

Paper Assignment:

OBSERVATION OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

On a daily basis, we as human beings continually observe social life and draw inferences and conclusions from our observations. The first purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to "fine-tune" these natural observational skills, and as a result, heighten your awareness of dimensions of social interaction that are often taken for granted. This fieldwork assignment is also intended to sensitize you to the difference between observation and interpretation so you will be able to evaluate more critically what others present as "objective" evidence.

Use the following steps in doing the observation:

- 1) Observe and take detailed notes on fifteen to twenty minutes of interaction among one or two groups of people. The size of your group should have at least two (2) people and on up to about fifteen (15). Groups larger than approximately fifteen may be too difficult to observe. Pay attention to some of the following aspects of the interaction: gestures, nonverbal cues, spatial behavior, emotions, attributions and/or other dimensions of social interaction.
- 2) Make rough notes on the spot describing the setting and what happens. Soon after you return from the observation site write a full description of the physical setting, the participants, and the events so someone who was not there could picture them. (The description will take at least three times longer than the observation.) Avoid interpreting what you have witnessed.
- 3) Next, attempt to interpret the meaning of the activities, the intentions of the actors, and their relations with each other. **Link your observations to course material, when possible.** Be aware of the difficulty of making observations that are uncontaminated by assumptions or inferences.

Report your findings in a paper. **First**, briefly define the setting in which you took these notes and describe how you conducted your observation. In addition, briefly describe the general characteristics and behaviors of the members of the group you observed. What sorts of objects or symbols gave you clues as to who they were? **Second**, discuss how your findings relate to course material--lectures and readings. Do these findings support, contradict, or alter any of the various social psychological theories and claims that we have been studying? Your TA will provide some additional clarifications about the format of the papers. **Give specific examples from your observations to support these claims.**

This paper should be type-written (12 point font), double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins, and approximately **five pages** in length. The paper should begin with a brief introductory paragraph and end with a concluding paragraph. You need to also attach your field notes in an **Appendix** at the end of the paper (these notes need not be typed). Please number all your pages.

All papers will be evaluated in terms of grammar and organization, in addition to their sociological/psychological content.

References: This is not a library research paper. We will assume that you will use class lectures and the book when discussing theories. Thus, for this assignment, you do not need to include a bibliography.

DUE DATES: The final paper is due IN CLASS **on May 31st**. *Late papers are accepted, but you will lose one half of a letter grade (5%) for each day the paper is late.*