2012

2012 Research at Andrews

Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/researchbrochure
Don’t think about the white polar bear.
And now that you’re trying not to think about the polar bear, please proceed to read the rest of this article. You may find yourself not wanting to finish the article, perhaps due to something known as ego depletion. “We think of self-control as a muscle,” says Arianna Lashley, senior behavioral sciences major. “In the short term, it can be depleted, but in the long-term, it can be strengthened. Ego depletion suggests that after completing one task, we deplete our finite resources of self-control enough so that mastering the self-control to complete a second task is much harder.”

Arianna’s research draws on the principles of ego depletion, and “my own twist was how religion can affect restoration of self-control.” Working under a faculty research advisor, she uses a multiple-object tracking task (MOTT) and selections of theologian Jonathan Edwards’ writing to measure ego restoration after positive and negative religious associations. Her first study tried to produce the effect of ego depletion by using the white bear task like you experienced above. “You’re thinking about the white bear again, aren’t you?” But the results didn’t come out quite as expected. “The white bear task should have worked—all the literature said it should have—but it didn’t. We changed a lot of variables, but kept getting the same results. This may have been caused by the population we were testing—college students with a lot of self-control.”

Arianna then wondered if religion was actually motivating and restoring self-control. After asking her subjects to rate their emotions, she had them read one of two passages: one from Jonathan Edwards’ fire-and-brimstone sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” and a more hopeful one from Edwards’ “Resolution.” Then she had them rate their emotions and respond to the passage they read, and do several MOTT tasks to measure their self-control score.

Surprisingly, the group that read “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”—a negative passage expected to deplete self-control—had higher visual attention scores. The “Angry God” group may have done better “perhaps because of emotional factors, but more likely because they felt increased autonomy.” In their responses, that group rejected the character of God depicted in the passage and wrote about their own beliefs. “Since the perception of greater autonomy generally produces more self-control, we think they may have performed better because they actually substituted their own ideas about God, instead of simply agreeing with the ones presented.”

On May 3, she presented her research at the Michigan Psychological Association Conference. Arianna’s research has garnered the two presentational slots—one at the MPA conference and the other her Senior Honors Thesis. “Although my research didn’t work at first—I actually got the opposite effect than the literature suggested—I’m learning how to do research,” she says. “When I took these surveys in my research methods classes, my efficacy was low. Going through the research methods classes really helped my anxiety. I realized that research wasn’t easy, and it was time consuming, but it was definitely doable. And I discovered that I really enjoy doing research.”

More than 50 Andrews University students and faculty attended the 118th annual Michigan Academy of Science, Arts & Letters Conference at Alma College in Alma, Mich. on March 2, 2012. Many students presented their own research at the conference, others presented jointly with their professors, and a few awarded simply to gain the experience. The University annually brings students to the MASP conference, but according to Gary Burdick, associate dean of research, twice as many students presented than in previous years. Two of the presenting students were Earhart Emerging Scholars: Sarah (Gane) Burton and Kristina Penny. They sat down to talk about the scholarship, their research and future plans.

FOR: What are Earhart Emerging Scholars, and how did you become one?
KP: My teachers nominated me, and at the time I didn’t really know it was a scholarship. For my job, I fill out and sign a lot of papers, so when they gave me the forms I signed them but didn’t realize until later that it was a scholarship.

SF: Last fall, I presented my research at a symposium where we met and discussed work with the Madaba Plains Project, and two months later I got the Michigan Academy notification. The award covers all our expenses registering for and traveling to the conference, as well as a $725 award, and requires that we attend and present our research.

FOR: Describe the research you presented. Did you work with a professor or did you choose your own topic?
KP: For my senior thesis, I worked alongside two other seniors on an auto project that involved working with students on research. I like doing research, but I like working with students doing research more.

SG: My research, overseen by Kristin Witzel and Øysteinn Laflaiana, grew out of an undergraduate research assistantship to Dr. Laflaiana in the spring of 2011. I’m exploring national identity in Jordan, especially the effects of Palestinian immigrants on concepts of national identity. Jordan itself is a relatively new state, created in the early 1900s, and has quite successfully begun creating its own identity. Jordanian national identity celebrates tribalism, which is essentially finding one’s identity in a tribe rather than a nation or ethnicity. The problem they’re having now is that with the influx of Palestinians, a more agricultural people, what does it mean to be Jordanian? When I was in Jordan two summers ago, I conducted interviews with Jordanians and Palestinians—five Jordanians and three Palestinians, and interacted with many more that didn’t want to be interviewed. There hasn’t been much case-study research since 2003, which is surprising since a lot has happened in the Middle East since then.

KP: Also worked in Jordan, documenting the work of the Jordan Field School with Patrice Jones, assistant professor of communication. Our project was an exposé on what’s happening in the Jordan Field School. The Field School prides itself on involving many different departments—archaeology, anthropology and computer science—to just to name a few. Each department is conducting a different project, and each site is connected to design and construct a visitor Center at Tal Khan. Part of our project was to do some ethnography and find out what the community needed from the Center—a visiting question like, “If there were a center, would you go? What would you need it to do? What about your culture do you not know or would you like to find out?”

SG: I chose my project because of a conversation I’d once had with two Jordans. I asked them if there could be such a thing as a Palestinian Jordanian. One said no, and the other, who was younger and had more experience with the West, said yes. I was very interested in the difference of opinion.

FOR: Sarah, what did you discover in your research?
SG: In general, the celebrations of Jordanian tribalism make the Palestinians feel excluded, since they are not natively tribal, but a more agricultural people. The Palestinians I interacted with felt that Jordanians are prejudiced and treat them as second-class, and don’t allow them to participate in the government. On the other hand, Jordanians feel that Palestinians, who actually hold some government positions, are usurping those positions. They believe that Palestinians only want a Palestinian passport and papers. But most importantly, Jordanians are afraid that the Palestinians, who have no state of their own and whose identity is now largely centered on displacement, will try to turn Jordan into a Palestinian state.