

Living in a Pluralistic World – Anth 340
Bus Rider Subcultures Assignment

Overview

Go to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall. Spend at least one hour there, and also take four trips on Santa Rosa city buses. Observe people at the Transit Mall, on the bus, and at the bus stops, and observe their surroundings. Take notes. Notice how people form groups by social race, language, age, gender, or according to other variables. Notice patterns of behavior within the groups, and how group members interact with members of other groups. Try to explain behavior within the groups and interactions between members of different groups in terms of cultural rules, values, meanings. Try to explain repeated patterns of interactions and specific examples of interactions that you observe between members of different groups in terms of cultural differences, possible ethnocentrism, naïve realism, cultural relativism, and/or other related concepts. Finally, try to explain how the different rules, values, meanings, etc. of the groups (including those about interacting with members of other groups) might have developed, how they might serve practical purposes, or how they might make sense within systems of meanings. Of course much of this will be preliminary and hypothetical, but try to come with hypotheses that fit what you observe.

Write and turn in a brief ethnography describing and suggesting explanations for these aspects of the social groups and interactions that you observed, illustrated with specific examples. Guidelines for your bus travel, observations, and writeup are included below.

Expect the fieldwork for this assignment to take a solid block of four to five daylight hours. To avoid wasting time, plan in advance using the bus schedules. Be sure to allow enough time at the Transit Mall itself, where you will probably see the most obvious group formation and interaction. Consider allocating some Transit Mall time at the beginning of your fieldwork, and some at the end, because you may see different groups and interactions at different times of day.

Getting to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall by car

If you have access to a car, you can simply drive to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall. For a map and other information, just type "Santa Rosa Transit Mall" into Google. There is a parking structure there, or you can hunt for scarce street parking or nearby lots.

Getting to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall by Sonoma County Transit bus

Alternatively, you can take a Sonoma County Transit bus from SSU to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall. If you do, you may use observations from the trip to and from the Transit Mall as additional material for your ethnography. Some past students have made interesting comparisons between the riders on the two systems.

You have a choice each way between Route 44 or route 46. Both leave from, and return to, the bus stop near the SSU parking kiosk. Bus 44 runs more often, including weekends, but takes 40-50 minutes each way. Bus 46 is an express that runs only a few times a day, weekdays only, but takes only 20-30 minutes each way. The regular, one-way fare is \$1.70. Students with student ID taking 6 or more units may pay the student fare of \$1.45 each way. Sonoma County Transit Bus schedules and maps are available at

<http://www.sctransit.com/routes.htm>

To see schedules specifically between SSU and the Santa Rosa Transit Mall:

1. Go to <http://transit.511.org/>
2. Click "Schedules and Route Maps" on the left.
3. In the box "Select a Transit Provider", pick "Sonoma County Transit" and click "Go"
4. Click on either Route 44 or Route 46
5. In the section labeled "Create a Stop to Stop Schedule", click the desired route (going to Santa Rosa from SSU is going north; returning is going south)
6. In the "Select Origin Stop/Station", select where you are leaving from (Sonoma State University or Santa Rosa Transit Mall) and click "Go". The choices are in geographic, not alphabetical, order.
7. In the "Select Destination Stop/Station", select where you are going (Santa Rosa Transit Mall or Sonoma State University) and click "Go"
8. Click "Printable Version" for a cleaner (yes, printable) version.
9. Do it again for the other direction; the schedules for the two directions are different.

If you take the Sonoma County Transit bus, you could save a few cents by buying a transfer for a Santa Rosa City bus destination. Do *not* do this. You must get at least one Santa Rosa City bus transfer slip to attach to your paper.

Santa Rosa City bus trips

Once at the Santa Rosa Transit Mall, take four city bus trips from the lists below: two from list A, and two from list B. Each trip is a loop that brings you back to the Transit Mall. The first trip costs one dollar. Additional trips during the next two hours are free. There is no student discount.

Make sure you get a transfer slip when you pay for your first Santa Rosa City bus trip. Usually, the driver will automatically hand it to you. If not, ask for a transfer. There is no extra charge. The transfer is good for unlimited city bus trips for the next two hours. Just show it to the driver when you board the next bus. You do not have to hand it over. The boxes they have to collect old transfer slips are just convenient wastebaskets; do not use them. Keep the transfer. Do not use it to board a Sonoma County Transit bus back to SSU, because the county bus driver will keep it. ***You must attach your transfer slip(s) to the paper you submit. No transfer slip = no credit.***

Check the bus schedules (links below) and plan your trip in advance, allowing time for transfers and delays. Plan on doing this assignment during the day, so you can see what is going on and do not feel threatened in the dark.

Bring at least three one-dollar bills and more than a dollar in change. The total cost will be less than you would pay for a burger and fries, but it must be in exact change.

Take two trips from list A and two from list B. You may take them in any order you wish.

List A			List B		
Route		Minutes	Route		Minutes
3	West 9th Street	23	1	Mendocino Avenue	38
9	Sebastopol Road (weekdays only)	35	2	Bennett Valley	35
9W	Sebastopol Road (weekends only)	25	4	Rincon Valley	50
12	Roseland	23	7	Montgomery Village/Rincon Valley	50
			8	Sonoma Avenue	24

Santa Rosa City Bus schedules and maps are available at

<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/default.aspx?PageId=2313>

What to do

Watch people at the Transit Mall, ideally at two or more different times before, between, and/or after your bus trips.

When you board the bus (don't forget to get a transfer!), go towards the back, into the elevated section if possible. This will give you a better view of the others on the bus without having to obviously turn around. Note the route you are on, and the time. Try to be subtle about taking notes, so you don't disturb people. Leave your music player home, and do not use your cell phone. You need to hear what is going on, and to be free to interact with people if the occasion arises.

Both at the Transit Mall and on the bus, watch people. Your purpose is to recognize the criteria for membership in the groups that people form, to discover recurring, somewhat consistent patterns of behavior that you can describe as rules of behavior, meanings, or values that are shared by members of each kind of group, and to notice both individual incidents and general patterns of interactions between members of different groups. For example, young people might share a different culture from older ones, or English speakers might share different rules about how to interact than do Spanish speakers. Interactions between an English speaker and a Spanish speaker may be different from interactions between a young person and an older one. Your first impression may be that people do not interact much, at least on the bus. Watch closely and see if you can pick up more subtle reactions and interactions as people pass each other, pick seats, stand in lines, and so on.

Just a few of the many things you might notice include:

- Details of behavior such as
 - body positions, body language, and how people direct their gaze (eye contact, etc.)
 - how they interact or do not
 - how they talk or do not, in what language(s), etc.
 - things they carry with them and what they do with those things
- Any behavior that seems to be repeated or shared by many bus riders.
- Any behavior or events that seem to be exceptions or to be out of place.
 - What values or rules of behavior did these events violate? Analyzing exceptions is a good way to discover what the generally shared values and rules are, because you have to figure out what they are exceptions to.
- Are gender, age, dress, or other characteristics connected to how these values or rules work?
- Any particular events or interactions that might be interesting or provide some insight into the subgroups within Santa Rosa City bus riders and the norms or values of these subgroups
- The composition of groups at the bus stops and on the bus: individuals, same-gender pairs of the same age, multiple-gender pairs, apparent mothers and children, groups of similar or mixed ethnicity, apparent social race, etc.
 - Are there any patterns in behavior associated with these groupings?
 - Are there any exceptions that highlight the norms?

- Do you notice any differences in the groups or the “cultures” that you observe on different routes, or in different neighborhoods?
 - Neighborhoods might differ by the size, condition, and type of lot and dwellings and/or businesses there
 - By the kind of landscaping (or lack of it)
 - By the frequency of metal grates or bars on doors
 - By the kinds and conditions of vehicles parked around
 - By the language(s) on signs and store displays
- When you begin to form impressions, consciously test them with further observations ("Maybe only men sprawl over multiple seats... no, now I see a few women doing it, too.")

Use these suggestions as a guide, not a checklist. Read them to prime yourself to be observant, then just actively pay attention. You will probably notice interesting things that are not mentioned in this list. Just be alert.

Do this exercise by yourself as much as possible. You may travel with a classmate or friend if you feel uncomfortable venturing out alone, but sit well apart on the buses, and keep separate while waiting for buses. The point of this is so that you can focus on the other people around you without being distracted. You are also more likely to fall into a conversation with a stranger if you are not occupied with a friend. Conversations with strangers may give you interesting information. On the other hand, try not to become too involved with any one person for too long, because that could keep you from noticing others and the general scene around you.

Taking notes

Try to take notes without being so obvious that you disturb people, while also observing and participating in the situation around you. Of course this is impossible, but try. Observing and recording as constantly as possible will help you to recall events and impressions, and to match them to places, routes, and times. When you are writing your paper, your notes may help you notice and verify patterns, and will help you to illustrate them with specific events and details.

Writeup

Write a five page micro-ethnography of some aspects of social grouping and inter-group interactions that you observed. The paper should touch on the following points:

- Specify the date of your trips, the specific bus routes you took, and when each actually departed. *Attach your Santa Rosa City bus transfer(s)* to the paper.
- Describe the subgroups that you noticed among bus riders at the Transit Mall and/or on the buses. What was the basis of the groups, that is, what criteria seemed to determine membership or exclusion?
- How did the various groups' subcultures differ, that is, what rules, values, or meanings did members of each group seem to have in common, and how do these differ from those of other groups? You can describe and support these claims by describing specific behaviors that were common or repeated (that is, shared) among members of a given group, illustrating with examples that you saw.
- How do members of different groups interact? Try to explain both repeated, typical kinds of interactions between members of different groups as well as specific cases of such interactions in terms of cultural differences, possible ethnocentrism, naïve realism, cultural relativism, and/or other related concepts.

- Try to explain how the different rules, values, meanings, etc. of the various groups (including those that affect how members of different groups interact) might have developed, how they might serve practical purposes, or how they might make sense within systems of meanings.
- Illustrate your discussion with specific examples of things you saw people do. What events or interactions led you to your conclusions, or seemed particularly interesting or informative?
- Evaluate your own responses to the experience. Did anything surprise you? If so, can you learn anything about bus rider culture from that? Can you learn anything about your own preconceptions from it? Did anything make you (or anyone else you observed) uncomfortable or upset? If so, describe the event(s) and try to explain the reaction. Did you observe anyone acting ethnocentrically, or find yourself thinking or behaving ethnocentrically?

Write this paper as an argument or an explanation of your conclusions about subcultures among Santa Rosa bus riders and how members of different subcultures interact, not a narrative of what you did and saw. Explain your interpretations, and use concrete incidents or observations to convince me that they are reasonable.

I will be looking for a cultural relativist stance. It is natural to feel ethnocentrism at times, but your task is to recognize and overcome it. I will also be looking for a discussion that shows some insight into what you observed, and good attempts to explain your observations in terms of cultural rules, values, beliefs, meanings, and so on, backed by specific illustrations.

Use 12-point type, double-spaced, with reasonable margins. Use a spelling checker, and proofread your work before submitting it. Recall that I require both a paper copy (*with the Santa Rosa City bus transfer(s) attached*) and a computer file of the same paper emailed to me or submitted on a diskette, CD, or USB drive.

Turning it in

Turn in your essay BOTH on paper, AND as a file attached to an email message to me. I will return the paper copy with comments and a grade written on it. The paper copy is due in class on the day indicated on the class web site. The computer file OF THE IDENTICAL PAPER is due by midnight of that day. I must have BOTH versions to give you credit. Name the file in this format:

340-07s-bus-SimpsonBart.doc

Your word processor may add a 3-letter file extension like ".doc" or ".wps".

Drafts

You are welcome to discuss your assignment with me or give me a draft to review before the assignment is due. My comments and suggestions may help you write a better essay and get a better grade. If you email a draft, please name the file as above, but add "-draft", like

340-07s-bus-SimpsonBart-draft.doc

Grading

This paper is worth 200 points, out of 1000 for the course.