s SPSP conference.

Photos

Photo file: Psych.jpg

Credit: Kevin Miller

Caption: Katelyn Schwieters and Megan Siedschlag.

Photo file: Psych Club Sign-Brain.jpg

Credit: Kevin Miller

Caption: A brain waits to be studied in the Psychology Lab.