

# Paper 4: Use of Participant Observation

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## 1 Assignment

Discussion of how you are using participant observation within your field site to collect data. This is the be critical assesment of your attempts to undertake participant observation and therefore, must be a candid and thorough evaluation of your research based upon your experience, how you will proceed in the future.

## 2 Essay

Participant observation could hardly be any more difficult; It seems that I run into the problem often of not being in an advantageous place to sit. It may seem possible if I wait a while to find a good seat, but all the time my second problem comes up. The second problem is catching enough information, or enough of the right kind. Giving light towards a more solidified goal of this project has caused me to sort of freezup on information that I would normally be writing down. Another problem (especially when I cannot get a good seat, or am waiting to be seated) seems to be of the awkwardness, or conspicousness of my note-taking.

The first problem of attempting to find a good seat, or a seat at all during busy times has been my most difficult. I usually have to be relegated towards guerilla tactics against other customers to get a good seat for data. The thing

is that I want to appear as if I am not there - as if I am not affecting the subjects' decisions. But if I go against someone directly for a seat, then I would be interfering with their "natural" decision. I am making my mark, or presence known and affecting the environment. Seeing as it is packed most of the times when I am assigned to be there, I just do not put up a fuss and try to keep everything in my head until I can write it down. Walking around with a pad and pen doesn't do too well for the employees who think that I am some sort of inspector.

The second problem is of catching information. I can never seem to get enough of it, or even know what I am trying to write down. I am attempting to get everything, but I am a bit shaky as to what to consider important enough to write down. How much is enough! It seems to me that I am writing down insignificant data (I.E.: Someone's dress.) But also after seeing my goal as being measuring the frustration of employees as the night progresses, it seems like I cant find information at all. I cannot measure their "frustration."

I have also been talking with individuals around the coffee house. I have started talking with an employee who is a fellow sociology major. I have asked her what she thinks about the job, and asked her about some of her other co-workers. She has given quite a bit of information that I might need to know (especially if I am to measure one's frustration level.) She told me about the normal attitudes of some of the other workers and of their general laziness. Particularly, she has supplied me with a timetable, so that I can come in at particular times and see when they arrive, versus when they leave.