**Anthropology 200 Participant Observation Tips**

**How to do participant observation**

* Try to observe as if you are from another planet.
* Become familiar with the setting before beginning to collect data.
* Observe the surroundings and provide a written description of the context and draw a map.
* Describe the participants in detail.
* Record the activities and interactions that occur in the setting.
* Note the frequency and duration of those activities/interactions and other subtle factors such as nonverbal communication.
* Note who talks to whom, whose opinions are respected, how decisions are made. Also observe where participants stand or sit, particularly those with power versus those with less power or men versus women.
* If there are many participants, counting persons or incidents of observed activity can be useful.
* Listen carefully to conversations, trying to remember as many verbatim conversations, nonverbal expressions, and gestures as possible.
* Be unobtrusive in dress and actions.
* Be honest, but not too technical or detailed, in explaining to participants what you are doing.

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| Appearance | Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance |
| Verbal behavior & interactions | Who speaks to whom & for how long, who initiates interaction, languages spoken, tone of voice |
| Physical behavior & gestures | What people do, who does what, who interacts with whom, who is not interacting |
| Personal space | How close do people stand to one another, do they touch, and how |
| Human traffic | How many people enter, leave & spend time at the observation site |
| People who stand out | Identify people who receive a lot of attention from others |

**How to take good fieldnotes**

* Record the date, time, place, and name of researcher on each set of notes.
* On the left page of your notebook record the information you take in through your senses. Provide descriptions without inferring meaning.
* On the opposite page record whatever thoughts, feelings, ideas or assumptions you have about what is happening. This will highlight the difference in observed data and your own construction or interpretation of the activity. Both are important, but they are different.
* Use exact quotes when possible.
* Use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.
* Describe activities in the order in which they occur.
* Include relevant background information to situate the event.
* Provide a statement of reflexivity.