Bus Rider Ethnography Assignment

Overview
Spend some time on buses and at the Santa Rosa Transit Mall, as specified below. Observe the people on the bus, at the bus stops, and outside in the neighborhoods you pass through. Take notes. Write and turn in a brief ethnography of Santa Rosa bus riders' culture. Guidelines for your bus travel, observations, and writeup are included below.

Expect the fieldwork for this assignment to take a solid block of three to five daylight hours, door to door. To avoid wasting time, plan ahead using the bus schedules.

Bus details
You may choose either of the two options below.

Option 1. Take a Sonoma County Transit bus from SSU to the Santa Rosa Transit Mall. Take at least one trip on a Santa Rosa City bus selected from list A (below), and at least one from list B (below). Return to SSU on a Sonoma County Transit bus.

Option 2. Get to and from the Santa Rosa Transit Mall by car or other means. Take at least two trips on Santa Rosa City buses selected from list A (below), and at least two from list B (below).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Santa Rosa City bus trips**

Once at the Santa Rosa Transit Mall, take city bus trips selected from the two lists of routes below. Each trip is a loop that will bring you back to the Transit Mall. The first trip costs one dollar. There is no student discount.

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

Take the Santa Rosa City bus trips in any order that you wish. Consider repeating a short route or taking more than the minimum number of trips to give yourself more time to watch people.

If you use a Sonoma County Transit bus to get to the Transit Mall, take one trip from list A, and one from list B. If you got to the Transit Mall by car or other means, take two trips from list A and two from list B.

**List A:**
- Route 3, West 9th Street, about 23 minutes
- Route 9, Sebastopol Road, about 35 minutes (weekdays only)
- Route 9W, Sebastopol Road, about 25 minutes (weekends only)
- Route 12, Roseland, about 23 minutes

**List B:**
- Route 1, Mendocino Avenue, about 38 minutes
- Route 2, Bennett Valley, about 35 minutes
- Route 4, Rincon Valley, about 50 minutes
- Route 7, Montgomery Village/Rincon Valley, about 50 minutes
- Route 8, Sonoma Avenue, about 24 minutes

Santa Rosa City Bus schedules and maps are available at

What to do

When you board the bus (don't forget to get a transfer!), go towards the back, into the elevated section if possible. From the back of the bus, you will have a better view of the others on the bus without having to obviously turn around. Write down what bus route you are on, and what time the bus leaves.

Both while waiting at the bus stops and while on the bus, watch people. To a lesser extent, watch people outside the bus, at the bus stops you pass by and in the neighborhoods you pass through. Specifically:

- Notice how people generally behave, in order to figure out the values and rules of a relatively consistent, general "Santa Rosa Bus Rider Culture".
- The behavior you notice could include:
  - body positions and "body language"
  - how people direct their gaze
  - how they interact or do not
  - how they talk or do not, in what language(s), etc.
  - things they carry with them and what they do with those things
  - how they dress
- Notice any behaviors that seem to be exceptions or to be out of place.
  - What values or rules of behavior do they violate? Analyzing exceptions is a good way to discover what the generally shared values and rules are, because you have to figure out what they are exceptions to.
- Notice if gender, age, dress, or other characteristics are connected to how these values or rules work.
- Notice any particular events or interactions that might be interesting or provide some insight into the norms or values of Santa Rosa Bus Rider culture
  - When you write your paper, you will want to consider what exactly these events suggest about this culture
  - What was going on? How can you explain it?
  - How might age, sex, social or economic status, ethnicity, etc. have been involved?
- Notice how people group at the bus stops and on the bus: individuals, same-gender pairs of the same age, multiple-gender pairs, apparent mothers and children, groups of similar or mixed ethnicity, apparent race, etc.
  - Are there any patterns in behavior associated with these groupings?
  - Are there any exceptions that highlight the norms?
- Notice what kinds of people take these buses, and thus are the actors in "Santa Rosa Bus Rider Culture"
  - How are you classifying the people who use the bus? By age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, dress, language…?
  - Do these categories of people use different routes, or are they relatively mixed?
  - Why do you think they choose to use these buses? If you have the time and inclination, try asking a few people.
  - Could these reasons tend to shape "Santa Rosa Bus Rider Culture"? How so?
- Notice any variants of this culture (sub-cultures). An example might be "Santa Rosa Middle-School Student Bus Rider Culture".
If you detect any such subcultures, what specific behaviors differentiate them?
If you detect any such subcultures, what categories of people exhibit each culture, that is, are the subcultures held by certain categories of people according to age, gender, ethnicity, language, economic status, etc.?

Do you notice any general differences in Bus Rider Culture between the routes you took, or the neighborhoods they went through?
- Neighborhoods might differ by the size, condition, and type of lot and dwelling and/or businesses there
- By the kind of landscaping (or lack of it)
- By the frequency of metal grates or bars on doors
- By the kinds and conditions of vehicles parked around
- By the language(s) on signs and businesses

When you begin to form impressions, consciously test them with further observations ("Maybe only men sprawl over multiple seats… no, now I see a few women doing it, too.")

Use these suggestions as a guide, not a checklist. Read through them a few times in order to prime yourself to be observant, then just actively pay attention. You may notice interesting things that are not mentioned in this list of suggestions; just be alert.

Do this exercise by yourself as much as possible. You may travel with a classmate or friend if you feel uncomfortable venturing out alone, but sit well apart on the buses, and keep separate while waiting for buses. The point of this is so that you will not be distracted, but can focus on the other people around you. You are also more likely to fall into a conversation with a stranger if you do not appear to be occupied with a friend. Chance conversations with strangers may give you interesting information for your ethnography. On the other hand, try not to become involved with any one person for too long, because that could keep you from noticing others and the general scene around you.

Taking notes

Try to take notes as constantly as possible, without being so obvious that it disturbs people, while also observing and participating in the situation around you as constantly as possible. Of course this is impossible, but try. Observing and recording as constantly as possible will help you recall and separate events and impressions from different places, routes, and times, which in turn may help you notice patterns or understand your observations more clearly when it is time to write them up.

Writeup

Write a three to five page discussion of your experiences and observations, focusing both on describing what you actually observed, and on generalizing, synthesizing, and interpreting or explaining it. Specify the date of your trip, the specific bus routes you took, and when each actually departed. Attach your Santa Rosa City bus transfer(s) to the paper. Describe anything you found noteworthy or surprising. Did you notice any consistent and repeated behaviors or patterns of interaction that might be norms of Santa Rosa Bus Rider culture? What were they? Can you suggest explanations for these cultural practices in Middleton's terms of adaptation, meaning, or system? Describe Santa Rosa Bus Rider culture, and contrast any variants (subcultures) you noticed. If you noticed differences, can you suggest functions or reasons that
might explain them? Did anything surprise you? If so, can you learn anything about Bus Rider culture from it? Can you learn anything about your own preconceptions from it? Did anything make you (or anyone else you observed) uncomfortable or upset? If so, describe the event(s) and try to explain the reaction. Did anything you experienced suggest a contradiction between real and ideal culture, either yours or somebody else's? Did you observe anyone acting ethnocentric, or find yourself thinking or behaving ethnocentrically? Finally, how do you feel now about the public transportation system? Who uses it? How might using buses affect other aspects of their lives?

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

**Turning it in**

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

203-06f-BusEthnography-LastnameFirstname

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

**Drafts**

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

203-06f-BusEthnography-SmithJohn-draft.doc

**Grading**

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