

# Fieldnotes

---

Elizabeth M. Pope, Ph.D.  
University of West Georgia  
[epope@westga.edu](mailto:epope@westga.edu)



# Learning Objectives

---

- Understand what fieldnotes are
- Determine when and how to take fieldnotes
- Identify appropriate content for fieldnotes
- Distinguish between description and reflection in fieldnotes



# Fieldnotes

---

- Fieldnotes = ethnographic record
- What to write down?
- Rich description
- Success of the study determined by fieldnotes

[Photo Source](#)



# Mechanics of Taking Fieldnotes

- By hand or electronically
- Organization of individual notes –
  - New set for each observation
  - Front matter
  - Imagery

Observation Notes – 01.16.2017

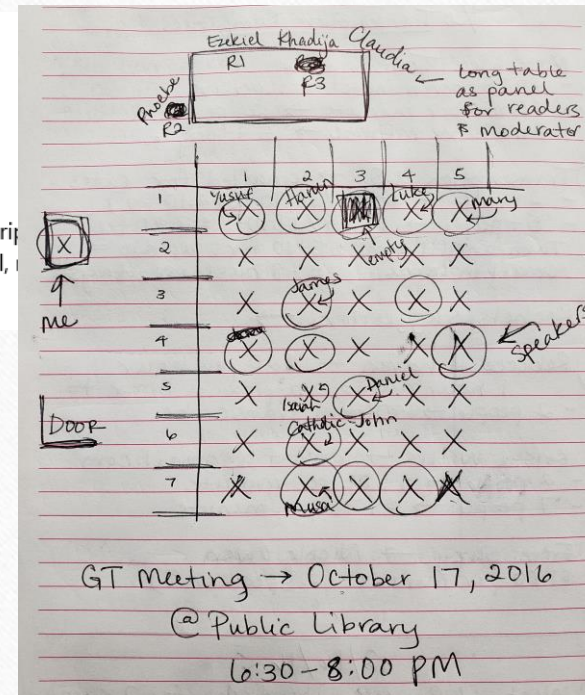
Location: Local Church

Time & Date: January 16, 2017 / 6:30 – 8:15 PM

Set up of room: Large circle of chairs with nothing in the center.

Participants: 33 members total – 14 women & 19 men

Session Topic: Life after death – session lightly follows model of scrip. While there were no pre-assigned readings sent out through email, I brought notes for passages of scripture to read aloud.



# Spradley's 4 Types of Fieldnotes

After Simon finished speaking, Claudia read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 20 about the resurrection of Jesus (*possibly to add some scriptural context to the mentioning of the Resurrection in both Simon and Matthew's speeches.*) She said, "I loath to add this, but a lot of Christians, when we die, to comfort each other we say, well he or she is in a better place now and we have these conceptions of streets of gold and pearly gates. There's an idea that we are not necessarily conscious, but rather that we're asleep in Heaven. That's not part of popular culture, but that we go into suspension in Heaven because we're all waiting on Jesus Christ and that very special day when the Messiah comes. Is there anything else any Christians want to say?"

In response to this question, Mary asks about Hell. She said, "we haven't heard anyone mention the alternative." Simon replied to her, "well we all know how to get there." Daniel broke in (amidst laughter from others) and said, "No, that would be a point of discussion." Instead of going further on this point, Claudia talked about "the lakes of fire, and there's a lot of discussion about we're given a choice, and that's the sticky wicket, that we have a choice and you have to choose Heaven or Hell."

Christine, who hadn't spoken yet asked, "I'd be interested to know if the Catholic view is any different than the Protestant Christian view of death and the afterlife?" Phoebe, the resident Catholic in the group since John and his wife were not present at this meeting, answered the question. She said, "the afterlife is a time of purging, it's a process, to come into the presence of God is a time of purging. And that's why we say we pray for each other after we pass on, we pray for that time to be short. It's more like a process of time, before you go into the presence of God, there's a purging." Then Christine asked if that description was similar to what Claudia mentioned about a period of suspension. Phoebe and Claudia both agreed that this was not the case. Phoebe explained that the time of suspension happens after the period of purging. She then read a passage from the book of Matthew from her copy of the New American Version of the Christian Bible about the period of Judgment and purging.

- Spradley's 4 types of fieldnotes
  - Condensed account
  - Expanded account (see image)
  - Fieldwork journal
  - Analysis and interpretation



# Descriptive vs. Reflective Fieldnotes

---

- Descriptive Fieldnotes: not summaries – details from what was actually observed in a chronological order
- Reflective fieldnotes: personal account, reflections, assessments, or wonderings about the observation
  - Observer's comments
  - Memos

“The child looked a mess” vs. “The child, who was seven or eight years old, wore faded, muddy dungarees with both knees ripped. His nose was running in a half inch stream down to his mouth, and his face was streaked clean where he had rubbed it with his wet fingers” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 117).



# References

---

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2016). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Flick, U. (2019). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

