

PY/ED 912: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: GENDER, RACE & POWER GUIDELINES for ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

1. **SELECT a site** within the community about which you would like to learn, preferably one in which you are currently working and/or hope to work. For example, you might pick a nearby street corner in this community, where schoolchildren hang out after school, or the local grocery store where folks who use the community center buy their groceries, or ... The idea here is to find a site that would give you access to observe the daily activities of at least some members of the population with whom you will be working **WITHOUT** making your presence intrusive. Be sure to identify a circumscribed location where you can spend some time and where you anticipate there will be activity, that is, people from the community will frequent the location and be engaged in activities. Also be sure that you have a clear definition of the “community” that you are observing. Also note that you will be taking **FIELD NOTES** and should seek a strategy that is not offensive to those in the site. Finally, be sure to clarify ethical considerations and complete a Human Subjects Review Application prior to entry.

NOTE: If you choose to do this observation **WITHIN** the site where you hope to collaborate (e.g., inside the community center, etc.) it is highly likely - depending on the site - that you will need to seek permission to enter the system and make your observation. This may not be the case if you are already a member of the community in which case you can make your observation as part of your daily activities. The idea is to systematize your observations about a setting and its activities or social processes.

2. **OBSERVE the physical location.** What is the area like? What kinds of objects (buildings, benches, trees, flowers, bus stops, etc) are present? What is the flow of traffic, that is, is it busy, etc.? Private and/or public transportation? etc.

3. **OBSERVE the human interactions.** Who are the people who come and go? How old are they? Are they alone or with others? In what kinds of groupings? Note their gender and race or ethnicity? To what extent is there a mixing of age, gender, ethnicity, social class, and/or race in the site? With what frequency do people come into the site? How long do they stay? What do they seem to be doing? Is there a pattern to their interactions?

4. **OPTIONAL:** You may be able to identify an **INFORMANT** at the site who is willing to share her/his observations of the site with you. If so, you should ask him/her to make the same kinds of observations you have been making and note these. This is **NOT** an interview. You are interested in another person's observations of the site that you are observing.

5. **WRITTEN SUMMARY** (double-spaced, typed, 8-10 pp): Begin with your observations of the site, first, physically and, secondly, in terms of the human interactions that you observed. Be sure to be as explicit as possible, sharing details of the space, the time of day when you made the observation, your behaviors and/or activities while in the site, and the people who entered, exited, the patterns of interactions, etc.

Next, consult at least one source that discusses ethnography and/or observational strategies for field research and discuss this article/book in light of your experiences. Summarize your “findings,” that is, what you learned about this community and your interpretations of your

observations. Discuss them in relation to the “theory” of observation you have identified. What have you learned from this exercise about the community with whom you hope to engage? What questions do you have about the community based on these observations? about ethnography? What additional information do you need prior to engaging in a participatory action research project with this community or another form of research with people who live within the community and frequent your site of observation? What ideas do you have about how you might go about getting these questions answered?

Finally, include a reflexive statement, that is, your reflections on the experience of observing this site. Summarize what you have learned about yourself as a researcher. What has this method taught you? How did you feel "in context"? What, if anything, changed in you over the time that you spent in this site? What would you do differently if you were to do a second observation? Or seek to learn about the community using an alternative methodology.

Be sure to include your typed up field notes, your HSR Application, and any additional tables, charts, etc. in the **APPENDICES** to your paper.