

HANDOUT 2.1

Data Workshop 2.1

ANALYZING EVERYDAY LIFE: "OBSERVING AND DESCRIBING VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION"

Name:

Class Section:

Date:

Each of these Data Workshops requires you to do original sociological research, using methods and concepts covered in the course. Please refer to Chapter 2 of the textbook for instructions on how to conduct social research. Refer to the textbook chapter listed under each topic for information on the concept to which it is related. You will be expected to support your discussion using specific terms and concepts from that chapter. You should *not* use any other supplemental sources for this paper.

Chapter 2 details various research methods including ethnography. Ethnographers collect data by writing detailed fieldnotes every day. These fieldnotes are characterized by thick description, which involves sensitivity to the context and to interaction details such as facial expressions and tone of voice that enrich what might otherwise be just a list of events. This Data Workshop is a practicum in thick description. To make things easier for you, we have separated the verbal and the visual so that you can concentrate on one kind of description at a time. But in your future ethnographic work, you'll be writing fieldnotes that describe both verbal and nonverbal behavior at once.

Step 1: Conducting the Experiment

1A: For 10 to 15 minutes, listen to (eavesdrop on) a conversation whose participants you can't see. They might be sitting behind you or in a restaurant. You should be close enough to hear them, but positioned so that you can't see them.

1B: For 10 to 15 minutes, observe a conversation you can't hear—one taking place, for example, on the other side of the campus quad. Even though you can't hear what's being said, you should be able to see the interaction taking place.

Step 2: Thinking and Writing about the Experiment

Write an extremely detailed description of each conversation. Describe the participants and the setting, and include your ideas about what you think is going on and what you think you know about the participants. Try to describe everything you heard or saw in order to support any conclusions you draw. You should not summarize any of the descriptions. For instance, don't use evaluative phrases such as "He looked angry." Instead, write down the explicit details and cues that made you think that the person was angry. For each 15-minute observation period, your written description should be three to four typed pages.

Step 3: Sharing your Findings

In class, choose a partner and exchange written descriptions. You will be marking your partner's notes using the following criteria:

3A: Mark with a star (*) the passages where you can see and hear clearly the things your partner describes.

3B: Circle the passages that contain evaluative words such as "angry" or "sweet" or summaries of action or conversation rather than detailed descriptions, such as "They argued about who would pay the bill."

3C: Place a question mark (?) next to the passages that leave you feeling as if you would like to read more.

Discuss your responses to each other's work. Your instructor will tell you whether you need to turn in a formal version of this Data Workshop or if you will be discussing it in class in order to compile data results.