SOCI 329 - Climate Ethnography Assignment

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Introduction

This assignment asks you to conduct original ethnographic research on a community of your choosing, asking, how is this community experiencing and responding to climate change in everyday life? For the duration of the term, you will identify a research site and population, and you will use the tools of ethnography, including 1) participant observation, 2) field notes, 3) interviews, and 4) qualitative analysis to try to understand how the group you are studying experiences climate change. Some field sites or groups you might consider studying include a workplace, a neighborhood, a church group, a social movement, a club, a sports team, a government agency (a city council, a student government association), or an extended family or kin group.

This is a multi-part assignment that you will work on throughout the term. The assignment will be submitted in a series of parts, culminating in a finished final product. Each part will be graded independently, however, the quality of the earlier parts will set students up for the final product, so be sure to set aside sufficient time for all the pieces.

This assignment is designed to help students work towards developing proficiency in the following course objectives:

- Interpret, and analyze climate change as a social problem.
- Compare and contrast a variety of social responses to climate change from communities in the US and globally.
- Identify and explore interconnection between environmental conditions and human wellbeing.
- Identify policy changes and public actions that can further the projects of mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

Parts

Part	Due Date
1. Proposal for field site & list of 10 potential interviewees	Week 3, 9/1/21
2. Understanding Ethnography	Week 4, 9/8/21
3. Field Notes	Week 7, 9/29/21
4. Interview transcripts	Week 11, 10/27/21
5. Coding & Memos	Week 13, 11/10/21

6. Write up of analysis	Finals week, 12/06/21

Part 1 – Proposal for Field Site & Interviewees

Due 9/1/21 (Week 3)

The first part of your assignment is to identify an appropriate field site and social group to study. Who do you want to study, and how can you get access to this population? Consider the following:

- What social groups or field sites are you most interested in?
- Can you gain access to the site? How much work will it take?
- Ideally, your site should be clearly bounded, and be a place that you already have relatively easy access to. Consider:
    - Your neighborhood
    - A workplace, or a place you volunteer
    - A church or community group you already belong to
    - A local business that you frequent (i.e. a local bar or coffee shop)
- Do you think the people who spend time in this space would be willing to be interviewed by you? Interviewees should be people you know, and who you think are reasonably likely to say yes to a 30-60 minute interview (it's ok if you don't know them well; for example, neighbors, customers, etc. are fine).
- If you are interested in studying a private space, like a workplace, you will need to ask permission to conduct your research

In this proposal, you should include the following:

- The group or community you are interested in studying. Be as specific as possible! It's ok if you don't know everything about them, but tell me what you do know, and why you are interested. Mention some of the variables that makes this an interesting study. Some examples:
    - I am interested in studying how my neighbors in Concord, a suburb of San Francisco, experience climate change. Concord has traditionally been a middle to working class suburb. It is racially diverse, with both large white and Hispanic populations. I will conduct my ethnography in the Dana Estates neighborhood of Concord, with participant observation at local parks, businesses, and the swimming pool I go to. I will recruit interview participants amongst my neighbors, business owners and customers, and my co-workers at the store I work at.
    - I propose to study how employees and customers at the coffee shop I work at respond to climate change in everyday interactions. I will conduct my participant observation as a customer at the coffee shop and use my contacts as an employee to recruit both employees and regular customers to participate in interviews. I have asked my boss for permission to base my project on the coffee shop, and she granted it to me.

Part 3 – Field Notes

Due 9/8/21 (Week 7)

Once you have identified your site, you should go there ready to observe. You will take field notes documenting what you observe. You can do this in a notebook, on a computer or a tablet, or even a phone, but keep in mind that you will be trying to capture as much as possible, so use a method that is

easy for you. I tend to take handwritten notes, and then transfer them to a computer document immediately after my observation session, filling in anything I remember from my handwritten notes. You should plan on setting up four distinct periods of observation, each one lasting around an hour.

You will submit your four field notes together in a single document during Week 7, so be sure to look at your calendar, and schedule your observations in advance.

Note: If you choose to observe a workplace, or another site where you are normally an active participant, try to set aside some time to observe outside of your usual role. For example, if you work at a coffee shop and choose to observe the interactions between staff and customers, you can use material that comes up during your shift, but you should also plan to stay late or arrive early one day, and just observe what happens, without trying to split your attention between work and the assignment. If your workplace will not allow you to do this, it might not be the ideal field site for you to observe during this project.

Part 4 – Interviews

Due 10/27/21 (Week 11)

You will conduct four semi-structured narrative interviews for this project. This means that you will start with a common set of questions, but you can ask additional questions, follow ups, or encourage the interviewee to expound upon something that came up. Each interview should last between 30 minutes-1 hour long.

You will need to:

1. Invite people to participate in an interview
2. Record the interview (be sure to get permission to do this first!)
3. Transcribe the interview
4. Submit your transcriptions to Canvas

Recruitment

While conducting your observations, look for people who might be willing to be interviewed. When you have the chance, ask them. You can say something like this:

"I am a student at SSU, doing research for a class project. I need to interview four people for this project. Would you be willing to let me interview you?"

- If they say no, thank them for their time, and let them go on their way
- If they say maybe, tell them a bit more about the project and let them decide
- If they say yes, let them know that you will need to record the interview for transcription, and that you will share this with your teacher, but that it will not include their name or contact information. If that still sounds ok to them, go ahead and set up a time to do the interview. You can do this in person, or use Zoom (this is handy because it has a built in record feature).

Conducting the Interview

When you arrive for the interview, get set up. Remind the interviewee that you will need to record the interview. You can do this in a variety of ways:

- If you are on Zoom, just hit the record button and save the recording to your computer. The participant can choose whether to turn their camera on.
- If you are in person, you can record the device on several devices, including:
  - A laptop, recording directly into Yuja
  - A phone, using an audio recording app (most phones come with one, and there are many available for download)
  - A hand held audio recording device (it should be digital so that you can import your files into Yuja)
  - There are many free audio recording apps and tools available online for use on phones, tablets, and laptops

Before you begin, thank your participant, and let them know that they can decline to answer any questions they don't want to answer, or end the interview at any point, but that you value their participation, and are interested in their perspective.

Start recording before you begin.

Tips on location:
- Try to avoid loud, public places. If you do talk in a public place, find a quiet corner, without a lot of background noise. It's hard to get good quality recordings with lots of background noise! Outdoors is not always great because recordings may pick up wind or movement.
- Be sure to follow COVID safety protocols, and only go somewhere in person if it feels safe to do so. Zoom is a great option right now!

Questions
Use the following questions to get you going, but if interesting things come up that you wish to pursue, you can ask additional questions, or modify these to suit your specific circumstances:

1. How did you first learn about climate change?
2. How do you feel about the fact that the climate is changing due to human activities?
3. Do you think climate change directly affects you, personally, right now? In the future?
4. How does climate change impact your [neighborhood/work/family/community organization, etc.] (fill this in with a role related to the interviewee's relationship to your field site)
5. Who do you think is responsible for responding to climate change?
6. Have you personally made any changes to your life in response to climate change?

Note: it's ok to adapt these questions to the specific circumstances, especially if the general questions fall flat. For example, someone might tell you that they don't really think about or care about climate change, but then signal that they are very concerned about fire. You can ask them about the specific ways they experience climate change (fire, drought, etc.) if it provides more insights. The fact that they don't have much to say abut climate change is in and of itself a research finding!

After the interview, be sure to thank the participant for their time! If the participant is someone you don't know very well, or someone you know is very busy, and generously agreed to help you, you might consider sending them a follow up thank you message, or even a thank you card. Use your best judgement for the situation!

Transcription

After the interview, you will need to transcribe the recording. You can do this in Yuja, which is available to all SSU students. You can either record the interview directly in Yuja, or you can upload an audio or video file into Yuja. Yuja will provide automated transcription, but it's not 100% accurate. You should review your transcript while watching/listening to the interview and correcting any errors.

I will provide more detailed instructions for this on Canvas.

Submission

To submit your interviews, give each interviewee a pseudonym, or a false name that protects their identity. For example, if your participant's real name is Jordan MacKenzie, you will not include that information in the transcript, but you will instead identify them as "Max Schmidt". Try not to make the pseudonym similar to their real name!

Combine your interview transcripts into a single file, with clear demarcation between them (use headings and page breaks). Submit the completed file to Canvas.

Tips for Successfully Interviewing Real Live Human Beings

- Keep in mind that people may decline to participate. You should try to come up with a list of 10 or so potential participants, so if some decline, you have others to ask
- Try to identify your participants and set up interviews early in the process—this part can overlap with your participant observation. This is not an assignment that can be left to the last minute!
- On occasion, I have had people agree to be interviewed, but when I try to schedule something, they can never quite be pinned down. If you encounter this, try following up two or three times, and then move on to someone who will commit to setting a time.
- Be polite, and direct. Give interviewees as much information as they need about your project to make an informed decision. Tell them why it's important to you that they participate.
- If interviewees have questions about the project you can't answer, you can share my e-mail address with them (allison.ford@sonoma.edu) and encourage them to email me directly
- Once people get going with a captive audience interested in their thoughts, feelings, and ideas, they can talk for a long time! Sometimes this can be useful, if they stay on topic, but try to keep the conversation contained. Remember, you will have to transcribe each interview, and that takes a lot of time!
- Some people might not be very talkative. Do your best to draw them out but use your judgement about when to push and when to accept that that's all they have to say.
- It is possible that you end up interviewing someone whose perspective differs greatly from your own. This is, in fact, ideal! But it can also pose a challenge, particularly if the interviewee shares something you personally disagree with or find offensive. The goal of the interview is to collect data, so you can identify broader patterns. This is not the time to share your own perspective or opinion. Do your best to practice active listening, focusing on the whole person in front of you. What can you learn from them, even if you disagree?
- That said, you are a researcher, not a sacrificial lamb. If you feel unsafe, if the conversation turns aggressive, or if something simply doesn't feel right, you are also free to terminate the interview, and remove yourself from the situation. [This is pretty unlikely to happen]
- Just as you are free to terminate the interview at any time, so is the interviewee. If they become uncomfortable, or want to stop for any reason, thank them for their time, and let them go.

Part 5 – Coding & Memos – begin analysis
Due 11/10/21 (Week 13)

You've gathered all this data—field notes and interview transcripts. Now what?

In this final part of the data collection & analysis, you will "code" your data. This entails reading through your interviews and field notes together, while looking for common themes that suggest a larger pattern. You can do this on a computer or print your data out and use a highlighter or colored pens. Either is fine, but pick a method and stick with it for consistency.

Coding

A code is a word or a short phrase that assigns interpretation to your text. In *Ethnography Made Simple,* Camila Torres Rivera tells us that "coding is the act of assigning a code to a section of raw data text for interpretive purposes to gain meaning." Coding allows us to organize and make sense of raw data, thus identifying patterns and themes that will help us answer our research questions. In this case, recall that our research questions ask how the group you have chosen to study is responding to, or making sense of climate change.

As you identify common themes or patterns, you will take notes, or memos, on what you see emerging, and why you think it might be important.

We will go over this process in detail in class.

You will submit your coded data as an appendix to your final write up, so be sure to take clear notes, and keep your data organized!

Part 6 – Final Write Up
Due 12/06/21 (Finals Week)

The final portion of this major project is the analysis and write up! Your final write up should include

- A description of your research question
- A description of your field site
- A summary of sociological literature on climate change, drawing on course readings and films
- A description of your research methods (what you did)
- A summary of your key findings from your research, and an answer to your initial research question

Papers should be between 5-10 pages long, written in clear, concise, academic English, with minimal grammar or spelling errors. You can use any standard size 12 font, with 1" margins, double spaced.

Papers must cite a minimum of 4 course readings.

Citations should be formatted in ASA style, and you must include a works cited list.