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Re: Sabbatical Leave Report for Spring 2022
Name: James Joseph Dean, Sociology Department
School: School of Social Sciences
Date: August 1, 2022

During my sabbatical leave in the Spring 2022 semester, I pursued the collection on in-depth interviews with beauty and fitness influencers on the social media platforms Instagram and TikTok. I will detail this data collection and its resultant research activity.

First, I conducted 25 in-depth interviews with beauty and fitness influencers on the social media platforms of Instagram and TikTok during the sabbatical leave. I interviewed 13 beauty influencers and 12 fitness influencers. The interviews discussed how they choose the beauty or fitness niche, their goal in growing their follower count on each platform, and their ability to gain brand sponsorships from their content practices. Obtaining in-depth interviews with influencers is a difficult process, as they receive many messages and do not respond regularly to requests to be participants in scholarly research. I solicited interviews from over 100 potential respondents and this yielded only 25 interviews.

Second, I drafted a conference paper presentation on the preliminary in-depth interviews I have conducted with the beauty influencers during the leave. In this paper presentation I compare the content creation practices of gay male makeup artists and beauty influencers to the straight female makeup artists and beauty influencers in my sample. This paper presentation is being given at the Pacific Sociological Association conference in Seattle, Washington in the Spring of 2023.

Third, I drafted a research proposal for a summer RSCAP Fellowship, seeking funding for the summer of 2023. In this proposal, I asked for funding to finish analyzing the in-depth interviews and digital ethnographic observation I have been conducting with gay and straight makeup artists and beauty influencers. This research proposal would allow me to finish the drafting of a scholarly journal article to be submitted at the end of the summer.

Finally, I am thankful to have had this opportunity to work on a new research agenda, to prepare a new conference paper presentation, and to draft a journal article. This new research agenda combines my previous research interests in the sociology of gender and sexualities with a new focus on social media. This has been a very gratifying time in my career and I appreciate the sabbatical leave as a way explore and grow my research agenda in the new fields of digital sociology and social media studies.

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