LARA

**LEARNING AND
RESIDENCE ABROAD**

UNIT EIGHT

Participant Observation

CONTENTS

	Page No.

SECTION ONE

1. Introduction

The quote for this section is from a participant observation study of cocktail waitresses in an American bar called Brady's. One part of the study concerns how they deal with regular customers. Here, Sue, the waitress is serving a group including a regular from the Cougar football team:

> She walks up to the table but they are engaged in intense conversation. She puts her hand on the regular's shoulders in order to get his attention. He immediately turns and looks at her as if to say, "Don't you touch me!" Sue knows he is kidding but quickly removes her hand: "I'm sorry!" She asks if he would like to order anything now, but he says, "No." In a few minutes she walks by him and this time *he* reaches out and grabs her by the waist. "Hey now, watch the hands," scolds Sue. Even though her tone of voice indicates that she is kidding, he profusely apologises and then says, "I guess I will have a beer now." She takes the other orders and when she returns the game continues: "That was fast!" says the Cougar regular while his friends look on.
> "That's because I'm a fast girl."
> "Oh, you mean with beer?"
> "What did you think I meant?" laughs Sue as she leaves the table to wait on her other customers.
>
> (Spradley and Mann 1975:80)

This is the first unit to concentrate explicitly on ethnographic methods. In Unit 2: *What is an ethnographic approach?*, a number of methodological issues were raised, including the idea that ethnography is holistic, that data is always interpreted in context and the notion of reflexivity. In this unit, the various stages involved in an ethnographic approach are charted and the most fundamental method within this approach, <u>participant observation</u> is described.

By this stage in the course, students are looking ahead to their 'home ethnography' and are beginning to wonder how they can possibly do it. So, motivation to learn some methods is usually high. This session is also an opportunity to be critically reflective about the different ways they have 'observed' already in their assignments and session activities.

The objectives of the sessions, therefore, are to:

- introduce Participant Observation (PO) as an essential method – and indeed for most projects *the* essential method;

- to introduce students to the choice they have between and within methods and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each one;

- help students think through the different stages of doing an ethnography and some of the practical and ethical issues involved;

- focus on the importance of accurate recording of contexts and interactions and to help students think analytically and reflectively about how they are observing, describing and interpreting.

2.   Links with the other units

The link back to Unit 2 has already been mentioned and, because Participant Observation is so basic to ethnography and to the experience of the year abroad, it permeates most of the other units as the method used in the ethnographies that illustrate many of the concepts introduced on this course. This unit also complements the next two units on ethnographic conversations and interviews and links closely to Unit 11 on data analysis.

3.   Background Notes

As this is the first unit to focus exclusively on methods, it may be useful to sum up here what is fundamental to ethnographic method. Fetterman (1989: 29-30) suggests the following:

Ethnographic method is:

- Holistic, i.e. the study should be as complete and comprehensive a picture of the topic as possible. It is better to study a small aspect in a holistic way rather than a large topic in a less complete way. William Blake in his *Auguries of Innocence* exhorts us: 'to see a World in a grain of sand'. In other words, smallness and comprehensiveness will reveal more than a larger, more general topic. Toni, one of the first students on the course, found out it was both more practical and more interesting to focus on the one child she was looking after and to study how he and his family made connections between what he was expected to eat and how he had to behave at table and their Catholicism than to take a broader topic on the relationships between food and religion.

- contextualised, i.e. the importance of a 'thick description' in which as much of the immediate context as possible is taken into account but is also connected to the wider picture. For example, Christiane chose to study how students from different backgrounds managed to live together in a German student hostel. She focused on the kitchen area where she could observe the minute details of how people managed themselves in a public social space but she also related this to wider issues of inclusion and exclusion.

- emic, i.e. getting inside the meaning of others' cultural selves and seeing things the way they see them. For example, Sandra found that many people she observed talked about the 'passion' of the Sevillanos dance but she had to spend a long time observing the dance in bars and talking to people about it to understand how they understood the word with all its rich associations.

2

As the term, 'participant observation' implies, the researcher is both participating in the daily lives of a group and observing it:

> The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organisation he (sic) studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants... and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed   (Becker 1958)

It is worth stressing again that it is *their* interpretations that the ethnographer is trying to understand, not her or his own. He or she is learning from them and indeed, one ethnographer, Michael Agar, called his informants his teachers.

In Unit 2, Malinowski was introduced as the 'father' of ethnography because of his work in the Trobriand Islands. He lived and participated, in some respects, in the life of the village observing the cultural and social practices of the villagers. As a result of his now classic studies, PO has become as necessary to the anthropologist as questionnaires to quantitative sociology.

PO is, at one and the same time, both the most commonplace way of behaving and a kind of contradiction. If you are participating, involved, in the thick of things, it is difficult, simultaneously, to be outside the action, observing, and 'making strange'. And yet this is what we do all the time with different degrees of effectiveness. For example, there are some famous studies to assess how well people can remember a simulated crime and how accurate their observations were. On the whole, people are not very accurate observers because they are usually attending to something else and so ethnographers have to train themselves to observe. As Dell Hymes has suggested, we are all born ethnographers (we have to learn about the world by participating in it and observing it) but we lose the ability as we grow up. Training in PO consists in making explicit to ourselves 'the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in their everyday life' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:2). Although we have to re-learn this ability, students on their year abroad often commented that once they had the ethnographic habit, it was difficult to give it up. One student who felt she was not getting anywhere with her ethnography decided to forget about it for a while and go to the pub:

> But ethnography doesn't leave ... I mean doesn't go, it's there to stay. Once you've done it, it's there to stay. And I found myself saying, well you know, I left the ethnography I said, well that's it you know. Stuff this whole project, I'm going down to the pub, I'd been invited to the pub. And we were sitting in this pub and I was talking to these German friends and I started looking because they were people I was living with and my ethnography was about them. I started looking at the way they were sitting and why they suddenly, in that particular set up, chose to speak to certain people about certain things. You know I was thinking, Oh Christiane, this is getting a bit crazy. Here you are at

3

eleven o'clock at night in a pub trying to relax and you're doing ethnography, it can't go on!

The fact that PO is close to the everyday ways in which we make sense of the world is seen as a weakness in natural science and traditional quantitative social science research. In these traditions, the emphasis is on avoiding or minimising participation with your subjects. The efforts of the positivistic researcher are directed towards being as objective as possible, avoiding 'bias' and taking steps to overcome the problem of the 'Observer's Paradox' so that your data is valid.

The 'Observer's Paradox' describes the double bind of all social science researchers. The very fact of your presence as an observer affects what it is you are observing. Social scientists within the positivist tradition will take steps to minimise 'the Observer's Paradox'. The two-way mirror technique used in psychology experiments is an obvious example.

Ethnography takes a very different approach (see Unit 2). Since the social world is not objective but involves subjective meanings and experiences, it is the task of the ethnographer to interpret these meanings and experiences. PO entails being relatively involved with your informants, observing and analysing their actions in context. As a participant, you are part of the social reality that you are observing and instead of trying to minimise this involvement and inevitable subjectivity, you can turn it to advantage. In other words, work with your subjectivity, not against it. Being aware of our role and relationship within the group and reflecting critically on this introduces the reflexive element of PO. (See Unit 2).

Reflexivity is a kind of self-questioning alertness: any activity observed, any question asked creates a context of which the ethnographer is a conscious part. The presence of the ethnographer may mean that the patterns of interaction can be raised to a conscious level and reflected on by the group themselves. The ways in which informants relate to the ethnographer or change their behaviour for her or him (e.g. say things they think the ethnographer wants to hear or produce a stereotype which they know the out-group has of them such as 'we are so fun loving') are themselves interesting because they illuminate the routine practices disrupted by her or his presence.

Participant observation is on a continuum from total participant to total observer (see Junker 1960:36, Chicago University Press). The particular circumstances will affect where on the scale, at any given time, the ethnographer may be situated. These are not discrete roles but that there is a continuum from complete participant to the complete observer and most students will not find it helpful to be either one or the other. Complete participants often conceal their roles as observers and this raises important ethical questions (see Unit 10).

Some combination of participant and observer will offer the most opportunities. Students may want to mix the different ethnographic methods described on the course. Units 9 and 10 deal with ethnographic conversations and interviews and students will often find themselves shifting between PO, ethnographic conversations and more formal interviewing. For example, they may be sitting in a bar with an informant when an incident takes place. They observe the informant and try to

remember as much as possible to note down later on. They may turn to their informant and either directly or indirectly elicit her or his reactions or discover the meaning of a particular term as used in this context. Sensitivity to context and flexibility are the qualities that students need to actively develop.

In the pub assignment (Unit 3) and the classroom observation (Unit 7), students have already started the process of 'hanging around'. They have started to observe, in depth and over periods of time, and to note the persistent and acute attention to detail required of the good observer. Suddenly everything becomes salient and nothing is worth passing over. Students become aware of how de-focused they are in their everyday lives and how difficult it is to make the taken-for-granted 'strange'. They also begin to realise how difficult it is to record accurately after the event what actually happened and how easy it is to jump to a rapid interpretation before first making a full description. These are all practices which, together with the habit of reflexivity, have to be developed over time.

Students also need to develop the habit of writing down everything they have observed and heard as soon as they can. In some situations, it may be possible to take notes unobtrusively during the PO. For example, one student jotted down key words on a beer mat, another wrote up what they could on their rather frequent visits to the toilet. On other occasions, it may only be possible to write up after the event. In this case, it is vital to organise some time immediately after a period of PO so that what happened can be captured as accurately as possible. (See Handout 2 on Shirley Jordan's ethnographic project).

Since PO is so central to ethnography, these sessions provide a good opportunity to give an overview of the different stages in doing an ethnography. (See Handout 1 based on Hammersley and Atkinson: Doing Ethnography). In addition, Spradley's *Participant Observation* is particularly good on getting started in the field and Robert Burgess's *In the Field* is a good general introduction to field research.

References

♦ Burgess, R (1984) *In the Field: An introduction to field research.* London: Allen and Unwin

♦ Hammersley, M and Atkinson, P (1983) *Ethnography: Principles in practice.* London: Tavistock

♦ Fetterman, D (1989) *Ethnography Step by Step.* Sage

♦ Spradley, J (1980) *Participant Observation.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

♦ Spradley, J and Mann, B (1975) *The Cocktail Waitress.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

SECTION TWO

1. Outline of a session

1. Introduction:
   What is PO?
   The advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of PO

2. Assignment Feedback (Observing):
   Observing yourself (from Unit 1)
   Observing others (From Unit 3 Assignment and video; Unit 6 Gendered Interactions and Unit 7 Classroom Observation.)

3. Doing ethnography:
   Presentation and discussion of the handout

4. Assignment Feedback (Critiquing)

5. Choosing an ethnographic topic

6. Taking notes during PO

2. Description of a session

2.1 Introduction

Explain the aims of the session (See Section 1). Using the background notes, re-introduce the notion of PO. As well as describing what is involved in PO from a methodological point of view, students may be motivated by the idea that doing PO will help them to engage more deeply and more quickly with the new social practices that surround them when they go abroad. Kate said this about doing PO when she arrived in Spain:

> I think in fact we had to start looking straight away. It actually made me observe a lot more and actually get in there and not be too afraid to speak to people because I had to speak to people, because if I didn't then I wouldn't have got anything interesting at all. I shared a flat with a friend and he was doing a different kind of project and I noticed the difference between my project and his. Because he would sit in all day, he didn't make any effort to do his project until the last week. But I'd been doing it from the day I arrived and I'd been out meeting people and getting exchanges and things like that purposefully, not only for the project but I mean it was a big incentive to actually get in there and have a go. It does make you look at all sorts of things in people's lives and I don't know that I would have missed them or not. Maybe I would have noticed but not paid any attention to them. You know the way people were. You just noticed every little kind of thing in the street, how people walked, or in the supermarket just the way they were, which maybe I would have noticed but not taken it in particularly. Rather than trying to be part of it

I would have been an outsider ... which I was, but I felt I was actually pushing in a little bit.

2.2 Assignment feedback (Observing)

Students work in pairs or small groups to compare each other's charts and agree on what have been the major problems, on the one hand, and the advantages and what they have learned, on the other. In a large group discussion, elicit the main pros and cons and draw again on some of the concepts and practical problems which have arisen in the course so far, e.g. subjectivity and reflexivity; how to make the everyday 'strange'; what might a 'thick description consist of; the distinction between description (in a thin sense) and interpretation; how people frame activities so that they are mutually intelligible; what cultural knowledge you need to make sense of even the most ordinary interaction; what patterns of interaction you can begin to see emerging; to what extent activities have symbolic significance (as well as being functional); what relations you have with those around you who you are observing, are you spying ?; practical difficulties with taking notes, remembering what was said and done, etc. etc.

The objective of this session is to revise some of the concepts and methodological ideas, prepare students for thinking about the whole ethnographic process and set the agenda for some of the practical and ethical issues of data collection which are discussed later in this unit and in Unit 9.

2.3 Steps in doing an ethnography

Go over the handout briefly. Two aspects of the handout: choosing a topic and taking notes are dealt with later in the unit. This handout should help students see how PO fits into the whole process and also see how data collection is not a discrete process. It links back to choosing a topic and forwards to data analysis. For example, students will do some initial PO before deciding whether they have picked the right topic or whether the original topic was sufficiently focused. And, as they start to write up notes from PO, the process of data analysis has already begun because what you choose to write up and how you write it up is already part of the analytical process.

2.4 Assignment Feedback (Critiquing)

Either in small groups or as the whole class, elicit responses to the eight questions posed in the assignment. The focus should be on what the students can learn from these ethnographic projects rather than knee-jerk reactions to some of the content, e.g. that some of Gary's friends were not very nice, etc. Some of the issues to draw out of this critique are:

- The different kinds of PO illustrated in the two studies: Ana was a participant but because she was in a public space, she was very much an observer. She could not find out what meanings those she observed attached to their actions. Gary was much more a participant and so 'making strange' was much more difficult.

- The extent to which they used anthropological and sociolinguistic concepts in their study. Could Ana have used Sutherland's notion of social space in more detail? Could Gary have unpacked the cultural knowledge required to be a member more systematically?

- Were they sufficiently reflexive in coming to the conclusions they came to?

- The ways in which doing a home ethnography helps with doing an ethnographic project while abroad: making sense of a cultural world with which you are familiar before taking on a stranger one; developing the habit of observation; looking at the smallness and everydayness of things and drawing out larger cultural patterns; issues of writing up (see Unit 18).

Gary Mortimer found that his home ethnography was useful in doing his ethnography on the barriers and maintenance of Sevillano identity. This was based on three main sets of informants: his landlord, the housekeeper and friends from the 'barriada', a poor suburb of Seville. He saw parallels with his Easter project, specifically to do with issues of inclusion and exclusion in which the 'northern man' mystique is compared with the Sevillano.

2.5 Choosing an ethnographic topic

Refer back to point one on the handout: Doing Ethnography and look at some of the examples of topic choices and also the changes that students made:

- 'Concepts of order' changed to 'what is it like being a foreign student?'. The reason for the change was that the student found her topic too abstract and too stereotyping. Also, she felt it would be more useful to do a project on a topic which she herself was part of.

- 'Naval personnel and local people in Cadiz' changed to 'transvestite prostitutes'. The main reason for this was that there were too many problems of access related to the naval base. Instead, Chris chose a clearly defined sub-group whose 'deviance' from the norm helped to highlight some of the practices of the majority group. In particular, he started by asking the question: 'do the hierarchical relationships and value-systems in this clearly demarcated sub-culture in Cadiz reproduce those of mainstream culture?'

- Shirley Jordan's project on dirt and cleanliness changed to a project on the group itself. (See Handout 2). She changed topic because, after some time spent doing PO, she realised that the cleaners' concerns were about their status and how they were perceived, controlled, etc. rather than about their 'work' as cleaners.

Some students formulate a topic and usually try to stick with it. This can mean that they overlook something in their environment which is an obvious choice. For example, Sandra wanted to do a topic on Flamenco and joined an (expensive) class so that she could learn about it. But she found few opportunities to observe Flamenco outside the class. But all the time, the Sevillanas dance was happening in the bars that she visited and she realised that the topic she really wanted to do was on the Sevillanas and the concepts of 'passion' and 'grace' associated with it.

Although many students change topic, and flexibility is important here, this does not mean that students should not work out a 'foreshadowed problem' before they go and discuss it with their project tutor. The process of doing this is useful in itself. It also means that students have something to start with when they arrive and, even though they may go through a period of confusion and frustration if they find that they have not picked the right topic, they can learn from this experience. And finding the 'right' topic for them is also a great relief and can mean that data collection and analysis progress apace.

2.6   Note-taking

The different ways of taking notes are detailed in Unit 11. In this unit, Shirley Jordan's home ethnographic project is used to illustrate some of the issues of note taking. Students are given the first part of her project as a hand out, most of which they can read in their own time. In class, concentrate on the sections: Data collection: making notes and changing tack; The tea-room.

From the data collection section, draw out the following points:

♦   it is worth trying to train your memory so that activities, topics and even verbatim conversations can be recorded;

♦   only use a notebook if your informants are quite comfortable with the idea and are not performing for it;

♦   do not focus down too fast on what you have decided in advance is interesting.

From the tea-room section, draw out the following points:

♦   jot down even the most apparently insignificant details;

♦   look at the ways in which physical surroundings give meaning to more explicit accounts from the informants themselves;

♦   be reflexive about your own physical presence in a relatively closed community.

3.   Advice and comments

At this stage, students are getting closer to the winter break when they will have to carry out some kind of home ethnography. They are often beginning to be concerned about what they can do and how they can do it. So a very practical session with a lot of references to what students have done before is usually well received. It is also quite a good moment to do some consolidating of anthropological concepts and terms used in ethnographic method. The student home ethnographies are not offered as good or bad models but as attempts which have both strengths and weaknesses from which students on the course now can learn. They can also be referred back to 'The Motorway' study from Unit 2.

Student comments

...sometimes it feels like there's too much to actually get hold of and occasionally it's almost as if there is nothing solid to grasp at all.

By going through our notes I suddenly became aware of the advantages and disadvantages of things we had done. The time for this repetition was good because we have done many different things and it was really necessary to juxtapose them in order to remember how they worked and for which situation during fieldwork they are suitable.

SECTION THREE

1.   Assignment

Participant Observation

There are two main parts to this assignment. It is essential that you do both of them to really benefit from the discussions on ethnographic methods and methodology from next week onwards. Both are important learning exercises in themselves and will help you:

1.   to gain an overall picture of what you have achieved so far and to consolidate what you have learned, a kind of 'stocktaking'

2.   to develop your analytical skills by doing what is called 'critique'

3.   to learn more about what is involved in actually 'doing' ethnography from a practical, emotional and ethical point of view.

So give yourself plenty of time to do this assignment and don't rush it in the last minute.

Part 1 – Observing

Get your course file and retrieve all your assignments, tasks and notes on the following:

♦   **observing yourself** (card exercise; life-cycle line)

♦   **observing others** (pub, NVC; focused and unfocused gatherings; mixed-gender interactions; videos)

♦   as well as any other notes you have specifically about **observation.**

Next draw up a chart on a sheet of A4 paper. Starting with the card exercise, make notes on the following:

on the **left-hand** side: problems or difficulties with this kind of observation (e.g. high visibility, awkwardness – why?, note-taking problems, ethical issues, etc.	on the **right-hand** side: advantages of this kind of observation

Remember to consider not only your own position, but also that of the people or situation you are observing.

Part 2 – Critique

Read the two ethnographic assignments written by students (G. Mortimer/ A.Seabourne) and based on three weeks' research.

Read the student assignments at least twice, use a highlighter pen, annotate the text and then write your comment making detailed notes on the following:

1. What is the project about? (It might be useful to consider what title you would give it if you had written it)

2. What kind of research do you think was needed to get the data on which this project was based?

3. What kind of questions does it ask?

4. How are these questions answered? (i.e. what evidence is given? Summarise and refer to text, page number and section)

5. Does it raise any possible further research questions in your mind which one could pursue given more time?

6. What difficulties or problems do you think the ethnographer encountered?

7. What 'role' did the ethnographer have to adopt (may be more than one)? How would you characterise their position as observer? Think also of the possible effects on the 'researched'.

8. Any other thoughts and comments on these assignments?

Remember: To 'critique' is not synonymous with 'to criticise'! It is all right to be critical, but try to be analytical and constructive about it. This is not an exercise in running somebody else's work down, you are trying to learn from it.

HANDOUT 1 – doing ethnography
(Adapted from Hammersley and Atkinson)

Ethnographic research is the <u>detailed</u> investigation of the cultural and social <u>patterns</u> of interaction, and the values, beliefs and assumptions that account for such interaction.

Steps in doing an ethnography

1.   <u>Developing a research problem</u>

Malinowski suggests going into the field with a 'foreshadowed problem' rather than a preconceived idea or specific hypothesis to prove or test. A foreshadowed problem is an interesting question hovering in your mind.   It may prove to be quite misconceived or totally impractical, in which case it is fine to change. Flexibility is all.

Some examples are:

♦   Why do despatch riders put on such a 'macho' image?

♦   Are there patterns and underlying relations in what looks like a very individual business: street trading in Portobello Market?

♦   What role does religion play in the everyday lives of people in Seville?

♦   What does it mean to be a blind student in Marburg?

♦   What are the greeting practices of a North Italian group?

Some students found they had to change from their original question, e.g. :

> 'Concepts of order among a German community' changed to 'What is it like being a foreign student at the University?'

> 'What kind of relationships exist between the naval personnel and local people in Cadiz?' changed to 'What does it mean to be a transvestite prostitute?'

> 'Notions of dirt and cleanliness among a group of cleaners' changed to 'How do cleaners perceive their own group and how do they relate to the wider community?'

If you do decide to change, do not leave it too late as you will then have very little time to collect/analyse data.

2.   <u>Choosing a group or event/series of events to study</u>

You may either choose an entire group (e.g. Ana Barro studied the only two caretakers in her buildings) or you will need to take a sample. This does not mean

sampling in the way it is done for surveys. It means working with a small group whom you have chosen (observer-identified) or who have selected themselves or been selected by one of the group (member-identified). A common practice is to find a key informant who then helps you find others in the group.

If you choose an event(s), e.g. marriage ceremonies; or a particular ritual, e.g. Sevillano dance; or an annual event, e.g. Notting Hill carnival, you will need to do considerable ethnographic work around the event as well as working out how you can observe it, if it is a complex encounter involving many people. Some classic ethnographies are based on what was perceived as a key event through which the whole society could be analysed, e.g. Geertz's study of cock-fighting in Bali.

Whether you choose a group or an event, you will have to work out over what period and with what frequency you can observe and talk to people.

3.   Getting access

It is important to choose a study which you can do. Getting access to certain groups or discussing particular topics with informants may prove impossible. It is important to get access honestly so that there is no suggestion of spying. The people you are studying need to know, at least in a general way, that you are interested in some aspect of their lives. As suggested above, a key member of a group you are interested in may 'open the gate' to many other members (see Unit 9 on locating an informant).

As well as getting in honestly, you need to get honest responses. These will only come as you gradually build up trust which, in turn, will be founded on the ability to share knowledge. For example, Rachel in Marburg found that the blind students were just as interested in hearing about life in British universities as she was in documenting their experiences. In such cases you may need to allow time for a certain amount of give and take in building up a relationship.

4.   Making relationships

Your relationship with the people you study will depend on many things including how far you are one of the group, how much time you have and how far you are accepted by them. Some ethnographies involve studying friends or your immediate circle, in which case you are part of the group.

In other circumstances, your gender, ethnicity, age, occupation etc. will mean that you could never be part of the group, but you can still participate in the group:

> Though it may seem incongruous to think of a middle-aged, 200-pound male anthropologist being a participant observer in third- and fourth-grade classes, this was actually the case. I sat at a desk in the back of the room and did the same things as the children did insofar as my ethnographic recording activities permitted. The children accepted me and my role much more quickly than did the teachers, but both seemed to adapt to the incongruities

after a period of several weeks. I can think of no other way that I would have come to an understanding of what the third and fourth grade in the Schonhausen Grundschule were like.   (Spindler, 1974, quoted in Burgess, 1984)

You will have to decide how closely you want to be identified with the group, if that is a choice. You certainly need to be accepted by them but you also need to make or keep strange the practices you observe and hear. Some ethnographers 'go native' and try to act as a member of the group. As a foreign student, this may not be possible or advisable since you may be perceived as 'acting the part' and resented or your participation resisted.

You may also find that your field-role changes during the course of your study. In other words, you may have several roles throughout the different phases of the project, moving from newcomer, to an accepted member of the group, to someone exiting the group. Similarly, you may negotiate different roles with different informants, e.g. Antonia's study of religion in everyday life was based on the family she lived with. She looked after the six-year-old son, who was one informant, and had frequent contact with the woman who cleaned the house. Her relationships, and so her data, with these two were quite different from her relationship with the parents of the boy.

4.   Collecting Data

Your data will consist of:

1.   Observations which include the setting, activities and interactions

2.   Accounts, including descriptions and interpretations by informants

3.   Interviews

4.   Documents, e.g. notes or forms used by informants in their work, letters, etc.

It is important to be reflexive about how you got the data and not just jump to premature abstractions and evaluations. Most of the data will be collected in naturally occurring situations but it is also possible to give informants tasks to elicit data, e.g. ask them to draw a map of the settings in which they operate or, e.g. for children, ask them to sort cards with activities on them into whatever categories they choose.

Christianne, who was studying relationships between German and foreign students in a hall of residence, spent a lot of time in the communal kitchen, observing the general conversations and the way in which fraught issues, such as keeping the kitchen clean, were handled.

6.   Recording and organising data

You can record data through the field notes, audio and video recording and photographs. Field notes need to be written up as soon as possible after each PO. Record as much as you can of the informants' actual words. You need to keep a chronological account, i.e. what happened each day in the order it happened with

17

time and date and setting, and a thematic account, i.e. a record of key themes and topics as they emerge. For example, as well as writing field notes based on observations and conversations with street traders, Jane took a series of photos of Portobello Market.

7. Analysing data

There is no hard and fast line between ordering your data and analysing it. As you begin to order and index it, so the process of analysing starts. Analysing data is a continuing process from the moment you collect your first piece of data. You may find, as you analyse, that your study is about something different from what you first thought. An important aspect of analysing data is keeping your own field diary in which you can write down all your personal thoughts, feelings and anxieties about the whole process. You may find this very useful when you come to write up your ethnographic project.

Remember to describe before you interpret and explain, to avoid quick and slick evaluations. As you analyse your data and constantly review what you have collected, certain concepts and themes will start to become important. As they emerge, keep checking your data to see how far it gives further evidence of these themes. But it is important to check for examples of <u>disconfirming evidence</u> as well, i.e. accounts, observations and interaction which either do not exemplify these themes or actually contradict them.

Shirley Jordan changed her ethnographic project from notions of dirt and cleanliness to ideas about group identity and status. She found, as she talked to the cleaners, that they discussed their own work very little. When she began to analyse the data, she found that both their concerns and the way they organised their physical space, the tea-room, were leading her to listen out for evidence of, and ask questions about, their relationships and their sense of who they were in the hierarchy.

8. Using different data sources

In trying to understand a different group or event, the ethnographer needs to find out as much as possible from <u>different sources</u>. This means observing/ talking to different people; collecting data about the same group/event in different ways, i.e. observation, interviews, documents, videos, etc. and studying the same people over time, perhaps in different contexts. All these different sources can then be compared and contrasted so that each one helps in the interpretation of the other. This is called 'triangulation'. In this way, the relationship between concepts and the actual data can be checked and generalisations are not made on the basis of one type of data.

Sandra, in her study of the Sevillano dance, used and triangulated a number of data sources: she hung around in bars to discover the contexts in which the dance was done; she observed and participated in the dance. She went to dance classes and read up about the dance in studies of it. In this way, she was able to compare what people said about 'grace' in the dance with what counted as 'grace' in the dancers' performance on the floor and relate this to wider concepts of self-presentation in Sevillano society.

9.   Writing up

You will need to allow plenty of time for writing up and should discuss a first draft thoroughly with your tutor. You will have an enormous amount of data that you need to boil down. Think about different ways of presenting your data, e.g. thematically or as a life history, and make sure that:

- you have sections on the context, the informants and how you collected the data, and a reflective section;

- that you use your informants' language as much as you can;

- that you relate your themes/concepts to the literature in the area;

- that you have a strong, clear conclusion.

HANDOUT 2 – Shirley Jordan's notes for her ethnographic project

1. Deciding on a project

When I began my ethnography, I was a complete novice. I had little idea of what such a project would involve, but was excited by what I heard and by the enthusiasm of students. My ethnography was not done during a period abroad, but in my home environment. This can be difficult for practical reasons. I was at a loss as no obvious group suggested itself, and the pace of my working day made the problems seem insurmountable.

Who could I spend time with, when and where?
I toyed with one or two possibilities before making my final choice:
- The community of women surrounding my own mother-in-law;
- Local people in the catering trade, all of different ethnic origins;
- The life of a British Rail station.

These were all abandoned for various reasons (difficulty of access, etc.)

Of the little background reading I had done so far, I was particularly drawn to a short essay about 'Rubbish' and had begun to chew over issues surrounding our ideas of rubbish, junk, dirt, hygiene and purity. With this in mind, I finally decided to attempt to work with a group of cleaners in my own institution.

2. Access

I was aware there was a hierarchy to work through, and began with G, the Operational Services Manager from Estates Management. She agreed to speak to one of the cleaning supervisors who would then introduce me to the cleaners. I was fortunate in that both Manager and Supervisor were enthusiastic about my project. G, who was new in her post, was concerned that the cleaners were 'invisible' to others, and that their task seemed a thankless one. She was keen that they should take pride in their work and that they should be thanked for jobs well done. It seemed appropriate to her that somebody should be showing an interest in them.

Despite the promising nature of this first interview, it also brought me my first taste of two problems which were to dog me throughout my fieldwork: disentangling myself from hierarchy, and explaining satisfactorily to others what I was doing. G was initially keen that I should 'report back to her', that information should filter up to her, using me as intermediary. The notions of 'impartiality', 'neutrality' and 'confidentiality' were ones I had to stress several times both with G and with the cleaners, in order to establish the unthreatening nature of my involvement with them.

My second problem was explaining why I wanted to spend time with the cleaners. From the beginning, I found it difficult to describe and to justify my project to those involved. This embarrassment never left me and I probably never gave a really

satisfactory explanation to the cleaners as to why I was there. The best I could manage was to say that I was working on a project which involved spending time with a group to which I did not belong, and that the 'results' would only be shown to my teacher. In spite of this, everyone involved appeared to have differing perceptions of me and of what I was doing there, and I doubt if any consensus was ever reached.

3. Locating informants

My first questions were who to spend time with, and when. The cleaners are a large, mixed-sex workforce, spread over different University buildings. I was unsure of how to make a choice. Initial conversations with the supervisor were extremely promising in terms of the kind of ethnography I had 'mapped-out' for myself, and she made some interesting observations on cleaning, namely, that nobody notices cleaning unless it hasn't been done, and that the general attitude is 'It's OK, somebody else will see to it'. She saw this phenomenon as a small-scale example of the general ecology problem – a shirking of responsibility both in terms of one's immediate environment and in terms of the planet! I had considered spending time with her, but this was not really possible unless I were to 'shadow' her in her work. The deep divisions amongst the cleaning staff would also have made it very difficult for me to spend time with people from different hierarchical levels.

It was considered inappropriate for me to follow the cleaners around on the job and the Supervisor suggested I begin by spending time with them during their tea breaks (beginning at 08:45 and officially lasting for 20 minutes). I had supposed that afterwards I would select informants, see them individually and 'interview' them or be with them at work.

After my first meeting, this idea was abandoned. I decided it was appropriate to stick with the 'tea-room set' and spend time with these women during their tea-break. I became interested in the group dynamics, the functioning, rules, hierarchy and values of the group as a whole, rather than one or two individual perspectives.

4. Responses to the ethnographer

There were problems in being introduced to such a fragile and volatile environment. My perceived identity gave rise to many problems in the initial stages, and the dangers were clear before I even got to meet the tea-room set. As I arrived to wait for the Supervisor, two cleaners (P and J) were sitting down and chatting. They assumed I was from Estates Management (possibly G), and were naturally suspicious. Was I a spy? (This word came from P and J, not from me, and was indicative of the general insecurity felt by all the cleaners).

It became apparent that mistrust is rife; spying, sneaking, gossiping. Very tribal. Not an easy environment in which to introduce a new element. The first responses of the tea-room set were less than gracious – and the Supervisor's introduction of me disastrous. It was difficult to get them to believe I wasn't part of a grapevine through to management.

The cleaners clung to the mistaken belief that I was writing a book on their private lives (I became 'That French teacher who's writing a book on the cleaners'). They tried to make themselves into somebody interesting by giving me their individual biography – anecdotes about childhood or marriage. They were often too keen to give me what they imagined I wanted. Even those who'd been there twenty years didn't imagine I could be interested in their job. Being a cleaner was 'not part of their identity'; they preferred to define themselves in ways which had nothing to do with their work. My preconceptions of what kind of information they would give me, and their preconceptions of what kind of information I wanted were both wrongheaded, and both got in the way of what I was really there to do.

5.   Data collection: making notes and changing tack

Before fieldwork began, I imagined myself scribbling copious notes and even taping conversations with willing and compliant informants. I did not turn up with my notebook for my first few visits, though. I thought it might be off-putting, and I already felt awkward enough. I was hampered by my nagging doubts that what I was doing was somehow exploiting the cleaners. I was, in addition, afraid they would insist on looking at my notes.

There are frustrations in attempting to commit everything to memory. I would dash to my notebook to scribble fieldnotes immediately after each session. I had very little time to do so and often had to leave it until late in the evening or the next day. I therefore felt constantly frustrated that important observations might be slipping away the longer I left it. In time, I did begin to take my notebook with me. I had decided to start directing things, asking questions and jotting down responses, but most of my more direct attempts were thwarted, and the notebook was a constant source of embarrassment to me. It never seemed appropriate to use it in the presence of my informants.

Worst of all, the unopened notebook became an object of attention to the cleaners, who would remark, "She's brought her little book again!" but who obviously saw I was doing nothing with it. The notebook seemed to me to symbolise my 'failure' to handle my new situation. D was puzzled by it: 'You're supposed to be writing about us, aren't you, but you haven't taken any notes!" Delighted at the invitation, I proposed to ask some questions and do some note taking next time. At the next session, however, D had other plans; "Bugger the questions, bingo comes first" was her response when I reminded her of her comments.

What should an ethnographer take notes on? Initially I was too keen to look only for things which corresponded to my 'shopping list' of headings, as if I had already decided what my fieldwork would yield. I was trying too hard to select only what I considered to be interesting or 'important'. Eventually, I learned that it is important to jot everything down, whether or not it appeared to have any significance at the time, and whether or not it appeared to fit my initial framework.

I also learned that it is essential to write up immediately and analyse later but not too much later, since key patterns and concepts emerging through data analysis must be obtained in order to direct subsequent data collection. In this way the material grows organically; through a constant process of observation, note-taking, analysing notes

and doing background reading, your initial questions will be refined and new questions will emerge. All these must take place simultaneously, and not be treated as separate stages.

When D was there, I felt I was not disturbing the environment; I was in her shadow and free to observe. In her absence, other informants came forward and highlighted my presence as an 'outsider'. I became more noticeable and conversation shifted as self-appointed informants such as L began to tell me their life story, assuming that was what I wanted to hear and waiting eagerly for me to take notes [the group appeared to hold their work as cleaners in low esteem and, assuming it could not be of interest to me, had invented their own notion that I was writing a book on their private lives]. Whereas D either ignored or tolerated me, others, in her absence, would try too hard to give me what they **thought** I wanted. They attempted to make themselves interesting as individuals, whereas I was interested in the functioning of the group as a whole.

It was D who made me put my notebook aside and play bingo with everyone (during which I learned a great deal). It was D who shrugged off many of my initial questions and made my ethnography change shape by unwittingly suggesting new ones. It was also D who served as a catalyst, often providing the group to discuss issues in which I was interested (although certainly not doing so for my benefit). On one occasion, I had been excluded from a sensitive meeting, and ventured to ask "So, was your meeting interesting yesterday?" The question was obviously an attempt to pump D for information. As such it was ignored and D kept her nose firmly buried in her newspaper – but she and the others gave me the full benefit of their opinions on the meeting in subsequent conversations, initiated by D. It was therefore thanks to D that I emerged with an authentic and rounded view of the group – a view which, I felt, belonged to the group itself rather then being 'invented' by me.

D, then, much to my surprise, turned out to be my chief informant and my chief aid – although if you were to ask D about it she would probably deny it. After all, she didn't even speak to me very much.

6. Conclusion

Field work for me was a series of frustrated expectations and of awkward and uncomfortable feelings. I felt constantly thwarted in any attempts I made to direct the conversation, since my voice was often drowned out by that of D (or others) who had their own priorities, their own more important issues to discuss.

This was a valuable lesson to me. It changed the shape of my ethnography, since the cleaners resisted the predetermined study on them which I had planned. I realised that the most important thing is to keep an open mind - to be flexible, to let your research lead where it will, and to be prepared to drop some of your most cherished concepts.

In the end, my notes had organised themselves into areas which had little to do with my initial ideas on rubbish. What became more interesting (and was obviously of interest to the cleaners) was their own status and their relationship within the larger

community in which they worked. What became of great interest to me also was the special way in which their own small community functioned and organised itself.

7.   The Tea-Room

Not wanting to be too intrusive in the initial stages, I had plenty of time to observe physical details of what was around me. Obsessive jotting down of all details observed, however apparently insignificant, led to my realising that many features of the physical environment of the tea-room had caught my attention. These recurred in many of my jottings and began to create a pattern. It was not just from the cleaners that I got information but also from the tea-room itself, a physical environment which was quietly yielding in all its details.

It was in many ways an early key to understanding the cleaners. They had created a physical echo of their own regime. Any physical environment is a reflection of its inhabitants, of those who have created it. Obviously, a home environment will tell us something about the occupant's 'home' mentality, and a working environment will tell us about the person's attitude to their work.

The tea-room was an environment created by a group, thus containing evidence of several influences, but with its overriding physical structure and organisation reflecting the group's own structure, as well as their beliefs and values.

The tea-room itself, then, was particularly rich with information about the group, notably on the issues of divisions, boundaries and power:

1.   The cleaners are a 'hidden' community, segregated from the rest of the university. Their tea-room is on the top floor, tucked away and out of sight. It is not near any offices or classrooms. They are the 'unseen', somehow peripheral, and the very location of their room reinforces that idea. They, like the rubbish, are 'in the way' or 'out of place' and are 'swept aside', both figuratively and literally.

2.   The area is divided into several sections; a small corridor, a kitchen area and a main room. At the opposite end of the corridor is an office viewed as a threat because it was the possible locus of power (rumours that G from Estates Management was to establish herself there in order to spy! 'To hear when we come in and out'). In the main room, two of the walls are lined with lockers, and there are two large tables.

3.   The cleaners neglect their own environment. The tea-room itself is scruffy, untidy, smoky and very dirty. There is nobody else to do it. Nobody cleans for the cleaners! They are at the bottom of the chain. They have no interest in making it a pleasant or comfortable environment.

WHY?
Total lack of pleasure associated with work.
Lack of pride/self esteem?
Not really a sense of belonging, but of passing through (hold on job tenuous).
Don't work together as a team. No sense of pride – of building something.
There are no decorations to speak of. A number of old thank-you cards with floral motifs gathering dust on a low shelf (been there for years). Glossy pin-

ups of Coronation Street stars on locker doors. Two of L's gods and goddesses (tolerated by others in an amused way)

4. Tea-room is a den. It is locked and private – their place – a place where they are not supervised and can rebel, either in word or deed. Conversations about supervisors, various injustices – or lingering longer than they should, or engaging in 'subversive' activity (bingo for money).

5. Belonging(s).

   The way in which cleaners used their belongings was evidence that they did not themselves 'belong' in the group. No real sense of trust, group identity or fidelity; every woman for herself.

   A locker for everyone. Lockers were kept locked all the time.

   Property is very important. Nothing is shared except the kettle. Own chairs, own rugs, tea, coffee, sugar, cloths, Hoovers, and own lockers to lock them away in.

   A chair for everyone (and just enough for the full contingent). Chairs actually had sticky white labels stuck on them, each bearing the name of a cleaner (i.e. their owner). The chairs had to stay in the same place and the cleaners invariably sat in the same place. It was thus very difficult on occasions. By being there I was often having to apologise, change seats or even stand up. I would sometimes be asked discreetly to move to another vacant chair even when there were plenty available.

   The tea-room was a place where general meetings were sometimes held as more cleaners arrived, the chairs were filled by their rightful occupants, and others remained standing, even when there were empty seats apparently available.

   Belongings or possessions gave each individual status and bargaining power. A request may be made to borrow somebody else's Hoover - but it was almost a punishable offence not to empty the bag and change it before returning it. If equipment is lent by a cleaner to whom it does not belong – trouble! Possessions = power. Who lets who use whose Hoover? Fiercely protective of equipment.

6. Uniform: two very young cleaners who arrived for a meeting were not wearing any overalls. This was commented upon by others as being 'incorrect'. Why? Uniform/identity more than practical reasons?

   Similarly, always remove overall before putting on coat to go home. Those who don't are looked down upon. This too is 'incorrect'.

7. Not only were tea-rooms divided into male and female tea-rooms, but there were further segregations, those of race.

   In the tea-room are two long tables. During my first two visits the numbers were low. On each occasion, an Indian lady (L) sat at the table next to the window, either alone or with one young African woman. There were six people on the other table (including myself) and plenty of room for us all to sit together. Everyone on our table was white. I had not noticed this or attributed any significance to it until I was officially told that this was the 'white

table' and that was the 'black table'. Such crude segregation of a group which in fact included people of a number of ethnic origins became more visible when the tea-room was full (with nine or ten people on each table). My surprise and embarrassment at their frankness about this. Issues of race were in fact important ones and dealt with by the cleaners on several levels.

READING

~~in bar 2~~

♦ **Student ethnography:** *Members only.* **Gary Mortimer**

After a failed attempt at my original title, I was rather stuck for some other topic on which to base my study. The ideal was to choose a group of people which I could observe without being conspicuous or influencing their behaviour. The obvious solution was to observe my friends. Although rather reluctant at first, as I thought 'nothing ever happens', after three weeks of 'making strange', close observation and many a drunken night out running off to the toilets to scribble down notes on beer mats, I eventually learnt that there was much more happening than what met the eye, and that I did not know these people as well as I thought.

This paper is mainly centred around the way in which people organise themselves into groups. By groups, I mean to say a collection of people who are drawn together due to their common factors, such as interests, obligations, aims etc., and which are characterised by their own image, values, attitudes, vocabulary and codes of behaviour.

Before going any further, a brief description of the people involved must be given if this essay is to be followed comprehensively.

My father runs a small welding business and employs two people, Andrew (23) and Derek (30). I have known Andrew for a number of years and he, along with Jimmy (21) and Pete (23), form the core of a group of friends with whom I mix when at home in Bradford. Derek, along with Barry, plays in a band normally at the local Working Men's Club called M's. Barry is also the father of Lorraine's (Derek's sister's) child.

There therefore appear to be four main groups: the welders, the band, family and friends.

Welders	Band	Family	Friends
Andrew Derek	Derek Barry	Derek Lorraine	Andrew Jimmy Pete Me

Membership qualifications to these four groups may seem fairly obvious; you are either a welder, a member of the band, related to Derek or a friend of Andrew. However, closer observation revealed the following:

♦ Andrew is allowed membership of the 'band group' as he sometimes helps them set up before a concert.

27

- Andrew has also been accepted as a member of the 'family group' as Lorraine (Derek's sister) has romantic designs on him and always tags along with Andrew to see the band play at M's (the club) where other members of the family congregate.

- Barry is also a member of the 'family group' as well as the band, as he is the father of Lorraine's child – although being married to someone else.

So, membership is not limited to one single group; furthermore since each group is distinct, membership of several groups endows a person with a number of roles to perform and images to project.

On several occasions, Andrew would use any opportunity to assert his membership of a certain group or his exclusion from another.

- We were watching a documentary on T.V. about Irish labourers. Somebody says: 'You've got to travel to where the work is...' Andrew: 'That's the way to do it Gary' (and later) 'He's a right lazy git him... they're normally good workers, the Irish.' This is clearly what he considers to be group knowledge – something which someone like me, who does not travel around working on building-sites knows nothing about – thus emphasising his membership of and my exclusion from 'the welder group.'

- As far as the band is concerned, one example best illustrates this. There was an advert in the local paper giving details of the band's concert the following Sunday. Andrew's excited reaction was 'Look we're in the papers.' 'We' meaning he and the band and not me. Also, the non-stop playing of rock music and songs sung by the band serve to remind others of his status as a band member.

- When speaking of Lorraine, Andrew has adopted Derek's nick-name for her 'Lol' and sometimes even 'our Lol.' Although this is said half jokingly – as he probably knows he is not fully qualified to address her in such a manner – the fact remains that this, like the examples before, is a case of group behaviour being used out of context, i.e. with non-members, to assert his membership.

- Andrew: 'Lol rang me up. She wants me to go to an engagement party with her ... I said yes but I don't want to go ... It'll be people stood around making polite conversation. I can't do that!" Here, Andrew is clearly trying to make the point that 'making polite conversation' does not conform to the required images of any of the groups to which he belongs.

The image of the welder is one of a hard, strong, popular, honest and fair working man who holds down a dangerous job, as can be seen in the following quotes, all of which are taken from Andrew.

- 'I'd have punched the fat git if I'd have heard him' – hard.

- 'Christ, I've got more strength in my...' – strong.

- 'Do you want another drink Gary' (time at the bar had been called), 'I'll tell that waitress over there. I know her' – popular.

- 'Well, I don't like letting people down, do I?' and I shouldn't be saying this, I don't like slagging people off' – honest, fair.

- 'Have you seen that Pudsey (site) we're (working) on? It's high up, is that' and 'Look at this. I got hit on the back of my head by a lump of burning concrete' – dangerous job.

The projection of this image becomes more apparent when a girl is present. The voice would drop, the accent become more broad and the notion of chivalry would come into practice. On one occasion, I was made to sit in the back of a van so a girl could sit in the front – welders know how to 'treat a girl with respect' !!!?

Reputation is extremely important if the image is to be maintained. Anything which threatens to contradict it is quickly rectified.

'Come and work the washing machine Gary. You know more about these things than I do' is such an example.

I once accused Andrew of being 'the sandwich boy' at work. This clearly goes against his desired image and was quickly justified by,

'It's the best job. I get to keep all the change. Anyway it's only because I'm the youngest.'

The example of the invitation to the engagement party where 'people would be making polite conversation', and Andrew's claim that he 'doesn't like slagging people off' are also relevant here.

To be seen in bad light would be extremely detrimental to Andrew's desired image.

- Many a frantic fifteen minutes was spent tidying the house if a girl was to visit, or even if there was the slightest possibility of such a visit. If by chance he was caught unaware, mess around the house was blamed on me.

- Andrew: 'I was supposed to ring that Alison last night. I suppose I'd better do it tonight.' Me: 'Why, I thought you didn't like her?' Andrew: 'Yeh, but you've got to keep them happy, haven't you?'

- Andrew: 'I'm going to ring Lol and say no. I'll think of a good excuse' (refers to engagement party).

- Andrew was talking to a girl in a night-club. Three other girls arrived with whom he also wanted to talk. He, however, continued speaking to the one girl, waited for me to appear, and then said 'Oh look Gary's here', and quickly disappeared to the

29

other three. So, although wanting to project his image as 'friendly and popular', Andrew would not leave the girl alone as this, as well as the examples before, would be contrary to his image as a 'gentleman' and therefore damage his reputation.

Within the 'friends group' there exist several other smaller or 'sub' groups, of which the criteria for membership is simply having something in common. This can be as simple as the beer you drink or the people you know.

In some cases membership to and the exclusion of others from these smaller sub-groups are used for the purpose of identity and image building, which reinforce the character and membership of the larger group.

For example, a local brewery was advertising its bitter on TV, portraying it as the drink of the 'salt-of-the-earth northern working man', and lager as the drink of 'the yuppy.' Both Andrew and Jimmy, who were present at the time, who both drink this particular beer and who both know that I drink lager (often referring to it as 'a pint of pufter juice'), looked at me and laughed.

'That advert's brilliant', Andrew claimed. The reason why it was so 'brilliant' is because not only did it reinforce Andrew's desired image of himself, but it also affirmed that he is not something that would totally contradict it. Furthermore, referring back to the engagement party (to which he did finally go, just to save his reputation), Andrew complained of there being no bitter to drink, only lager. The following are similar examples.

- While Andrew was at work one day, I went to his house and found Jimmy there, who was on holiday, doing some apparently urgent repairs to Andrew's loft. This was the first I had heard about it. Since I had three weeks holiday and Jimmy only had two days, it would seem more practical to ask me. Andrew returned and was not very happy about the mess Jimmy had made. Me: 'I can't understand why you didn't ask me?' The response from both was laughter.

- Andrew was repairing a kitchen door and asked Jimmy to lend a hand. I, however, although doing nothing at the time, was not asked.

The reason why, in both cases, I was not asked could be put down to the existence of another 'sub-group' from which I am excluded. As I am a student and not a worker, even more so not a practical or manual worker, it was assumed that I would not be interested or even suitable.

The fact that I am the only member of the 'friends group' who cannot drive and who does not own a car has many repercussions. Not only

does it exclude me from yet another 'sub group', but it is also a major source of conflict regarding the return of favours, as can be seen in the following illustration.

Pete and I live quite a distance away from Jimmy and Andrew. It is therefore customary on a night out for one person to drive around and pick up the others to take them to a pub near to the driver's house. On one particular night it was Jimmy who picked up Pete and I to take us to a pub near to Andrew and Jimmy's houses. However, before going to the pub, I asked to be taken somewhere else which was quite out of the way. The reaction was not very positive. 'I'm not a bloody taxi'.

Had it been anybody else making such a request, the response would not have been quite as strong. This is most probably due to the fact that since I am excluded from 'the drivers group', Jimmy is under no obligation to take me anywhere as he owes me no favours and I cannot return his. Furthermore, since I am excluded from 'the workers group' I cannot return the favour in any other way. This raises the question, do favours have to be returned? I found that the answer to this question was most definitely – Yes.

I questioned Jimmy as to whether or not he was being paid for doing the repair work to Andrew's loft. The answer was, 'No'. Me: 'God I wouldn't do it for nothing!' Jimmy: 'Oh I don't mind. I like it. Anyway he's helped me out in the past.'

This clearly indicates that the favour must be returned. This idea is best explained by the following example.

Andrew, Jimmy, Jennifer (my girlfriend) and I were at Andrew's house one evening before going out. Andrew was going to M's (the club), Jennifer and I were going to a local pub and Jimmy was unsure. Pete rang to say he wanted to be picked up. Andrew told Pete he was going to M's. On arriving, Pete decided he did not want to go to M's, but would prefer to go to the pub with Jennifer and me if Jimmy would also go. This sparked off an argument. Andrew: 'I told you half an hour ago I was going down there'.

Since Andrew clearly stated over the telephone where he was going, he saw an agreement having been made. Pete would be picked up in return for him accompanying Andrew to the club. However, when the agreement was not executed, or rather, the favour not returned, conflict arose; and Pete was well aware of what caused it. 'I feel a bit bad though, about him giving me a lift' and later in the pub, Jimmy complained about Andrew. 'I think he's playing funny buggers again.' Since each person present was a member of 'the friends group', there was no reason why Andrew should expect anyone to go to M's, which is the base of the other three groups. Andrew's insisting on going there was seen as petty and awkward as it did not conform to group norms. This is another example of group behaviour exercised out of context,

one which, along with non-conformation to group norms and values leads to conflict – which the following examples illustrate.

- Andrew, Pete and I were outside a night-club waiting for Jennifer, who would sign us in (a members only club). Jennifer was not there. Andrew spots someone he knows in the queue and gets then to sign him in, (to see if Jennifer was inside) while I wait outside. Pete had no choice but to wait with me. Jimmy arrives. 'Where's Andy? Has he done his usual trick again and just looked after himself? God he's a........ 'Looking after oneself' is contrary to the norms and values of the 'friends group' and therefore to everything it stands for.

- Andrew projecting his 'friendly and popular image' by talking to every girl he meets is quite dangerous as it sometimes has the opposite effect. He was accused of 'loving himself' and 'thinking he's a right woman's man'. One girl even complained of 'being led on', although this was justified by Andrew with, 'God, can't you even be friendly now?'

- Pete often complained of 'not even getting an introduction.' He once told me, 'Derek's ok because he doesn't leave you out of the conversation.'

Therefore, being excluded from one group by a fellow member of another is not acceptable behaviour. This highlights the dislike and, in some extreme cases, the contempt at being on the outside or the odd-one-out.

Within the welder group, Andrew is the only one who is not married and who lives alone. This causes him endless grief as he is now on the outside of a group and the odd-one-out. At work, wives are referred to as 'our lass'. A common phrase used at work, when leaving for home is: 'our lass had better have my tea on the table when I get home.' This is said jokingly and was once even said by Andrew himself. Driving home to Andrew's house one evening, he confessed: 'God, I wish I had an 'our lass' waiting for me with the tea on. I'm the only one at work who hasn't got one.'

Furthermore, Andrew's reason for not going to M's the night when everybody else went to the pub was: 'I went round for Derek and they're all going down with their wives, I can't be doing with that', as once alone with this group, his exclusion would become more apparent. I also recall an event which occurred at Christmas, when Andrew was 'parvicing' because 'everyone's taking their wives to this Christmas do.'

I was told of an event which took place shortly before my arrival in Bradford. Andrew had invited Pete and Jimmy to M's. According to Pete, he and Jimmy ended up sitting right at the other end of the room, being ignored and looking idiots, just because Andrew was with his welder friends. So Pete is clearly aware of his derived entry to this

group by Andrew. At various times he would attempt to give reasons which justify his exclusion such as:

- shifting the blame to Andrew: 'he hasn't half changed since he went to work for your dad.'

- belittling Andrew's own membership. Jennifer: (referring to M's) 'what is it with that place anyway?' Pete: 'he thinks he is important in there 'cos he's a member [...] He is a working man!' Peter's sarcasm implies he is not and therefore does not want to and cannot become a member of the group.

I asked Pete about Lorraine. 'Don't ask me, a couple of weeks ago I'd never heard of her. Now he talks about her as if she's his bloody sister.' This obviously refers to Andrew (the family group terminology i.e. 'our Lol'). Pete has used this example to try and show a misuse of address (as earlier explained) and thus make Andrew appear to be on the outside and trying to gain entry to a group by means of vocabulary.

Peter's main method of coping with exclusion from a group was to dismantle it and create another.

- On one occasion he was rather reluctant to come out with Jennifer and I as he would be 'gooseberry'. After trying in vain to persuade Andrew, he came. In order to escape being the odd-one-out, he spent most of the time talking about Andrew, thus dismantling the 'boyfriend/girlfriend group' and creating another of which he is a member, i.e. friends. The same can also be said when Jimmy did not want to go out alone with Jennifer and me, that is, until Pete arrived who would go 'if Jimmy comes'.

- As I said at the beginning of this paper, Andrew and I have known each other much longer than either of us have known Pete. Whenever Andrew and I would talk about an event which happened in the past, or a person, both of which Pete knows nothing about, he would wait for a lull in the conversation and then start a new one about something I know nothing of (usually football, someone I do not know or an event which occurred while I was in London), and once again creating another group of which he is a member.

However, this method cannot be applied to any situation, as Pete found one evening at M's. Only when Lorraine was left alone, without her friends and family, did Pete attempt to speak to her. Once all the obstacles were removed, i.e. other people, he was able to choose his own topic of conversation and thus create another 'sub-group'. It would have been impossible for him to do this with the members of the larger groups present as he would be too heavily out-numbered. This example also raises the question, can one single person be classed as a group? I found the answer to be, yes, but only when this particular person behaves in a distinct manner. For example, if Andrew was to have a

conversation with Pete, projecting his welder image by using group vocabulary etc., then he, solely, would form a group. However, Lorraine, sat by herself in a pub having a conversation with Pete about the weather, would not. If, on the other hand, she spoke of 'our Derek' or 'Barry' then she too could be singly classed as a group.

This method of creating other groups in order to avoid exclusion also leads to confusion over which one takes precedence, as shown in the following example:

Andrew, Jimmy and I were going out in Andrew's van. Andrew was driving and there is only one passenger seat. The question now raised was, who sits in the front seat? There were two conflicting factors:

- the van is a work's van and is theoretically owned by my father. Therefore, a group is formed between Andrew and myself, since Andrew works for my father.

- Jimmy on the other hand forms another group with Andrew, that of the drivers. In Jimmy's eyes, my place is in the back as a passenger. I was also reminded that I owed Jimmy a few favours. 'All that driving around I do for you!'

This argument was settled by yet another spectacular performance by 'Andrew the almighty welder', who pushed Jimmy in the back and slammed the door – but only because I was already positioned in the front seat.

Another source of misunderstanding, confusion and conflict was the misuse of roles, which yet again is another example of group behaviour exercised out of context. That is to say, two members belonging to the same groups do not interact with the same group code of behaviour, when one carries out his role as a member of another group which the other fails to realise. For example, on the night of the engagement party, Andrew received a phone call from Derek to see if he was still going out with his sister. Andrew's reaction was: 'Bloody big brother rings up to check if I'm still going out'

On another occasion, Andrew was not very pleased when Lorraine spoke of something she was supposed to know nothing about as it was told in confidence to Derek by Andrew. 'How the xxxx does she know that? It must be Derek. I'm not telling him anything again.'

Another such example is that when wanting to get in touch with me by telephone, Andrew would ring someone else to relay the message to me. All this simply to avoid ringing my house and running the risk of having to speak to my father, who Andrew can only see as having one role, i.e. 'boss'. Having to speak to my father on the telephone would mean a complete reversal of roles, 'boss' would become 'friend's dad' and 'employee/welder' would become 'son's friend'. Andrew would

therefore prefer to keep everybody's role separate in order to avoid the distress which occurs when roles are misused, as this leads to a breakdown of group membership, of image, and consequently loss of identity.

Detaching myself from the normal routine has definitely changed my outlook. I have realised that we are not, as I thought, simply just one group of friends and acquaintances, but that we are all divided into groups and furthermore into sub-groups, each one endowing a member with an image to project, a role to perform and a code of behaviour. I now know that bad feeling, upset and jealousy are caused by being excluded from a group and by the presence of two or more groups in the same place. Even now, as more people are being met, membership is increasing and new groups are being formed whilst more people are being excluded.

READING

- **Student ethnography:** *How people behave and react when forced to share a limited space with strangers.* Anna Seabourne

This project was carried out mainly on the Central, District and Piccadilly lines. The data obtained is a result of fourteen hours of participant observation, done mainly during the day. Its aim was to discover how people behave in a limited space with strangers.

Travelling by tube may appear to be something trivial, which many people do every day and take for granted. However, like almost everything else in society, it has its own sets of rules to be learnt and followed.

On entering the tube, one has to decide whether to sit or stand. This action is not always as straightforward as it first appears. Many factors affect the outcome of this decision, even though it only takes a second to be made. One has to consider the practical aspects – the length of the journey and the time of the day this takes place.

Also, gender and/or age factors may well be taken into consideration. Out of politeness, men should give up their seats to women, and the elderly should be allowed to sit down. However, the former is part of a social code which is gradually losing favour In these times of growing sexual equality. The latter, on the other hand, is still respected, I believe.

The fact that one of these rules remains strong while the other doesn't may indicate something about our multi-cultural society today: elder members of the community are widely respected in many cultures while men's attitudes to women may differ from the 'traditional English' one.

The unwritten code of the tube also dictates to us where we sit. The main aim of this code appears to be the maintenance of non-contact between oneself and fellow passengers. This non-contact is sustained on three levels: eye, physical and vocal. These must be maintained as far as it is possible.

As for choosing a seat, apart from the direction the seats face and the number of people they accommodate, the seats are indistinguishable from each other: they are all the same size and colour. Nonetheless, some seats are more popular than others. The seat at the end of the row next to the glass panel appeared to be the most popular out of all the seats. During my research, this seat was almost constantly occupied throughout the journey. This is probably due to the fact that the passenger would only have one person next to him, rather than two.

This would help that passenger to avoid any kind of contact by about half.

The single seats which are found on the District line tubes are also very popular, especially with women. Here, one does not have an immediate neighbour. People's decision about where to sit is also likely to be influenced by the presence of other passengers. When a passenger was faced with a choice of two free seats, it was interesting to see where that passenger chose to sit.

In one instance, a young woman was faced with either sitting next to a man or a couple. She chose to sit next to the couple. This was probably because the couple would have no reason to communicate with her as they were having a conversation. At the same time, the man on his own could pose a threat towards the woman.

On the other hand, a businessman chose to sit between another businessman and the glass panel rather than between two businessmen. Here, he was reducing the possibility of his coming into contact with anyone. At one stop, an Asian woman swapped from sitting between a man and woman to sitting between the glass panel and myself.

Obviously, the decision of a woman on her own is influenced by the knowledge of what a threat a man can constitute. Similarly, a man may choose not to sit next to a woman on her own so as not to cause her any discomfort. Moreover, the presence of objects, such as newspapers and cans, certainly influences a passenger's choice of seat. One might be deterred from sitting where there is such an object left on the seat. This may be because it is considered dirty - finished with or empty - and should really have been put in a bin. A passenger might think that the object would then make him dirty himself. Or the object may be a symbol of the previous passenger's ownership of the seat.

On one occasion, one passenger moved a coke-tin left on a seat he wished to occupy, to the next seat. A few stops later, after this passenger had got off, another passenger got on and placed the coke-tin on the floor, although he didn't then go on to take the seat the coke-tin was occupying. The presence of an object on a seat distinguishes it from the rest. It is a symbol of prior ownership and of that person's attitude to litter – it is acceptable to leave used things on seats that people will still want to use.

A similar thing occurred when a newspaper was left on a seat. A man moved it to the seat next door and sat down. Another man then came along and sat on both the seat and the newspaper. Obviously, some people have more feelings towards these objects. One girl picked up a brochure from the seat she wanted and proceeded to read it. When she got off, she took the brochure with her.

Once settled into their seats, people are obliged to comply with the rule of non-contact. This is essentially very hard to achieve – the seats are closer together than this culture's rules on personal space feel comfortable with. People who share the same eye-level are forced to sit opposite each other. One must avoid any physical or eye-contact with fellow passengers by protecting oneself against this possibility.

The first thing that one does is to mark one's personal space, and then protect one's physical being from contact with other passengers. By sitting in various positions, one indicates to the others one's personal space which must not be entered. Most people take up about the same amount of space. The position which allows adequate personal space, but does not infringe on a neighbour's, is where one leans to one side with the elbow on the armrest and the hand touching the face. By doing so, the passenger leaves enough space on the other side for her/his other neighbour to do the same thing without trespassing. Meanwhile, the arm creates a barrier which the neighbour cannot cross.

Similarly, other people may choose to lean as far back as possible, moving them further away from their neighbours, especially their heads. Alternatively, a few others choose to sit hunched forward over their knees. Their body becomes rounded like a ball and is reminiscent of a baby in the womb. Contact with one's body is called auto-contact which is a very natural action in times of stress or trouble. Travelling on the underground may not be the most stressful situation, but the more of our bodies we can cover and protect ourselves, the less chance there will be of anybody else being able to touch us. We also make barriers using our arms and legs to protect ourselves. Unless a material object is used, almost everybody makes a barrier, meaning something which crosses the body and prevents anyone getting close. These barriers range in degrees of strength: some just have their fingertips touching while others had their arms fully crossed.

Barriers made by legs also vary, from the feet being kept together or the ankles being crossed to the strongest form, the ankle/knee cross, one leg being parallel to the ground. This action could also be seen in terms of a circle. Thinking of the body as a circle (i.e. a continuous thing) is only valid when bands or legs are touching. Any loose ends, i.e. a hand lying free, could mean danger as someone could come along and get hold of it, breaking the non-contact rule.

There were very few instances of passengers sitting with both arms and legs free. Usually, one or the other was joined in a barrier. However, there was one instance when a man sat down, stretched out his legs and stretched his arms behind his head, leaving him very exposed. After about thirty seconds, he lowered his arms and joined his hands.

Although not always available, material objects make very good barriers and are more effective than human limbs. They are normally bigger and one can hide more easily behind them. Also, having something personal

nearby is comforting as it is a symbol of one's life outside the tube. The more items one has around, the stronger the space is marked. Coats and bags are the items visible on people's laps. They can conceal quite a lot of one's person. Briefcases are also likely to be seen on laps, perhaps creating an environment in which its owner feels comfortable, sitting at his desk. When not found on the lap, they are likely to be placed behind the legs next to the seat. There were occasions, however, when certain passengers sat bundled up with suitcases and holdalls. They probably felt very safe but looked very uncomfortable as they held on to them tightly.

The idea of keeping one's possessions as close as possible also indicates one's reluctance to let other people come into contact with their things as well as with themselves. Left on its own, a suitcase is open to interference, whether it be kicked or stolen from. Interfering with one's property is almost the same as interfering with one's self.

On various occasions, passengers attempted to extend their personal space by placing their belongings on the neighbouring seats. They have now stated a claim on that seat and will only move it if forced to do so. Once, a man sat next to the glass panel and placed his bag on the seat next to him, obviously barricading himself in, away from other passengers.

Another time, a man sat with his briefcase on the seat next to him. He had to remove it as a couple wanted to sit down. One had mentioned that there were two free seats. The fact that this extension of space had been vocalised brought attention to this man, and he had no other choice. To have refused might have meant that the couple might have had to directly ask him, constituting vocal and probably, eye contact. The passenger continued the rest of his journey with his briefcase clutched tightly against his chest.

However, once personal space has been realised, it can still be invaded. The person invaded then reacts accordingly to counteract this invasion. One of the most common reactions happens when a new person sits down beside somebody already seated. Between the time the person starts to sit and by the time he has completed this action, the other passenger will adjust his position to accommodate the new passenger and the new reduction in space. This may mean a re-positioning of the legs or a lean in the opposite direction.

One visible example of this occurred when a man sat down on the left-hand side of a young woman. Before he sat down, she had been leaning in this direction. As he sat down, she shifted her body into a more vertical position. Not only that, she then very gradually pulled her jacket, lying on her lap, away from the newly seated passenger. This may indicate that as well as non-contact between people, there is also a rule about contact between people and other people's possessions.

One's space can also be invaded with noise. One man, who was sat next to a man playing a Walkman very loudly, leant away and formed a barrier with his arm between the armrest to his face.

As well as marking one's space, it is essential to fix one's territory. By this, I mean occupying of oneself to prevent coming into contact with the others. The idea is to keep oneself as separate as possible. This is especially important for those sitting in the two opposing rows whose eyes are bound to meet. For many people, staring down at the ground provides the best solution. Staring blankly through the window is also popular. One has to make sure not to look at the person opposite. It is also very boring while underground.

The Underground maps also provide good entertainment, as do the advertisements placed above the window. This need to occupy oneself was obviously recognised by the advertising agencies. Each advertisement has a captive audience who will probably read them over and over again during their journey. One can also see the extent of this need by the introduction of poems onto the walls of the tube.

Having exhausted all these options, passengers then tend to focus their attention on their person or personal belongings. Watches are looked at over and over again within the space of minutes. Ties are adjusted and split ends are searched for. Fingernails are examined and fluff, perhaps imaginary, is picked off one's clothing. An orgy of origami is performed on tickets, envelopes and any other available piece of paper.

There are also other devices which offer seclusion from the other passengers. One is to close one's eyes. In some other areas of society, this may not be acceptable behaviour, but it is normal for this to happen on the tube. The other solution is to wear a Walkman. This also provides isolation but can be intrusive to other people's space, as already mentioned.

The more professional tube traveller is more prepared. Books, magazines and newspapers are produced from nowhere upon entering the train. Reading of any kind on the tube diverts the eyes from looking at the others. They also provide some relief from the boredom that such a journey brings. Apart from these two reasons, a newspaper can also make a very good barrier, especially the broadsheet variety. Fully opened and held vertically, the newspaper can conceal the face and the whole of the upper body. If one wears a Walkman at the same time, one is totally isolated. The more isolated one is, the more separate and whole one is, the more one is conforming to the rules of the tube...

Going to the other extreme, somebody who does nothing, sitting idle staring at the others, not following the rules of the tube is dangerous. By not fixing his own territory, is he then invading everybody else's? In terms of confirmation, on the tube meaning safe could be classified as follows:

- wearing Walkman and reading newspaper
- wearing Walkman or reading newspaper
- looking at maps or advert
- looking at floor or window
- doing nothing

Conforming to the rules is not something that is adhered to rigidly. Through observing passengers who are 'conforming', it becomes clear that being seen to conform is perhaps more important than the act itself. The following examples show that people use their books and newspapers as instruments to follow the code and not to flout it. These examples are more evident during rush hour than at other times when the tube is less full.

On a couple of occasions, I spied people with books open on their laps but who were not reading them. One was reading her neighbour's newspaper over his shoulder, another had her eyes closed. A number of people reading newspapers looked up surreptitiously every now and again. One thing I saw was for somebody to be reading, but in fact were secretly observing the row of people opposite them. This was done very subtly. The head was in a bowed position and with the eyes looking very slowly up and down, left to right.

Although this code is predominant, choosing to travel on the tube could be compared to accepting to be examined under a microscope. For a fixed amount of time, strangers are forced to share a small space. We are scrutinised by the others, although not openly. If the aim of the code is to achieve a separateness from everybody, then it would appear to be a contradiction to say that, beneath everything, there exists a mutual co-operation between passengers.

From what I saw, the passengers helped each other to conform, enabling everyone to continue this act. People pull in their feet so as to not touch the person passing. When one catches the eye of another, one or the other will soon avert their gaze. Objects are removed from seats if someone is seen to approach a free seat.

Democracy also prevails among those who stand. When a new passenger enters the train, everyone moves to accommodate the newcomer with an equal amount of space. Similarly, when someone leaves, the extra space is shared between the rest.

There do not appear to be any class rules on the tube. Nobody appeared to receive any preferential treatment, other than the gender and age rules already mentioned. The only person invested with any kind of power was a ticket inspector. He was a symbol of the Underground company and also one of authority. By checking our

tickets, he was inspecting our capacity to be allowed to travel on the tube. If found to be without a ticket, he was embodied with a great deal of power over that person. His mere appearance had people searching for their tickets, which were duly shown without a word being said.

On the other hand, when someone entered the train asking for donations to charity, the passengers anticipated his approach but dismissed him as quickly as possible by shaking the head, saying 'no thank you' or by quickly giving him money. Anything more would have constituted a contact between the two people involved. He was invading their territory and interfering with their conformation to the code of the tube.

People who stand instead of sitting are moderately more free in their behaviour. For a start, they choose the way they stand and the direction they face. They are not obliged to face other passengers as are the passengers who sit. Their situation is less uniform. As people are standing, the range of different heights means people do not share the same eye-level so readily.

As already mentioned, the standing passengers space themselves out as evenly as is possible. Not only are bodies evenly spaced, but hands placed on the upright poles are also regulated. Anymore than three hands is too much. Even then, it seems there has to be at least one hand's space between each one.

The passengers standing have less capacity to occupy themselves than those seated. However, newspapers are read. Personal effects, such as briefcases and bags, are kept on the floor between the legs.

However, during rush-hour, one's personal space is totally invaded. Bodies are pushed together and someone else's breathing can be felt on the neck. Unable to get away from this predicament, each passenger does as little as possible. As one does not move and give out any signals, one seems to lose one's identity and become simply a piece of flesh, a body. People stand trance-like, suffering this violation as peacefully as they can. It is impossible to keep oneself separate.

As for the people sitting, the rigidity of the seating system appears to grow during rush-hour. There is very little space to be grabbed for oneself. Every seat is taken. It is hard to maintain non-contact. This is especially true of the Piccadilly line going to Heathrow. As well as people, the tube is full of bags and suitcases leaving even less space. During rush hour, people are very tense as they pull their bodies in as tight as possible. The passengers become very passive.

But there is a reprieve. Every time the tube stops and the doors open, the rules of the tube fall away as one has contact with the 'outside world'. In these few seconds, people fidget, adjust the way they sit, uncross and cross their legs.

At one stop, a man stretched his arms and heaved a giant sigh of relief. Similarly, a girl standing next to the doors took a very deep breath of fresh air while the doors were open. But as soon as the doors close, everyone returns to their passive state.

There is also a ritual involved in leaving the tube. From the penultimate station until the arrival at the station at which they want to leave, people prepare their departure. They gather up all their belongings – bags, coats, umbrellas – and hold them tightly. They will generally move forwards to sit on the edge of the seat, rather than sitting back. This will inevitably save time when the tube eventually stops. It is also an indication to the other passengers that that passenger is leaving. This will affect them as they will probably have to move their body so as to let that person pass, to avoid physical contact.

Many people will leave their seat during the journey before their particular stop. They wait by the doors, facing them, waiting for the station when they will open. Throughout the duration of the tube journey there is an air of continuity. People will endeavour to continue what they were doing, whatever happens.

During one very bumpy journey on the Central Line, everyone continued to read or to do work on their briefcases, even though the movement of the tube was almost throwing them out of their seats. To counteract this interruption, they simply held onto their possessions and to the armrests. An old lady continued to read her book although she was struggling with her other hand to prevent her shopping trolley from escaping. Another woman caught my eye and was smiling, almost in embarrassment. Had someone realised that the motion of the tube was incommoding her? Someone had seen that the train was affecting her journey and that she was not continuing to do what she was doing.

Such an interaction is not very usual on the tube. Most people follow the code without any problem and their journey passes without any complications. For many people, it is a skill that they have perfected over a period of time – to stand holding a rail, briefcase locked between the legs, quite happily reading a newspaper.

On the other hand, I found that out of all the passengers, women were able to focus their attention better than men. Some men showed two or more signs of occupying themselves, trying to fit in. They constantly flitted from one action to another – looking at the Underground maps, looking at their watch, adjusting their tie, looking at their watch...

If this project shows anything at all, I would say that it shows the English are quite a co-operative race, but enforces the idea that they are insular in that they prefer to keep themselves to themselves. They are not ones to join in too eagerly, favouring a more passive role. They have respect for those in authority as they readily accept and follow rules that are inbuilt. They also have much respect for people's territory and space.

Finally, the English each have a strong identity which they will strive to maintain.

With thanks to Desmond Morris 'Manwatching'.