

# Introduction to Sociology

## Research Project 1

### *Field Observation*

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#### Standard 2 — Culture

Students will examine the influence of culture on the individual and the way cultural transmission is accomplished. They will study the way culture defines how people in a society behave in relation to groups and to physical objects. They will also learn that human behavior is learned within the society. Through the culture, individuals learn the relationships, structures, patterns and processes to be members of the society.

S.2.1 Define the key components of a culture, such as knowledge, language and communication, customs, values, norms, and physical objects.

#### **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS**

- receive information and relay thoughts clearly
- interpret and apply ideas of self and others
- speak, read, write and listen reflectively and critically in English

#### **LIFE-LONG LEARNERS**

- continually gather information to expand his/her world view

#### **QUALITY PRODUCERS**

- establish and use standards of quality in artistic, intellectual and physical work
- effectively organize, analyze and assess essential data

#### **CRITICAL THINKERS**

- research, discover and describe data
  - analyze and evaluate the validity of data
  - synthesize data to create informed, rational conclusions
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#### Objectives:

- Students will understand the function and importance of participant observation as a research tool
- Students will learn how to observe situations, detect patterns, and take field notes

#### Instructions:

- You and your partner will observe the movement of people at a fast food restaurant or other public place. Be sure that you go together. Your report will be due on 16 September so you will have plenty of time. Participant observation means that you will engage in customer behavior while observing the behaviors of other customers and personnel. The first step in your project is to make a one hour visit to your fieldsite to take fieldnotes.
- You will take double entry field notes – left column will be non-judgemental observations, the right column will be a record of your thoughts and feelings
- On 16 September you will turn in your notes and a two page typed report based on those notes. Your assignment should be 2 pages long, typed, in 12pt font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. **Page 1:** Type up a single page narrative of your observations from your fieldnotes. The following information should be included in your notes but will not *all* be in your narrative.
  - (a) Date, time, place of observation, and weather
  - (b) Describe the location and what other places/businesses are around your location
  - (c) Describe the managers and employees (race, gender, approximate age, clothing, etc)
  - (d) Description of the customers at the location and those that arrive while you are there
  - (e) Description of interaction between employees and customers, employees and other employees, employees and management, customers and customers
  - (f) If parking lot is available, types of vehicles in the lot

## Page 2: Reflection

In the second page reflect on your experiences in the field:

- (a) Describe your role at the fieldsite during your observations. Did you participate in any activities or otherwise interact with the participants? Did you spend most of your time sitting, watching, thinking, or writing? While in the field, did you take head notes, scratch notes (jottings), or full fieldnotes?
- (b) What did you primarily focus on during your observations? Why were these issues particularly noticeable to you? What kinds of issues do you think you may have overlooked? (Pay special attention to them the next time you go to the field.)
- (c) What interesting sociological or cultural issues emerged during your observation and your reflections afterward? What generalizations can you make so far about how society and culture work in your fieldsite? (Even small, seemingly obvious preliminary observations are fine; they'll get you started.)

We will conduct a roundtable discussion of the assignment.

Count the people who are in your location at the beginning and the conclusion of your visit and place them in the following categories:

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male Female	Male Female
<b>Race / Ethnicity</b>	White African American Asian Hispanic Other	White African American Asian Hispanic Other
<b>Approximate Age</b>	Infant – 5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21-30 years 31-40 years 41-50 years 51-60 years 61-70 years 71+ years	Infant – 5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21-30 years 31-40 years 41-50 years 51-60 years 61-70 years 71+ years

## Sample fieldnotes

Monday, May 3, 2010; Carl's Junior; 11:45 a.m.; main dining area area

Observation	Notes and comments
<p><i>Two girls are sitting at a table in about the middle of the restaurant; they seem to be Hispanic. One has long black hair in a ponytail, a black sweatshirt, faded jeans with holes in the knees and frayed at the bottom, and flip-flops. The other has long light brown hair with streaks, a white T-shirt and shorts, and flip-flops.</i></p> <p><i>They both hold their cell phones and look at them while they talk. The girl in the black sweatshirt has an iPhone. She starts reading a message out loud and asks the other girl, "Do you have this one, Linda?" Linda responds, "No, not that one. Can you send it to me?" The first girl sends her the message and Linda checks her phone (a Nokia) to see if she got it. Then Linda asks her friend (whose name I don't know) if the friend has a particular message that Linda has on her phone; the friend says she already has that one.</i></p> <p><i>They read and send each other messages for about 10 minutes. Linda's friend reads aloud a message about a romantic relationship: "While you're gone I'll be a sun without a sky, an abandoned empty house, a church without a god." Linda asks her friend to send it to her. Then the bell rings and the girls put their phones in their backpacks and go back to the classroom building. They don't seem to have noticed me at all even though I was near them, next to a group of other students who were talking on the grass.</i></p>	<p>Text messages seem to be central to the interaction.</p> <p>I should check to see if boys do this sort of exchange too. Do all girls do it, or only certain girls, or certain types of girls?</p> <p>It seems like these are mostly chain messages, not personal messages. Where do they get them from? Always from friends or some other source?</p> <p>Are there different kinds of messages? Jokes, poems? Are they all about romance? Next time I'll ask them to show me some of the messages.</p> <p>I felt really uncomfortable listening to their messages but they didn't seem to care who heard them.</p>