

HUM 473 Festivals: Culture in the Making

Ethnographic Observation Assignment

Your assignment is to observe a populated public setting where you are able to blend in unobtrusively. Choose something like a coffee shop, a park, a public tennis or basketball court, a skate park, a waiting room, a health club, or an airport lounge area. This exercise will be most manageable if you choose a setting in which you are unknown to the people whom you observe. Your emphasis in this assignment is to observe, rather than be an active participant in the scene (you may, of course, find that the individuals whom you are observing refuse to let you go unnoticed).

You must observe in the setting for at least one hour. Do not take detailed notes while there UNLESS your note-taking is extremely unobtrusive. Some of you will choose settings in which you cannot take any notes or can only jot down key observations to jog your memory. Try to imprint scenes and statements in your memory. Use this opportunity to observe to look closely at events you would ordinarily dismiss. After you have observed for an hour, rush to your computer and reconstruct the events you witnessed during that hour in recorded (typed) fieldnotes. Do so with as much detail, information, and insight as you can muster. Provide as much support for your statements as you can.

What is happening in this setting? What are people doing? Look for the ways people appear and act within the scene. Describe these ways as fully as possible. What do you learn about these people's self-concepts and identities from what you observed? How might the actions and interactions you observe reflect something about this particular scene and the people within it? How, if at all, are status, power, and hierarchies played out in the scene? *For each preceding question, what indications and evidence do you have to support your claims?*

Plan to spend two to three hours writing up your fieldnotes per hour of observing. ***The major portion of your work for this assignment should be fleshing out your fieldnotes.*** After you have completed your fieldnotes, then answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of this method of observation? How have you experienced these strengths and weaknesses in regard to this particular setting?
- 2) What strengths and weaknesses do you possess for conducting this kind of research in this type of setting?
- 3) What ethical problems, if any, do you sense in doing this kind of research in this kind of setting?
- 4) **(OPTIONAL)** How would you compare the quality of the data you gathered with that in any earlier observation you have done? Specify the points on which you base your comparison.
- 5) If you were to do this exercise again, how would you improve ***your*** approach?

Post as blog on the Festivals course website:

- 1) A short description of the setting and the kind of participants within it (2-3 paragraphs).**
- 2) Your fully developed fieldnotes with date and length of observation time(s).**
- 3) Your responses to the five questions above (no longer than 500 words or two pages).** You will be rewarded for detail and candor.

--Grateful acknowledgement is made to Dr. Kathy Charmaz for permission to use her SOC 452 assignment.