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ANT 103  
Ethnography Paper  
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### Life as a Parkland Pathways Student

Our topic for this ethnography research project was looking into the lives of Parkland Pathways students. We wanted to know what their dislikes were, what they liked most, and their overall thoughts on the program as they balanced going to both Parkland College and the University of Illinois. The qualitative research methods that we chose for this project were participant observation and interviews. We interviewed four females that attended the Parkland Pathways program and we recorded what they had to say. Exercising some reflexivity, I feel that my being a full time Parkland student who commutes from Arcola gave me a different perspective because I honestly don't know any people in the Pathways program and my experiences are very different from theirs, even though we are all taking classes at Parkland.

The data we collected surprised me, and it did my group mates, more than we thought it would. First of all, I did not realize how Parkland Pathways students need to make it to both institutions in one day. Our interviewees all mentioned whether they had a car or not and how they had to base their whole day around the bus schedule if that was their main form of transportation. Another piece of data that I think was very interesting was that our interviewees seemed to have more friends from the University of Illinois (U of I) institution than the Parkland institution. Since some of our interviewees live on the U of I campus they explained that they socialize more with people who live around them as well as their roommates and the friends of

their roommates who are also U of I students. Parkland, as a commuter campus with no dorms, is at a disadvantage in helping encourage friendships in the same way.

In our cultural anthropology textbook we read an article called “A Dispute in Donggo: Fieldwork and Ethnography” by John Monaghan and Peter Just. In it, the authors claim that “the interview is by far the most important part of an ethnography” (15). I really do agree with them on the effectiveness of this method because besides asking questions and obtaining an answer, we were able to have a real conversation with our interviewees and ask them why they gave the answers they did and I was able to find out information on a group of students that I had no idea about or that I really didn’t understand. I also feel that with the interviews I had the opportunity to become closer to my two classmates who I had the pleasure of interviewing. Before this project, I had little or no idea that they were Pathways students as there is no way to tell a Pathway student from a regular Parkland student or a regular U of I student, unless they identify themselves. This is also the reason why participant observation was not very useful in Parkland’s public spaces and we decided to gather data basing ourselves on people we knew starting with those two classmates that were part of the program.

This difficulty in identifying Pathways students reminded me of what anthropologist Takeyuki Tsuda had to say about Japanese Americans in his own ethnographic research titled “Is Native Anthropology Really Possible.” Tsuda mentioned that he himself is Japanese American and that when he met other people sometimes other Americans thought he was a native from Japan, while Japanese Americans would simply assume he was also like them. This is similar to what we found with Pathways students. A couple of our interviewees also mentioned that their friends from the U of I didn’t even know that they were Parkland students or even a part of the Pathways program. I thought this was interesting because, as Tsuda would argue, it is true that

when you are in class with someone you automatically assume that they are a part of your community.

Through this study we were able to explore our interviewees' likes, dislikes and their overall opinions about the Parkland Pathways Program. I think our most important finding in this ethnographic study was that everyone said that they did benefit from the Parkland Pathways Program in different ways. For example, one of our interviewees said that she gained confidence in her studies and it helped her social life as well as helping her get into the university life. Another interviewee said that she thought the program was very beneficial in terms of saving money since you pay Parkland tuition but you are able to take U of I classes. Some questions I feel that we could still ask when building on this project and moving forward would be how Parkland Pathways students manage their school schedule and also ask on whether there is any difficulty in having to pick certain classes since you have to attend both institutions. A last question I have would be if Parkland Pathways students feel any pressure to stay in the Pathways program after they have done it for a semester and if any of them felt like it just wasn't for them.

Works cited:

Brondo, Keri Vacanti. *Cultural Anthropology Contemporary, Public and Critical Readings*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Tsuda, Takeyuki. "Is Native Anthropology Really Possible?"

Monaghan, John. Just, Peter. "A Dispute in Doggo: Fieldwork and Ethnography."