

Soc. 487-Assignment 3-Modes of Observation

Due 11/20/08

The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize you with the process of conducting qualitative field research. To begin, choose a social setting where people interact with one another-this must be a public setting, you should not be trespassing on people's private lives. The interaction does not have to be overt and vocal. It could be a library, traffic intersection, line at the DMV, or a busy bar or restaurant. After choosing your setting, observe social interaction for one hour on two separate days. Think carefully about why you chose these two times-you will need to justify them in your write-up. If you are actively participating in the social setting (pick-up basketball game, for example), you must decide if you are going to inform others of your role as a researcher or not. This is probably not necessary in some social settings, such as restaurants. When you begin observing, be sure to take notes on important events. If you are participating, you may have to make mental notes and write down the activities later. After you have finished your observation, briefly describe the events. Be sure to include your role, if any, in the events. Because you are doing social research, not telling a story, you should also include some conclusions. For example, if you are observing individuals at a coffee shop, are individuals that are alone likely to order more or less food than those in a group. If you are in a library, what is the reaction of patrons to a loud individual? These are the sorts of insights into society that field research is so valuable for.

Your report should include:

1. The reason for choosing the particular social setting (a particular research question, for example).
2. A brief description of the social setting you researched.
3. When you did your observations (dates and times).
4. Your role as a researcher (participant or bystander) and why you chose this role.
5. A description of what occurred while you were observing.
6. Conclusions that can be drawn from your observations. These can be related either to your research question (if you have one), or a general discussion of your findings.
7. Please include your field notes.

The report (not including field notes) should be about 2-4 pages double-spaced.

Disclaimer-Under no circumstances should you be involved in any interactions that are illegal and/or dangerous. Do not observe activities that individuals wish to keep private-all observations should take place in public settings. If you are unsure, please ask me.