Observation Essay, Research Paper

Observation is one of the most useful ways to detect patterns, practices, habits, similarities, and differences among people in a specific culture. It allows the observer to watch with an unbiased perspective, and see people of all types in their natural setting, acting as they normally do. In a college setting, particularly, it is easy to detect people?s differences because there are so many different types of people.

My group and I were able to observe some patterns among a variety of settings. A few of the places we observed are the Western Michigan ?W? outside the Waldo Library, the cafeteria, and the front desk at one of the valley dorms. It is interesting to see which people act in similar ways and in what way they are similar.

We were surprised by some of our findings, however. It seems that, as a group, we have a fair amount of preconceived thoughts on ?the way things should be?. One observation was that, at 8:00 am on Saturday morning, the majority of students who were awake and out (about 95%) were males. Oddly, we were all under the impression that it would be mostly women out on a Saturday morning, instead of men. However, we could not come up with a reason as to why we all thought this way. This was interesting because we didn?t know we had as many unexplained thoughts as were coming to surface during our discussion.

A second observation we discussed was one I had noticed as I sat outside the Waldo Library. There is a superstition on Western?s campus that if a student walks over the cement ?W? in front of the library, that person will fail that semester?s classes. It is a silly superstition, yes, but about 99% of all students who walked by the ?W? went to great lengths to avoid it. People would shove their friends out of the way, lunge last minute to stay away, or just walk completely on the other side of the pillar to be away from it. The superstition had probably only been mentioned to them once or twice, yet they were extremely dedicated to staying away from the ?W?.

There are extreme differences in action between groups of people, as well. When observing people in the cafeteria, it is very evident that people of ?like groups? tend to stick together. Sadly, it is rare to see a culturally or even ?fashionably? diverse group of people eating together. It seems that, subconsciously, people are afraid to break out of their comfort zones to meet new people. It is easier to stay narrow minded and comfortable than to stretch yourself a little and meet people different than yourself. People would learn so much if they were willing to accept new people.

I really enjoyed my glimpse into the life and habits of my peers. People who we know close to nothing about surround us each day, and it seems that most people would rather keep it that way. It?s sad, really, to think about the fact that each day we could be passing by our soul mate, but we are just too self-focused to look up at the world to see what other people have to offer. If everyone took the chance to reach out even just to one person, it would be surprising what we could learn.

In conclusion, this assignment was a great learning experience for me. It is always good to step back and take a look at yourself and how you personally assess the world and the people in it. After all, we all share the place we live in, the air we breathe, and the sky above us. That is a start, anyway, to all the things we have in common with each other. Shouldn?t we try to learn all the wonderful things about each other?