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Non-Traditional Lifestyle Choices Regarding Marriage and the Family in the Southern United States

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Project Title: Non-Traditional Lifestyle Choices Regarding Marriage and the Family in the Southern United States

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Proposal Identifier: RCEU19-CM-CLL-01

Project Description:

In our current cultural milieu, there are massive shifts in cultural and political beliefs related to all aspects of daily life. In this study, I will work with a student to do a deep dive into how individuals living in the American South are changing their perspective on what is a “traditional” or an ideal lifestyle. By interacting with participants using rich, interpretive and qualitative methods, we will surface changes in how both men and women of various socio-economic classes and experiences judge: 1) the choice to be married and when, 2) the choice to have children and when, 3) the practice of taking the husband’s last name as a new family name, and 4) if the father can take the role of stay-at-home parent and the mother can work full-time. This project will document not only how traditional family life is changing but the complex emotional work that goes in to these intimate decisions that are ultimately projected broadly to society. Participants will be interviewed individually and asked to participate in focus groups to share their own thinking on these important decisions, and also how they would advise friends and family to act. We expect the data to reflect new perspectives on how time spent in school, ability to support a family on one income, purchase a home, desire for greater flexibility/ individual freedom, etc., are shaping modern family life.

Work Already Done on Project: A student in CM 670 Advanced Research Methods used a mixed methods approach (survey with open ended and likert scale questions) to measure opinions on non-traditional choices and if the respondent felt the choice was acceptable. The survey was completed by 67 individuals, including 19 male (32.2%) and 40 female (67.8%) respondents. The majority of participants (67.2%) had a four-year degree; this convenience sample may not reflect the general public. The new study will offer a more representative sample of Southern American beliefs by recruiting a wider range of education levels, ages, and genders. Our current study will go deeper than the polite norms of tolerance for marginal

behaviors to surface implicit beliefs through discussion and examples. The study will be completed over the summer term with a poster presentation and article prepared for submission to a peer reviewed academic journal.

Specific Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes:

During the end of the Spring term, the student will help prepare the Institutional Review Board application for the study. During the Summer term, the student will assist with preparing a literature review and research protocol. During data collection, the student will also shadow me for the initial focus group to learn how to successfully facilitate the discussion, taking notes and ensuring good capture with our audio-visual equipment. The student will then have the opportunity to run their own focus group. During the final portion of the term, we will systematically code our data looking for themes, descriptive frames, and any patterns that emerge which explain changing beliefs and attitudes surrounding marriage and relationships in Northern Alabama. As a result of this work, a journal article will be prepared for submission to the *Journal of Marriage and Family* (published by Wiley-Blackwell).

Requirements:

Required: Communication Arts Major

Required: Completed CM 370 Research Methods or have documented experience with qualitative research methods

Mentorship: The student will join several other RCEU students working in the eValuation and User Experience lab over Summer 2019. Dr. Joy Robinson, Dr. Ryan Weber, and myself will all be present throughout the summer to help with data collection, analysis, and writing. We will specifically have a Monday morning meeting each week where the entire lab shares our goals for the week; this will be followed by a Thursday afternoon meeting to show progress. Based on the student's personal research interests, we will also attend local professional events that will bolster their network and professional experience.

Prior Award:

In the Summer 2018 session, Zoe Torres worked with me on a project titled “Sentiment in Situ.” Zoe successfully completed the literature review, identified a textual corpus for analysis, collected the tweets specific to that topic, analyzed those tweets for their sentiment using her native language knowledge. She then compared her findings to an automated approach to sentiment analysis where the tweets were translated from Spanish to English then automatically coded as “positive”, “negative”, and “neutral.” She prepared a poster presentation for the RCEU research day, and there is a manuscript in progress for her results to be submitted to an IEEE/ACM journal on sentiment analysis and machine learning. As part of mentoring Zoe, we also attended the local Cybersecurity summit held at the Von Braun Center where she attended the job fair and learned of many internship and scholarship opportunities.