

NAME: Simone Roth – Health Group – Thyroid Cancer Campaign**RESEARCH METHODS: What did you learn about the various research methods?**

This term, I have learned a great deal about the different research methods and what their pros and cons are. When surveying the empirical literature, what became quite clear was that scholarly research is different than research that is funded and carried out by the cancer charities (e.g. Canadian Cancer Society). I learned less about the campaign aspect from the cancer charities and more from scholarly and peer reviewed journals. Also relating to the literature search, it became clear that not all published articles are high quality. This really underscores the fact that in the preliminary phase of research, getting good information is challenging. It takes much more time than one can imagine to find valuable information than one initially estimates.

In the second part of my project, which required data collection, I realized how difficult it is to construct a questionnaire that will yield meaningful data. A great deal of time and care has to be invested in the wording of items on a questionnaire in order to avoid a) confusion and b) biased responding. This allowed me to allow identify flaws in other questionnaires. It was, however, necessary to create a survey in order to start to put together a new campaign and apply the information to thyroid cancer.

Another thing that I learned from this experience has to do with the validity of people's responses. On my poster presentation day, I created a brochure that had a QR code/link to a survey evaluating the proposed campaign and prototypes. Many individuals filled out the survey on their mobile devices right in front of me, and it made me wonder about the validity of responses on any questionnaire. In particular, I wondered if people would fill it out the same if they weren't standing right in front of me. On my first questionnaire regarding breast cancer advocacy objects, the opening message on the survey said that the participants responses would be confidential and requested that they answer as honestly as possible. The survey on the brochure which asks participants for their thoughts/comments after seeing my proposal did not have this information on the opening message. Similarly, I also wondered how this could affect my questionnaire results.

RESEARCH HABITS: What did you learn about your own research habits? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What methods did you find most productive in terms of your own interests?

The beginning process was the most difficult for me to effectively and efficiently search for scholarly information. However, once I located articles that were truly relevant to my topic, I was able to identify the appropriate keywords to search for information. I also found written communication to be challenging...it was very time consuming...and when I was in a zone I am not 100% comfortable (e.g. research literature), I found it overwhelming at times.

I also felt that it was very challenging to engage in the process of critical synthesis. After I had acquired a great deal of information, because of my lack of experience, I found it difficult to make decisions about what should be included and what should be omitted in the podium presentations, written proposals, and especially in the poster presentation. This took much more time than I anticipated, and I found myself second guessing myself often.

The selection of the research question, for personal reasons, motivated me to do my very best. In reflecting in the things I have chosen to research in the past, I realized that I almost always (when given the choice) select topics that are directly meaningful to my own life, and I feel this is one of my strengths.

I am also confident in my oral communication skills. I thought that my podium presentation and the poster session were not comprised by my nervousness, lack of information, or fear.

Finally, my artistic abilities and technical knowledge allowed me to put together a feasible, sound and creative campaign and product(s).

RESEARCH PROCESS: If you were to begin the research process again would you approach it in the same fashion or would you use a different approach? Explain why.

It is my belief that I would follow precisely the same process of examining what is out there, reflecting on it, critically evaluating it, and then constructing an original piece of work that is based on prior knowledge. This process seems to make the most sense to me.

Another strategy would have been to first start with a focus group, where I talk to people, and ask them what are their associations to thyroid cancer, what their knowledge of thyroid cancer is, etc. Afterwards, I would explore the literature. Since this is a huge area of research and big business, exploring the literature seemed like the most logical process.

RESEARCH TOPIC: What were the most important things you learned about your topic during the course of this research?

As someone who is in the middle of fighting thyroid cancer, I came into this project with a lot of knowledge regarding the medical information, statistics and facts about thyroid cancer. Most of this information came from my surgeon and oncologist after being diagnosed on October 16th, 2013. However, I learned a great deal about the sociology and economics of illness. We live in a culture where diseases and disorders can be branded. Before this project, I was not aware of the business side of things.

APPLYING YOUR RESEARCH: What impact did doing this research have on your interests? In what context was this made evident?

Completing this research project was extremely valuable and meaningful for me. Ever since I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, I have struggled with trying to explain why, or what caused something like this to happen. The reality is that there is no explanation, and this makes certain days very long and challenging as different thoughts float around in my head. However, creating a thyroid cancer campaign in all three stages provided meaning and allowed for something positive and educational from my diagnosis.

FURTHER LEARNING: What do you feel you need to understand better in order to improve the quality of your research?

If I were to proceed with this project, I would need to conduct further research on the characteristics of the young adult demographic. I would want to know about their purchasing power, what they spend it on, if their aesthetic preferences are different than adults, and what the strategic product placement would be in retailing (magazines, internet, facebook ads, etc.)