For many students research can mean many different things and can cause many different emotions. So what’s my relationship with research? Let’s just say it’s complicated.

I first grew to love research during my junior year of high school when I was required to submit a project to our school’s History Fair. I formed a group with two other students and we created a documentary entitled, “Innovations in Sanitation: A History of Chicago’s Sewer System.” I know what you are thinking... a documentary about sewers? Yes, I made a movie documenting the amazing innovations Chicago made to their sanitation system, the technological advancements they made in reversing the Chicago River to make the sewage flow away from the city, and overall the major improvements this caused for the city’s public health. I realize now that I was definitely destined to be a public health major because I found this whole topic to be fascinating. Regardless, after more hours of hard work than I can count, my group documentary made it all the way to the National History Day in Washington DC and was placed third in the nation. This experience was exciting and it was so worthwhile to see our hard work pay off.

Fast forward to college, where after being accepted to the Commonwealth Honors College, research started to become an overwhelming and daunting concept that I tried to push out of my mind. I do not know why I all of a sudden became frightened by the idea of research, especially since I had enjoyed it so much during high school. I think this fear partly had to do with hearing about junior and senior students and the amazing research they conduct at UMass Amherst, thinking that I had to fit my own interests into a preconceived idea of what “research” really was. As a social science student, it became especially difficult to think outside of the idea that hard science research is the only kind of research. As I started to think about what I would want to do for my Honors Project, I became even more terrifed and unsure.
These restrictions began to lift when I began working as a research assistant in the Work and Family Transitions Project (WFTP). WFTP is a psychology lab that studies new parents, mainly mothers, and their transition back to work after they have a baby. I could not have pursued a better lab to match my academic interests and because of this, I began to have new ideas about my own capabilities and interests in doing research.

Now, as I am in the second semester of working on Multidisciplinary Honors Project, I have a completely new idea of what successful research can look like. Drawing on my passion for public health and maternal mental health that I developed through my internship experience (see my blog post: What I Do Makes a Difference for more information on my internship with MotherWoman) and research assistantship, I have been able to incorporate my academic interests and personal experiences into my research. It was these experiences that helped to give me the inspiration and drive to work on such a large research endeavor.

My #ResearchStory is unique compared to many other CHC students because I completed my Honors Project through the Citizen Scholars Program, which you can read more about in one of my previous blog posts. The first part of my project is a policy analysis on the barriers to care women suffering from postpartum depression face and includes in depth policy alternatives to this serious public health problem. The second half, which I am currently working on, is using Marshall Ganz’s community organizing framework to engage students, faculty, and the administration in creating campus change by increasing the accessibility for students to the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health.

Now for my next research hurdle: presenting at the Undergraduate Research Conference.

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