Research: Dr. Sylvia Beyer, Psychology

My research focuses on gender, self-perceptions, stereotypes, STEM, and the intersections of these topics. I have spent almost two decades investigating the causes of female underrepresentation in Computer Science, focusing on psychological factors such as self-efficacy and stereotyping. Many of my publications are on this topic. But in this short summary I want to focus on the three projects on which I am currently working.

Over the last few years I have broadened my interest to women’s underrepresentation in STEM in general. Many students have contributed to this research, most notably Hannah Yonke, who received a summer stipend through the Dean’s office to work with me this summer. After collecting data for almost two years comparing college students’ performance in and attitudes towards Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Math, and English, we are now analyzing the data. Hannah has become a veritable statistical whiz. It has been exciting to see her progress over the last three years.

I have also been working on a paper on college students’ lack of awareness of occupational segregation and the gender pay gap. Actually, the paper consists of three studies I conducted in three different decades at Parkside (1996, 2007, and 2012). The sad upshot is that the lack of awareness has not changed one bit over those 16 years. I guess not enough students are taking my Psychology of Gender class.

Another exceptional student who just graduated this May, Yo-Fan Callewaert, got me involved in a completely different project, forcing me out of my comfort zone by quite a bit. Her research was born out of a class project for a seminar on Psychology Research. Students had to develop a hypothesis and the methodology to test it. Yo-Fan wanted to test whether females’ attire would affect men’s interest in them during speed dating. And since she loves to cosplay (for the uninitiated, like I used to be, this refers to dressing up as the character from a popular TV show, movie, or cartoon), she wanted to do this at a comic con. Her literature review was so thorough and methodology so well developed that I decided to help her bring this project to fruition. I convinced a large comic con, Wizard World in Chicago, to allow us to carry out our research during speed dating sessions. They declined at first, but I persisted, and they relented. I also applied for and received CRCA funding to purchase video cameras and wrote a URAP for Yo-Fan to support her financially. We attended Wizard World last summer and brought three confederates with us to wear three different attires (seductive, demure, and casual) while attending speed dating sessions, which we video and audio recorded. We then spent two semesters coding and analyzing the data, which involved 7 students. Yo-Fan presented this research at the Parkside Research Day, UW-System Research Symposium in Stevens Point, the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in North Carolina (to which I accompanied her, sponsored by the Provost’s Office), and the Association for Psychological Science in Chicago. We also submitted the study for publication in the Proceedings of NCUR. This has been one of my favorite projects for a variety of reasons. The idea germinated in a class I was teaching and was enthusiastically nurtured along by Yo-Fan’s fellow students, many of whom eventually participated in the project as confederates or coders; a real joint effort. It was a student’s project and her enthusiasm carried it. I loved being the facilitator. This is an excellent example of how relatively little money from CRCA, the Dean’s Office, and the Provost’s Office can result in an incredible project coming to fruition. And I haven’t even told you the results of the study yet. Ask me when you see me.

Working with students on research has enabled me to combine two of my great passions: teaching and research. My students have taught me a lot and watching them blossom into excellent researchers has been a privilege.