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Composition 10

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### Ethnographic Study: The Citizens of Philadelphia

#### **Introduction**

Over the last five weeks, I have been working on an ethnographic project for my composition class. An ethnography is a scientific description of individual human societies. It is made up of qualitative and quantitative research. The observation process has to do with watching how people act in certain areas and their body language. On a field trip, I specifically watched for those types of things from people because they let me know how they act in different areas and what type of person they are. On the field trip, in certain areas people were loud and rowdy and some were just quiet or on their cell phones. Everyone was acting different in each area I observed.

#### **At-Home**

I was prompted to observe how my family behaves on a normal day. During my observation on what goes on at home, I noticed how occupied my mom always is. I saw that she was on the computer for a while. Then she started cooking and she also was talking to my aunt, but she spoke differently from the way she talks to my sisters and brother. She talked to her in a polite and soft tone and so did my aunt. I also noticed that they laughed a lot. Another thing that I noticed about my mom was that she got angry quickly. For example, when she could not find her car keys and cell phone, she started throwing things.

During my observation of my siblings, I noticed how they act towards each other. When my sisters are talking to each other they talk at a normal volume and laugh loud. They also joke around a lot. For example, my brother was chasing my little sister around the house and my sisters jumped my brother for no reason while play fighting. My sisters are more rough and aggressive when playing with my brother.

### **In-School**

During my in-school observations, it became clear to me that the students and teachers have a very good connection between one another. During my observation on the students and how they interact with each other, I noticed how rowdy they are towards each other. For example, when they are talking to each other they sometimes yell and use foul language. When I went to observe them from the atrium, some students were yelling and showing some aggressive actions. When I was observing some students in the hallways, some of the students were joking around, laughing, and play fighting. Also, while I was in the hallway I could hear a teacher trying to teach, but at the same time her class was trying to talk over her.

During my observation on the teachers and how they talk to other teachers and students, I became interested in how they talk to other teachers. Sometimes it would be in a whisper as if the information was top secret. The rest of the time it would be a normal conversation. I also noticed how active the teachers are. Every other minute I would see a teacher walking fast in the hallway to get somewhere. The thing that really surprised me the most about the teachers is how they act towards the students. Some of the teachers treat the students as if they were really a part of their family.

### **Public Transportation**

During my ethnographic field work, I used SEPTA, Philadelphia's public transportation system as an observation area. During my observation on the SEPTA train, I noticed how the people acted around other people. They seemed more on their guard and quiet. Some people were sleeping, reading a book, or listening to music quietly. I noticed how quiet some people were in public. They were less interactive with other people.

Some other things that I noticed during my observation were that there were business people on the train. I could clearly see the difference between the people who were going to work and the people who were going to school or going somewhere other than work. The people who were going to work were dressed up in a suit or they looked professional. The people who were going to school were in a uniform and the people who were going to other places were wearing everyday clothes.

### **Sacred Space**

At St. Patrick's Church, I observed the area and how different it was from other areas. Two things that really caught my attention during my observation were that it was very quiet and it was literally empty. I also saw what people would normally do if they were there. A lady was whispering instead of talking out loud. Another lady looked like she was praying while she was lighting some candles. They would also give an offering of money for charity or the homeless.

### **Public Park**

I observed Rittenhouse Square, a public park in Center City Philadelphia because I thought it would be a great place for an observation. During my observation at the park I noticed how calm the people were and the area was. A lot of people were sitting down on a bench and some other people were walking through the park. It was as if they were using the park as a

shortcut to get to where they needed to be. I noticed that there were more people walking around than there were people sitting on a bench.

The thing that really caught my attention during my observation was how many people were in the park. Around 10a.m., there were barely any people in the park. A lot of people might have been at work around this time. Something else that caught my attention was a lady walking her two dogs in the park. I realized that she was the only person in the park with dogs.

### **Grocery Store**

During my field work, I also visited Rittenhouse Market, a small grocery store near Rittenhouse Square. During my observation at the market, there were a lot of things that had forced me to bring my attention to. I noticed how observant the shoppers were of what they were going to buy. They would pick it up and look at it closely, checking if it had any problems and if it was good enough for them. I also noticed how everyone was taking their time going through the aisles, slowly looking for what they wanted or needed.

Another thing that I noticed during my observation was how polite the staff were to the customers. They were walking around, waiting for people to ask for help if they needed it. There was also a lady who was a customer with a bad attitude. She would get very impatient when someone in front of her was moving at a slow pace.

### **Market**

Philadelphia is home to Reading Terminal Market, a unique indoor market that has a lot of people and a large amount of cultural vendors where you can eat. During my observation at the Reading Terminal Market, I noticed how everyone was moving around. They were all rushing to get to where they needed to be. Some people were taking their time trying to choose

what they wanted to eat. They would observe every place before they chose what they actually wanted. The people who were rushing would buy what they thought looked good.

Something that really stood out during my observation was how many people were at the Terminal during lunch time. There were so many people that other people could not really get to where they wanted to go. I also noticed a big change in the amount of people who were there. Around 2 o'clock, the amount of people who were there really decreased. It dropped to a normal level. The amount of people who were at the Terminal wasn't too much or too little of an amount.

### **Mall Comparison**

I was able to observe two separate shopping malls, Liberty Place and The Gallery, where I noticed some major similarities and differences. During my observation of the Liberty Place, I noticed how different it was from the Gallery. The Liberty Place was mainly a mall for women because of the types of stores it had in it. There were stores like Victoria's Secret and Loft. The Gallery had all types of stores for both men and women, like Adidas and the Adidas store for women. Another difference that I noticed about the two was the size between them. The Liberty Place was smaller than the Gallery.

During my observation of the two different sites, I noticed that they also had their similarities. Both of the places were malls and they had a good amount of people in them. Also during my observation I noticed a very obvious similarity that they both had: that they both had a lot of security guards walking around. They were watching people at a close and cautious distance.

### **Survey Data**

In order to find more evidence to support my observations, I conducted a survey. After I had gotten back the surveys I noticed some differences and similarities between my observations and the responses to the surveys. For example, when I observed 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station I noticed how some people were talking to complete strangers, either asking them a question or just starting a conversation with them. On the survey my mom answered one of my questions saying, "I always do because I want to meet new people and get to know them better." This shows how similar she is with some people in public. A difference between my observations and the survey answers was my Nanna's answer to one of the questions. When I was on the train I observed how some people were reading books and listening to music as if they were trying to avoid other people. My Nanna answered one of the questions on the survey saying, "I only use my cell phone when necessary, not for pleasure." This shows that my Nanna doesn't use her cell phone as a distraction from other people, but only when she needs it.

After I had gotten back the surveys I also noticed some differences and similarities between the ages of the people who had taken the survey. For example, on the survey my mom had answered one of the questions saying, "I always do because I want to meet new people and get to know them better." With the same question my Nanna answered, "I never start conversations with stranger." This shows that probably people who are younger are more willing to start a conversation with a stranger because they are more social. Older people are wiser, they are more cautious about who they talk to, and probably because they are more caught up in how bad the world is today.

### **Secondary Research**

Where there is not a lot of research out there about Philadelphia specifically, I did read some interesting information about human behavior in general. I read an article called Esquire. In

the article I noticed how it mentioned something that I had observed. When I was observing 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station I saw how some people would pull out their cell phone to make a brief call if it was important. In the article it says, “This is when you use your PDA, but for e-mail. Keep phone calls to a minimum.” (“Esquire”) It is saying that when you are waiting for something or someone you should only use your phone for important uses and when you are talking on the phone you should keep it short.

In the second article, called Public Etiquette, that I had read, it also mentioned something that I had seen during my observations. During my observation of the SEPTA transit almost everyone was completely quiet and there was a guy who had wiped his nose on the sleeve of his hoodie. In the article it said, “This morning I took public transit and enjoyed how quiet the ride was. I glanced around at my fellow travelers and quickly wished I hadn’t. A young lady was reading her book and picking her nose. I stared in disgust. She never noticed.” (“Public Etiquette”) It is saying how some people don’t really care about how they act around other people. They could be well mannered or have no manners at all.

### **Conclusion**

I greatly benefitted from my study of Ethnography because I learned how it really lets you see what your community is like and what the people who live in it are like. I also learned how fun it is. It helped me see how people really act in public. I learned that there are basically two types of ways or groups that define how people act in public. The groups are the well mannered and the non mannered people. The well mannered people are respectful, mostly quiet around other people, and they know how to act in public. The non mannered people are the ones who really don’t care about how they act in public. They could be loud, very disrespectful, and disgusting. But if I was to group myself I would put myself with the well mannered group of

people because I am polite. When I am in public around other people I don't show off or pick my nose. But to sum this up I really enjoyed doing this project because it allowed me to go out and explore and see how people act.

### **Work Cited**

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