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EDTC 809
September 28, 2015

Observation Report

Overview

Observation is a highly skilled activity which should not be taken lightly by the researcher and should be approached in a rigorous and structured way. It is a methodology that is used for exploring the social world using detailed descriptions and involves consideration of validity, reliability and ethics. There are two types of observational activity: participant and non-participant. For participant observation, the researcher immerses herself in a situation alongside target participants (Brewerton, 2005, p. 96). The observation is unstructured (i.e. without preconceived ideas or code or foci of investigation and is guided by analytical codes or checklists) and the focus is usually at the macro-level. For non-participant observation the focus is directed at the micro-level (Brewerton, 2005, p. 97).

Observation involves all of the senses; it is not just limited to what the eyes can see or what the ears hear. Observing is an active process and involves more than just recording data from the observed scene or place. The brain is actively engaged and the interpretation of activity is based on the researcher's perception. Participant observation is often termed ethnography which means capturing the 'native point of view' and is mainly anthropological in thrust (Schwartzman, 1993). This project is based purely on non-participant observation because no recorded video material was used to complete the observed activity. The aim of the paper is to observe and record in as objective a way as possible, target events and occurrences, using whatever unit and level of analysis is required for the achievement of the research objectives. The observation will not be framed theoretically (Bales, 1999). A checklist was used to record the data and observation can be used as long as the researcher feels that it is an appropriate way to elicit the evidence wanted (Brewerton, 2006, p. 98)

Below is the observation report prepared by the researcher recording the social interaction of males and females at a restaurant eating lunch and dinner at different periods over a period of two days.

Observational Notes

Observation topic: Do undergraduate females talk more when they eat than undergraduate males?

Population: College students

Purpose: To determine which gender (male or female) chat more when they eat.

Locations/Sites: McDonald's, Wendy's and a college cafeteria (Independence Café) – the study was conducted in natural “real life” setting(s) and was disguised, so the non-participants were not aware that they were observed.

Method: Mixed (both Qualitative and Quantitative)

Sample size: 100 (total number of persons observed)

Dates: The week of September 22-25, 2015

Day 1

Date: Sept 22, 2015

Site: Independence Café

Start: 9:00 a.m.

Note: Did not have to request permission to be at this site.

End: 10:00 a.m.

Data Collector and Typist: Antoinette Pinder-Darling

First observation

Café has television (looked like a movie was playing)

Gender: Male (White)

Age: 50's range (Student/Professor - not sure?)

Dress: Uniformed (White coats)

Appearance: Looks presentable, clean-shaven and hair groomed. They were eating breakfast (one had toast and eggs and the other had a bagel and some drink (tea or coffee, didn't look like juice?))

- Chatted with another male – early 20's.
- Dressed alike
- Both males seemed to be engaged in conversation, one had a cell phone.

Second observation

Gender: Female (Black)

Age: mid-20's range (Student – dressed business-like)

- Chatted with another female – late teen's
- Both persons seemed to be talking about an issue
- One female talked while the other was listening, eye-contact was given, there seemed to be some emotion expressed.

Third Observation

Gender: Female (Black)

Age: Looked like late 20's possibly early 30's

- Chatted with another male
- They were talking about US politics, then about math and science classes
- The conversation seemed to be getting heated based on body language
- They were seating at a table for four and both were eating grits with eggs (one had sausage) and the other had tuna.

Day 2

Date: Sept 23, 2015 **Site:** McDonald's Restaurant

Start: 12:00 noon **Note:** Requested permission from Manager to conduct observation.

End: 1:00 p.m. **Data Collector and Typist:** Antoinette Pinder-Darling

First Observation

Gender: Male (Black)

Age: Appeared to be late teens (18...19...possibly)

- Sitting with another male having lunch

- One of the male wore glasses and the other looked briefly at his cell-phone
- One of them had a fish sandwich (the food container was visible) and the other drank a coke.
- Both males seemed to be engaged in the conversation. They paused briefly, ate and they began talking again.

Second Observation

Gender: Female (Black)

Age: Early 20's

Dress: Both females were wearing pink tops

- Talked while eating and it sounded like it was about a relationship
- One of them mentioned that the temperature was comfortable
- One only had French fries.

Day 3

Date: Sept 24, 2015 **Site:** Wendy's Restaurant

Start: 1:30 p.m. **Note:** Did not have to request permission to be at this site.

End: 2:30 p.m. **Data Collector and Typist:** Antoinette Pinder-Darling

First Observation

Gender: Female (Black)

Age: 30's

- Talked about how the semester was going with another female
- Mentioned work-study schedule
- The other was concerned about how she could finish her papers.

- One non-participant ate a wrap sandwich and drank a raspberry drink

Second Observation

Gender: Male (Black)

Age: early 20's

- Looked at tablet while eating a salad
- Talked intermittently with female and another male, then two other males joined them after five minutes into the lunch.
- He mentions that he wants to go to the library to study

Third Observation

Gender: Male (Black)

Age: 18 or older

- Looks as if a female he was chatting with took a 'selfie'
- Another female was working on a laptop
- Male talked with female about social media
- Male mentioned that he needed to begin studying for mid-term examinations

Analytic Section

Site: Wendy's Restaurant (New Providence, Bahamas)

Data collector: Antoinette Pinder-Darling

Typist: Antoinette Pinder-Darling

Date: September 25, 2015

Start time: 1:30 p.m. **End:** 2:30 p.m.

When I arrived at Wendy's, I located a seating spot that gave me a scenic view of the dining room, it was unobtrusive so that it was easy to observe (hear and see) the non-participants for my study. The project non-participants on each angle of the dining were having their lunch and engaged in conversation. The dining room appeared to sit approximately thirty (30) persons that I counted upon arrival. This number was tallied before I fully began observing the non-participants.

I began observing two ladies near the entrance of the dining room; they were engaged in conversation about the fall semester. They spoke in great detail about the classes each was enrolled in and one of the non-participants began to talk about how she really needed to get her schedule organized. She mentioned that she needed to write a paper for English 300, conduct an interview, and prepare a cultural critique on Junkanoo.

The other student who was having lunch and conversing with her, talked about how difficult it was to juggle working and going to school. She mentioned that she is happy that she works on campus and is able to work and study at the same time. She indicated that the pay was not as high as she would like but the benefits outweighed the income. The other female's body language was positive; she gave eye contact so it appeared as if she was interested in the conversation. She glanced at her phone briefly – maybe to check the time. Then there was a brief silence and then the older female of the two began talking about her job. She mentioned an incident at work and how she needed to change offices because of mold. The other female was reassuring her that everything happens for a reason. She mentioned that it worked out because of her persistence and she is now in a better working environment.

Based on all of the observations, the reoccurring themes seemed to be about taking classes, studying for upcoming exams, or preparing papers. There were huge similarities in the way people interacted, a number of individuals were working from laptops, tablets, viewing their phones and chatting simultaneously. In attempting to understand the meaning of the observed non-participants in a cultural context, until now, most researchers have deemed conceptions to belong to the minds of individuals. However, conception can be understood through perception. The content and structure of these conceptions are thought to be available primarily through a person's talk during interviews or their answers to questionnaires (Roth, 2010, p. 102). However, my analyses exhibits the nature of conceptions as something distilled from practical, accountable, situated, and embodied language-in-interaction experiences. The results/conclusion of the observation is, more undergraduate females talk while they eat than undergraduate males in a restaurant setting.

References

- Bales, R. F. (1999). *Social interaction systems: Theory and measurement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publications.
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- Roth, M. W. (2010). *Language, learning, context: Talking the talk*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Schwartzman, H. B. (1993). *Ethnography in organizations*. London, UK: Sage Publications.