A person wearing a suit and tie

Description automatically generatedAnthropology 104

# **Fieldwork Project 2** | *Participant Observation*

Project Journal

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**TA Name: Juniper Lewis**

**Discussion Section Number: 320**

**Semester and Year: 2nd Semester, 1st Year**

# Getting Started

Welcome to your journal assignments for Fieldwork Project 2! Please add your information to this template (above), rename and save it in Microsoft Word **.docx** or **.doc** format.

Make sure the filename includes **your name** and the **name of the assignment** (FWP2).

*(Example)* FWP2F Wendy Liu.docx

*Submission:* The project journal will be completed in several steps. You will be submitting this same journal file multiple times in different stages of writing, in response to each journal assignment below. If you do not submit the file to Canvas by the deadline you will not be awarded points for that journal assignment. For example, for the first assignment you are only expected to complete Journal 2.1 (the others will still be blank). By the end of the project, all the assignments in your journal will be filled in.

## **Journal 2.1** | Reading Response

### Instructions & Expectations

Before you begin this writing assignment, read the article “*The Machine Does It!”: Using Convenience Technologies to Analyze Care, Reproductive Labor, Gender and Class in Urban Morocco.* by M. Ruth Dike (available as a PDF on Canvas).

Write 2-4 sentences in response to each of the questions below. The first question has been completed as an example.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 5**.

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| *(Example)* **Why did M. Ruth Dike choose to examine how Moroccan women used washing machines as part of her research?** |
| M. Ruth Dike chose to look at how Moroccan women used washing machines because she was interested in understanding whether or not new “convenience technologies” were actually convenient to use. She was also interested in understanding how its usage impacted the gender politics of labor in a household. |
| 1. **What were M. Ruth Dike’s main research questions when she started her research with families in Morocco?** |
| M. Ruth Dike asked how new convenience technologies affected gender and class roles in urban Morocco. She also asked how new convenience technologies that helped with reproductive labor reinforced or changed gender stereotypes and roles in urban Morocco. |
| 1. **Why did M. Ruth Dike think that examining washing machine and pressure cooker usage would be good activities for her to research?** |
| Examining washing machine and pressure cooker usage would be good activities for Dike to research because it is easier for her to use to answer her question. They are easier to analyze since “participants said that washing machines meaningfully impact their daily lives.” (312). |
| 1. **What were M. Ruth Dike’s key research methods? (Describe them).** |
| Dike “conducted fifty-three semistructured interviews with married middle- and lower-class Moroccans in Moroccan Arabic, as well as extensive informal participant observation.” She also “lived with four different families for a week each to gain more fine-grained data on exactly who did which kinds of reproductive labor.” (314) |
| 1. **How did M. Ruth Dike approach “gender” as a topic of study?** |
| Dike explored how convenience technologies such as washing machines or pressure cookers affected traditional gender roles. Since new technologies made doing things that (traditionally) only one gender did easier, it also managed to devalue women’s reproductive labor in relation to other men’s labor, such as in the kitchen. |
| 1. **Based on this article, what do you think are some of the strengths and limitations of anthropological research methods?** |
| One strength of these research methods is that it is extremely thorough and it takes account of many different perspectives. A limitation, however, is that this method takes a huge amount of resources and time. |
| 1. **What did you find most interesting, important, and/or confusing about this article?** |
| What I found the most interesting about this article is that new technologies can affect gender roles to this extent; I had no idea that simple technologies like washing machines or pressure cookers could devalue women’s roles so much. An important note about the article is that convenience technologies also serve to reinforce one’s perception that their standing in the world is one as a citizen as a developed nation. |
| 1. **What have you learned from this article that may be useful to you when you conduct participant observation yourself?** |
| If I conduct participant observation, I have to make sure to take data from different classes of people. Additionally, you should make sure the participants are different in other ways; for example, Dike selected families to differ in wives participating in the labor force or not. |

## **Journal 2.2** | Research Questions

### Instructions & Expectations

Anthropologists typically ask “how” and “why” questions. These are open-ended questions that explore processes, relationships, and meaning. They generally don’t ask closed questions, such as yes/no questions or questions related to quantities (e.g. “how many”).

Remember:

* Your research questions need to be answerable within the time frame of the project.
* Choose a research question related to gender that will be interesting for you to explore.
* Choose a context for your research where you can engage as an active participant.

Based on the work you did in discussion section, write your two possible research questions here. Your TA will review these and advise you which one(s) likely to be successful for your research. You will receive feedback on Canvas.

In addition, for each question you need to also give a *short description* of the activity you will be participating in during your observation, and the *location* where that activity takes place. (*e.g.* "For my participant observation I will lift weights at the Natatorium gym on the UW campus.")

**Read your TA’s feedback on Canvas in order to proceed with the project.**

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day AFTER your Discussion Section in Week 5** (e.g. if your discussion section meets on Monday, your Research Questions are due by 11:59pm on Tuesday).

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| **Research Question 1** | How does gender affect the way we see certain technology? |
| ***Activity & Location*** | Go out into an open space and show different people pictures of appliances and asking what they think of them, while also noting their gender. |
| **Research Question 2** | How do most people learn about the concept of gender, and how did this affect their own gender identity? |
| ***Activity & Location*** | Go out into an open space and ask different people how they learned about the concept of gender; also note their gender. |

## **Journal 2.3** | 1st Fieldnotes

### Instructions & Expectations

#### Participant Observation

It’s now time to conduct your first participant observation based on your research question and the activity/location you have chosen.

* Do your activity for one hour.
* Next week you will return to the same location for a second round of participant observation.

#### Taking Field Notes

Field notes are what anthropologists write down in response to what they do, see, hear, and think. They are a form of recorded data, and anthropologists can continue to analyze them long after they have completed their participant observation.

* Take field notes while you do you your activity, or immediately after completing the activity.

Everyone writes field notes differently. Some anthropologists make very detailed notes. Others just jot down quick points to help jog their memory later. Some people's notes describe what they observe quite literally , while others are more abstract (for example, they might include drawings or charts).

It's up to you to decide how to take field notes and you may want to experiment with different styles.

#### Succeeding in your Participant Observation

Here are some questions & ideas that may help you:

* What is your activity like, physically? How do you feel doing it? How might the way you are experiencing this activity be different from the ways other people experience it?
* What are other people doing? Why are they doing it? How are other people interacting with each other? What do you think the relationships between the other people are? How might aspects of other people’s identities (e.g. gender, age, etc.) be shaping their involvement in the activity and their interactions with one another?
* What's the space around you like? How do the characteristics of the space – for example, if it’s inside or outside, big or small – shape what people are doing there? What are the sights, sounds, and smells?
* How does what you're noticing help you answer your research question? What ideas do you have at this point?
* What else do you notice? Write down anything that sticks out to you as interesting or important.

You have two options for submitting your field notes:

You can type your notes into the space below and upload your journal to the Canvas assignment for Journal 2.3 (doc, docx, PDF) **OR** you can submit a photo or scan (pdf, jpg, jpeg, png, tiff) of your handwritten notes to the Canvas assignment for Journal 2.3.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 6.**

### Field Notes

* I feel a little embarrassed doing this, since I’m just hanging out in the laundry room and watching people do their chores. Usually, I’m standing in a corner and observing people’s actions, but sometimes when somebody is waiting for a dryer to end, I walk up to them and ask them how they feel about the washer appliance.
* Most other people are either waiting for their laundry to get done, loading clothes into the washer and dryer, or taking the clothes from the dryer into their room. Some people when they see other people they know in the laundry room chat for a while.
  + I don’t feel like gender is a large part about how people interact in the laundry room, since everybody’s doing the same thing – there’s no reason to treat people differently based on gender.
* The laundry room is about twice the size of my dorm room, with rows of washers on one side of the room and then a single row of dryers on the other side. The way people put their clothes into both appliance is different because of the layout of the appliances – for the washer, most people just do it normally, but for the dryer, most people avoid putting their clothes in a dryer directly above or below another person putting in clothes. This might be based on notions of personal space, and are affected by gender, since it’s a common notion that girls require more personal space from guys.

## **Journal 2.4** | 2nd Fieldnotes

### Instructions & Expectations

#### Participant Observation

#### Do your activity again for one hour.

#### This time, engage more actively with the people around you.

#### Talking to people is a key part of participant observation. Learn from them. Find out what they're doing and why. Ask questions that you think might help you better answer your research question.

#### When you approach someone, briefly explain to them that you're working on a class project and that you would like to ask them a few questions. Anthropologists always make it clear to the people that they're working with that they're conducting research.

#### People will not necessarily behave the same way once they know someone is conducting research. This is okay! Anthropologists don't work in a controlled setting like a lab: researching human life involves interaction, which means some people may choose not to take part.

#### It's important that anthropologists acknowledge how their presence affects things. It's also crucial that anthropologists are specifically aware of how aspects of their identity (e.g. their gender, age, etc.) might affect how people interact with them. Anthropologists also need to be aware of how their identity shapes their own interpretation of the data they collect. The term for this awareness is reflexivity.

#### Taking Field Notes

#### Take field notes while do you your activity, or immediately after completing the activity.

#### You can use the same method as you did previous, if the way seemed effective to you. Alternately, try some new approaches to taking notes.

#### Succeeding in your Participant Observation

*Here are some questions that may help guide your second hour of participant observation:*

* How is what you're observing this time different from what you noticed during your first hour of participant observation?
* Why are the people around you participating in this activity? What's its significance to them? You can ask them these questions directly.
* How might your presence be affecting other people? What is your relationship to them?
* How might aspects of your identity shape the ways that you're interacting with other people? How might your own identity shape how you interpret what's going on? Be reflexive.
* How does what you're learning help you answer your research question? What new ideas do you have this time, versus during your first hour of participant observation?
* What else do you notice? Write down anything that seems interesting or important.

You have two options for submitting your field notes:

You can type your notes into the space below and upload your journal to the Canvas assignment for Journal 2.4 (doc, docx, PDF) **OR** you can submit a photo or scan (pdf, jpg, jpeg, png, tiff) of your handwritten notes to the Canvas assignment for Journal 2.4.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 7**.

### Field Notes

* Nothing much is different, although there are definitely more people because it’s the weekend.
* When I asked people what significance washing laundry had to them, they mostly laughed and looked at me skeptically, finally replying with the fact that it kept their clothes clean. When I asked them to elaborate, some people said that they liked the feeling of clean clothes on themselves. Additionally, the people from other countries like China and India said things like cleanliness was a big part of their life, and their parents had groomed that part of them as being important.
* I have been raised to assume that doing your laundry is as normal as walking, since it’s such an essential part of keeping your life together that not doing it would screw things up. I feel like this probably affected my questioning people, since I expected a “correct” answer.
* My presence might be affecting other people since this is probably an unfamiliar concept to them; doing your laundry is mostly a solitary chore, so having someone observe with a clipboard and paper might unsettle them and make them think I’m there for something else.

## **Journal 2.5** | Final Analysis & Reflection

### Instructions & Expectations

Write your analysis & reflection by responding to each of the questions below. Use your field notes to help you develop your responses. Each response should be **150 – 250 words, unless otherwise noted**.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 7**.

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| 1. **What was your research question? (1 sentence)** |
| How does gender affect the way we see washing machines? |
| 1. *Describe* **| Describe your experience conducting participant observation (e.g. where you were, what happened, who was involved, etc.).** |
| I conducted participant observation by staying in the laundry room with a printout of a laundry machine. If people were waiting for a laundry machine to finish and otherwise not doing anything, I approached them, introduced myself and the project I was doing (which caused a bit of a reaction, be it a sympathetic smile or a raised eyebrow) and asked them what they thought of when they saw my printout. I didn’t exactly have specified questions to ask the participants, but I did try to keep the conversation going as long as possible, to get as much information as I could out of them. Some people simply ignored me, which I accepted as a necessary hazard of conducting such a study, but the vast majority responded well to my questions – well enough, at least. I tried to involve an equal mix of genders in my study, tallying down the people I talked to and categorizing them to maximize fairness. |
| 1. *Respond* **| Based on your participant observation, write an answer to your research question.** |
| Surprisingly, people of both genders that are approximately my age consider laundry machines with the same perspective. This is probably due to restructured gender norms due to the Information Age, among other things. However, there were some perspectives that I expected – for guys, the laundry machine didn’t have much significance in their life, while for girls, washing machines had slightly more significance. I noted that this was pretty rare in general, however; most people when asked that question just looked at me skeptically and wondered what I was talking about. When I asked girls to elaborate on who usually does laundry at home, they responded that it was usually their mother that loaded the clothes and folded them, and only two guys said that the work was evenly distributed between their mother and father. In some cases, where a family had a sister or a brother, the work was shoved off exclusively to the sister and mother. |
| 1. *Connect* **| How does your answer to your research question connect to concepts about gender discussed in class (i.e. in the lectures, discussion section, or textbook)?** |
| The answer to my research questions stems from globalization, and how it changed gender. Additionally, I think that since college is extremely different than a normal home, most people feel the same, since everyone has to do their own laundry. However, when people began talking about laundry machines in their home, I noticed that they often said that women were in charge of doing the laundry. This is due to gender-power norms, since women are traditionally raised to do more household chores, and the process continues in their children, even if they are supposedly more “open-minded”. |
| 1. *Self-Assess* **| Describe the experience of conducting participant observation. What were the high points and/or challenges? What do you feel you learned? What surprised you about the experience?** |
| The main challenge about me conducting participant observation was gathering the necessary confidence to ask people questions. It took me a while for the first few people, and I stumbled over the words a lot of the time, but eventually, I got used enough to asking questions that the preconstructed interview I had in my head slowly transformed into a casual conversation about gender norms and what the person I was talking to thought of them. I feel I learned that I shouldn’t be so scared to ask questions – almost no one had a genuinely bad response to me asking them, so I wonder what I was scared of in the first place. The main thing that surprised me about the experience was the fact that so many people had similar opinions, regardless of gender – I underestimated the impact college and globalization would have on the population I surveyed. |
| 1. *Recognize* **| How might your presence and identity (e.g. your gender, age, etc.) have affected what the people around you did during your participant observation? How has your identity potentially shaped your interpretation of what you observed?** |
| My presence and identity may have influenced what people thought I was asking because I was born and look like a guy. I feel like if a girl asked the same question, people would think about their response a bit more, purely due to preconstructed gender norms about laundry and other household chores. My identity has definitely shaped my interpretation of what I observed, since I grew up in an Indian household and gender was not even a question in chores, since I only grew up with a brother. All chores were shared equally between me, my little brother, my dad, and my mom. |
| 1. *Critically reflect* **| What do you think are the strengths and limitations of participant observation as a research method? What kinds of data does it allow you to collect?** |
| The strengths of participant observation include the fact that the researcher can gain extremely qualitative data about how people live. Additionally, the researcher can gain empathy by going through the experience by themselves – by acting as one of the population, the researcher can gain insight into the population’s responses and view-points. Participant observation is also very flexible; if something comes up that the researcher didn’t anticipate, the researcher can simply incorporate it into his observation without much hiccups.  Some disadvantages of participant observation are ethical – observing participants without letting them no, or deceiving people to gain information is simply ethically wrong. It is also very time consuming – I had to stand in the laundry room for hours, and I can only imagine how long it takes for people who are doing comprehensive studies on a population. Participant observation only allows for small sample sizes, so you don’t really know if that’s how the whole population feels. Finally, there is always a risk of bias – the researcher might get too involved and therefore involuntarily corrupt the data. |
| 1. *Reflect* **| What have you learned about yourself while completing this project? (1-3 sentences)** |
| I have learned that I have the capability and confidence to ask people seemingly random questions and not seem like a psychopath, which is a good thing. |
| 1. *Advise* **| What would you do differently if you did this assignment again to achieve a more in-depth answer to your research question? (1-3 sentences)** |
| I would probably research a bit more prior to asking questions about gender and technology, so that I could have some context before and what I could expect. |