Samuel Peter   October 20, 2023

Professor Emma Colven   GEOG 11: Qualitative Methods

<u>**Research Journal Entry Four**</u>

   My group went to the Tower Room on Tuesday to conduct ethnographic research on the Dartmouth community. I selected the Tower Room when planning the class primarily because it is a highly coveted study space on campus, attracting a diverse student body. Although I am a junior on campus, the last time I went into the Tower Room was for a campus tour during my first year on campus.

   By not having a personal connection to the study subjects and not being familiar with the study space, I could watch students and their activities without worrying about biases affecting my observations. Although I was excited to be carrying out ethnographic research, doing it felt like a daunting adventure to me because I had to incorporate myself into an environment that I was unfamiliar with. I was anxious about being perceived as an outsider because it would make me stand out of the crowd/room, making me draw unnecessary attention towards myself. Would not blending in cause my audience to undergo the Hawthorne effect? Although I was still on campus, would too great of an environmental change make it hard to conduct my research? These were some of the questions and thoughts going through my head as I walked to the library from the classroom.

   As I walked into the Tower Room, everyone looked up at me. This collective action made me think that my assumptions of not being able to blend in were about to come true. After I navigated to a chair, however, I noticed that no one was paying attention to me anymore. Being the only one not working on something in the Tower Room felt oddly wrong. To blend in, I had to appear busy. I pretended to be working on some homework/assignments because everyone else in the room was.

   Just as Aiden had told us, the first 10 to 15 minutes of observing did not yield fruitful results. The Dartmouth students appeared to work like any college student would. They looked busy, but many often took frequent breaks to scroll through social media or chat with friends. Goldman writes, "It is important to see the world not in simple [developmental] terms detached from the workings of the global political economy…[it] is a more complex institution." (Goldman 154). I could identify the behavioral trends of the student behaviors on campus only when I began looking at the bigger picture of their behavior in general. I could see the rebirth and propagation of the neverending cycle of capitalism driven by consumerism in society.

   I noticed that nearly every person in the Tower Room had an iPad to take notes and studied with a Starbucks drink while listening to music on fancy earphones/headphones. These were some of my observations, and someone more knowledgeable about fashion could identify trends/styles among the students' clothing choices. Children consume different materialistic items, and societal behaviors teach them that consumerism equals happiness. For children, this consumption can start with various media forms and foods/snacks and eventually turn into more expensive items, like cars, dresses, houses, and other forms of technology, as they grow up. This behavior is only made worse by influencers endorsing products on social media, further increasing consumption and sales of the products. This consumeristic behavior reflects C. K. Lee's description of ethnography, in which she identifies how micro-level processes influence macro-level forces (Lee 21). Individual consumeristic behaviors, the micro-level processes, affect the revenue and profits of corporations, the macro-level forces. By constantly consuming,

we individuals create a never-ending demand for companies to profit from. High profits allow corporations to expand and cause companies abroad to replicate similar behaviors. This expansion of capitalism and consumerism has led to the development and often "westernization" of many underdeveloped countries. This observation from the Tower Room made me believe I had answered: "the how of certain forms of global capitalism." (Appel 698).

As I felt my observations were getting productive, I had to head back to class for the debriefing session. If only I had a couple more minutes, I thought to myself. Goldman perfectly describes the frustration of time constraints by writing, "By far the most pressure comes from the stringent time constraints placed on those carrying out the research." (Goldman 160). The time constraint is an unknown variable with too much weightage in the equations of ethnographic research. How should a researcher know when they have studied all aspects of their research topic without knowing all the aspects/stages of their topic itself? Time constraints on ethnographic researchers might also cause researchers to rush through their work, which causes the study results to be less accurate with numerous assumptions. Time constraints add too much mental pressure on the researchers by forcing them to find something valuable within a time limit. During my research, I was worried about not finding something the audience liked within the 25 minutes allotted to conduct research.

In conclusion, ethnographic research was more challenging than enjoyable for me. There are numerous nuances in the research methodology for it to be completed effectively by researchers. Besides time constraints, topics of interest might differ between the researcher and those hiring the researchers. This conflict affects both research methodologies and the result perception of the researcher's work. Adaptation and power dynamics are other factors that can indirectly affect the research's outcome by creating additional challenges for the researcher to overcome. Due to these issues, I would prefer to conduct ethnographic research to collect information only if I have an extended time to collect and present research data for smaller or digital projects. The high margin of error and desire not to have a lifestyle upheaval make me less enthusiastic about pursuing ethnographic research to collect data.

Works Cited

Appel, Hannah. "Offshore work: Oil, modularity, and the how of capitalism in Equatorial Guinea." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2012, pp. 692-709. *Canvas*, https://dartmouth.instructure.com/courses/60723/files/11603325?module_item_id=687339. Accessed 22 October 2023.

Goldman, Michael. *Imperial Nature*. Yale University Press, 2005. *Canvas*, https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/60723/files/11599309?module_item_id=687256. Accessed 21 October 2023.

Lee, Ching K. *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa*. University of Chicago Press, 2017. *Canvas*, https://dartmouth.instructure.com/courses/60723/files/11599313?module_item_id=687259. Accessed 22 October 2023.