

Qualitative Research Methods – Projects for Fall 2018

Stereotypes and search behaviors: Millennial, Gen-X, i-Gen? Principal Investigator/Client: Dr. Lisa Rose-Wiles

There have been many attempts to characterize individuals belonging to the categories of Millennial, Gen-X or i-Gen, who comprise the majority of today's college students. Stereotyping generations is clearly problematic, disregarding diversity associated with factors from ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status to individual personality and life experience. Two commonly reported traits are of considerable concern to librarians: expectations of immediate gratification and emphasis on saving time even at the expense of appropriate or accurate results. These are related to the broader phenomenon of 'satisficing', or making do with what is "good enough" for the task at hand. Though practical in today's high-paced, multi-tasking world, this search behavior is not a good approach to scholarly research. Choosing and citing the first few articles found after a brief search will likely not help students understand a complex question or produce a balanced and well-crafted research paper. The issue is especially problematic in this era of rapid (and often unreliable) communication and "fake news".

Dr. Rose-Wiles seeks the assistance of a student-led research team to conduct a literature review to help frame the research question, particularly in theoretical terms, and develop a strategy for an exploratory study of how SHU undergraduate students react when confronted with barriers to retrieving the full text of articles through the library. Do they conform to their generational stereotypes? If they persist in the quest for full text, how do they go about it? How much variation does our student population exhibit, and are any patterns apparent? The team will also have the opportunity to present their results at the 2018 Petersheim Academic Exposition.

Psychological and cultural differences between liberal and conservative Students: An exploratory study.

Principal Investigator/Client: Dr. Mark Horowitz

We live in polarized times. As red and blue states divide – and political rhetoric grows increasingly hostile – social scientists are turning their attention to the institutional, cultural and emotive differences between the left and right. Indeed, liberals and conservatives appear to differ not just in politics but in personality; not just in beliefs but in cognitive styles, characteristic emotions, and even food and leisure pursuits.

Dr. Horowitz seeks the help of a research team for an exploratory study of the behavioral differences between self-identified liberal and conservative students at Seton Hall University. The research team will aid Dr. Horowitz in a number of activities: 1) develop a strategy to identify students who clearly regard themselves as liberal or conservative in their political philosophies; 2) help fashion a brief survey instrument on personality and cultural differences based on current research in political psychology; and 3) administer the survey to self-identified liberal and conservative students to explore possible differences between the groups. Gathering and analyzing the resulting data will contribute to ongoing discussion in social psychology on the roots of political polarization in the United States.

"Right choices" in the grocery aisle? Ethnographic explorations of individual food shopping choices.

Principal Investigator/Client Dr. Michael Taylor

How do people make the "right choices" when shopping in the grocery store? More interestingly, perhaps, is the question what are the "right choices" to consider? Though food choices are highly personal, they are shaped by social and cultural factors. Though most studies of shopping behavior focus on economic/budgetary concerns, I am interested in how health and environmental concerns, broadly defined, relate to food perceptions as well as food selection behaviors at the grocery store.

Dr. Taylor seeks the help of a research team to develop an exploratory study to obtain qualitative data on these aspects of individual food choices. Ideally, the research will draw on ethnographic principles but will not be limited to this. I am also interested in how the use of visual data approached anthropologically can help us gain a deeper understanding of this research area.

Building a methodological and interpretative framework for generating an "isotopic profile" to enhance identification of forensic cold cases. Principal Investigator/Client: Dr. Rhonda Quinn

Stable isotopic methodologies have been applied to various tissues of human remains in forensic contexts for the purposes of individuation and matching to missing persons. The utility of each chemical fingerprint for inferring geographic origins and movement, diet specialty or mixing, and aspects of health depends on several variables encompassing questions of what exactly the isotopic system reveals with respect to specific tissues, what time periods in an individual's life are averaged with isotopic analyses of specific tissues, and what resolution is possible within geographic and cultural landscapes. As with many methodologies, wholesale use of forensic isotopes can lead to oversimplification of data and erroneous interpretation(s).

Dr. Quinn seeks the help of a research team to characterize food traditions across various human populations and cultures residing in the New Jersey area. This can be done through a variety of methods from diet diaries to menu descriptions or others of your own design to capture food preparation and consumption differences across different food traditions and dietary practices. Identified food cultures will be characterized with $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values, which will then be used to gauge if cultural practices can be inferred from hair of forensic cold cases in the US.