

## FORMAT FOR STRUCTURED OBSERVATION #1 PAPER

Because most people are so busy participating in a social setting, they frequently don't have the time to mentally step back and observe the structured behavior that goes on. Those patterns constitute much of the basic content of social psychology. This paper assignment is designed to help you develop your ability to: (1) observe social interaction in a structured way; (2) discover the patterns of behavior that characterize particular social settings; and (3) interpret them in some systematic theoretical framework.

### **Paper Organization:**

You should use Goffman's "dramaturgical (or theatrical) model" for the general organization of the paper. We will discuss this perspective in class, but most basically, Goffman compares interaction in social settings to theatrical stage performances. For example, begin with the physical layout of the setting. What is the decor like (e.g., posters or paintings, color scheme, lighting, equipment), and what kind of image is it designed to project? Also, in each social setting there is typically some kind of general "script" that characterizes how various "actors" are supposed to behave in this setting, and some kinds of behavior can disrupt the performance. There also may be "props" (e.g., physical equipment, particular kinds of clothing, makeup, etc.) used to support the performance. When actors are in the "frontstage" region they are expected to be "on" (presenting an acceptable performance). When they are "backstage" (e.g., rest room, lounge area, kitchen) they can "let down" the performance or gear up for returning to frontstage.

### **Choice of Observation Site:**

You should select a social setting that provides the opportunity for repeated interaction between "actors" (e.g., a restaurant, bar, athletic club, church, wedding, funeral, etc.), rather than one that is very short term and anonymous (e.g., elevator). Also, select a setting where each actor "type" is represented by more than one person. This is to allow you a stronger basis to infer that the observed behavior is characteristic of a role, rather than unique to a particular individual. Using these guidelines should provide you more raw data to work with.

### **Structured Behavior Focus:**

Your analysis should be concerned with routinized or patterned behaviors, rather than behavior that is unique to a particular individual. That is, you want to focus on particular "types" of "actors" or players (i.e., who are playing different roles) in your setting. For example, bars and restaurants will usually have "regulars" who act differently from first time or infrequent customers. There may even be physical areas of the setting that are informally reserved for "regulars". Try to identify these different types of performers, and discuss the "roles" they seem to be playing. How do their verbal and nonverbal behaviors, dress, etc. differ? What kind of "performance" is each type trying to present? What variations within each type do you see? Obviously you have observed you will be looking at individuals in your settings, but your analysis should focus on how their behavior relates to some general role or "performance". If the behavior (e.g., presentation of self, use of props to support their performance) of some individual typifies some particular role type, you might describe that in some detail. Similarly, if a particular person clearly fails in projecting the kind of identify s/he intends, that would be instructive to discuss. The point is that your analysis should focus on structured behavior, general expectations for role performance, etc., rather than simply describe a person's behavior as an isolated event. Also, you should objectively describe what you actually see as support for the interpretation or attribution you make. For example, if someone is trying to start a conversation with someone at a bar, what verbal and nonverbal behaviors do you see? If you conclude that the tactic worked (or failed), what visible evidence did you use to draw that conclusion?

### **System Analysis:**

Describe how the setting function as a social system. How does each role type or actor category fit into the overall interaction that is taking place? What functions do interactions between particular actors have in projecting a definition of self or carrying out a performance? How are the various actors and their performances interrelated?

### **Miscellaneous Stuff:**

The paper should be typed, double-spaced, with regular margins (about one inch on all four sides). There is no minimum or maximum length, but you might use about 5 pages as a guideline. The objective, however, is not to fill up a certain number of pages, it is to describe your structured observation in a fair amount of detail. Actually, the more detailed and comprehensive the analysis, the more information you will have for comparison when you write the second paper. Keep in mind, however, that these details should be interpreted in terms of the dramaturgical model. That is, draw conclusions about what function the setting, behaviors, props, etc. served in projecting a particular image or self-presentation. Connect those conclusions to details you have observed, so the reader can see how you arrived at them.

The paper should represent college level writing. That is, it should have a clear organizational structure, your analysis should demonstrate knowledge of the course material and analytical skills, and you should be careful about clerical and presentational details (i.e., typographical errors, misspelling). If you use a word processor, be sure to run a spell check on the paper, followed by a close visual inspection for typos. Spell checkers will not catch "real words" that don't happen to be the ones you intended to use (e.g., effect versus affect, to versus too versus two). The paper is due **Week #4**.