

Project #1: Observational Exercise

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Jottings

This section represents preliminary notes from the observation of JZ's Gym, a pseudonym used in place of the gym's actual name. These quick notes capture key observations and interactions that will contribute to a detailed account of the gym environment and activities.

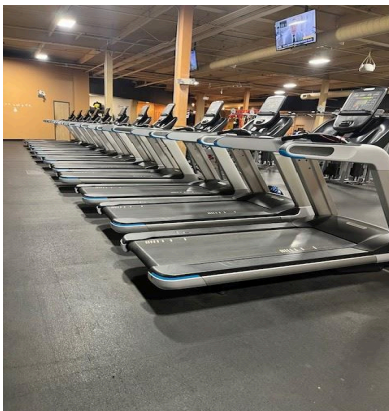
Notes:

- Participant A, a woman in her 30s, walked into the gym, greeting the reception staff.
- Participant A saw Participant B, a man in his 40s, and they exchanged a fist bump before beginning their leg workout with the barbells and machines.
- Both appear motivated and engaged.
- Participant C, a man in his 20s, is performing leg exercises on the squat machine.
- He frequently checks his phone while scanning the gym between weight-lifting sets.
- Participant A is performing a deadlift for her leg workout routine.
- Participant B is providing spotting and verbal encouragement.
- Interactions and supportive comments were observed.
- Both are wearing their headphones while nodding their heads in what appears to be listening to music.
- Participant D, a man in his 50s, walked into the gym and immediately approached the chest workout station.
- He greeted members with a smile.
- No verbal communications were observed.
- Participant D greeted members by smiling as other members responded with smiles, head nods, and fist bumps.
- Participant D appeared focused while wearing wireless headphones.

- He began his workout routine with push-ups and then used the flat chest machine to perform shoulder shrugs.
- He repeated this routine three times.
- Participant E, a man in his 30s, came from the treadmill and used hand gestures to ask Participant D if the flat chest machine was in use.
- Participant D waved two fingers, signaling to share the machine.
- Participant E nodded in approval.
- Participant E placed his fist over his heart as a gesture of thanks.
- Participants D and E shared the flat chest machine space.
- No words were exchanged.
- Their communication consisted of:
 - non-verbal cues
 - smiles
 - taking turns.
- Multiple participants were observed conversing while walking on treadmills.
- They are engaged in casual conversation and offer mutual encouragement.
- Participants A and B completed their leg workouts and then moved toward the treadmills.
- They left one empty treadmill between them and began walking on an incline, each with their headphones on.
- After their walk, they joined each other and started talking.
- Fire alarm took place
 - Some members were still working out.
 - Others were stretching

- Others were discussing their routines
 - Others showed frustration at the fire alarm disruption.
- Staff announced through the intercom, “Evacuation now, please exit the gym. We have a fire alarm.”
- Everyone walked outside, and activities were observed:
 - Some members continued working out by doing jumping jacks and lunges
 - Others were standing outside waiting to go back inside
 - Others began to walk/jog around the parking lot
 - Others were observed to engage in phone call conversations
 - The gym owner was on the phone with the police department
- After 20 minutes, all members were able to enter the gym.
 - Some members resumed their workouts
 - Others went to the locker room to grab their belongings
 - Others went to the treadmills
 - While Participants A and B went to get a post-workout shake.

Pictures of the Gym Setting:



Full Observational Notes

The purpose of this observational exercise is to conduct a detailed observation of social interactions in a public setting for educational purposes. This writer chose a gym setting located in Bergen County, New Jersey. For the purpose of this observational exercise, the gym will be referred to as JZ's Gym, and the participants will be identified as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, and so on. As a frequent gym attendee at JZ's gym, this writer has taken a step back to "make the familiar strange" in order to conduct this observational exercise effectively. This observational exercise is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do gym-goers provide support and motivation to each other during workouts, and how does this affect their engagement and experience?
2. What non-verbal communication strategies do gym-goers use to interact with each other and manage their workouts in a shared space?

The setting for my observations was the gym on a Saturday morning between 10:00 AM and 11:30 AM. As I walked in, the atmosphere was vibrant, with several members gathered around the Shakes station while others were seated at the round tables, busy with their cell phones. The gym was filled with energetic music from a diverse workout playlist that included pop, hip-hop, and reggaeton hits from the 90s and 2000s. I made my way outside of the aerobics class area, finding a bench that offered a panoramic view of the entire gym. From there, I observed the various interactions among the gym members. Some participants engaged in lively verbal conversations, while others communicated through non-verbal cues, which I found interesting as I realized how much of the social dynamics in the gym are conveyed through these non-verbal interactions.

Participant A and Participant B exchanged a fist bump before commencing their leg workout, they appeared motivated and excited. Meanwhile, Participant C was focused on leg exercises at the squat machine, frequently glancing at their phone in between weight-lifting sets. The dynamic between Participant A and Participant B, where one was lifting weights while the other provided support and encouragement through "spotting," which is a frequent gym term used so that when one is lifting weights, the other is actively watching to prevent injuries.

I observed Participant A lifting weights while Participant B provided spotting and verbal encouragement. Supportive interactions and comments were observed. Both were wearing their headphones. From there, Participant D approached the chest workout station, greeting members with a smile. It was noted that there were no verbal communications; instead, Participant D conveyed greetings through smiling as other members responded with smiles, head nods, and fist bumps. Participant D appeared focused while wearing his wireless headphones. He began his workout routine with push-ups and then used the flat chest machine to perform shoulder shrugs. He repeated this routine three times.

I observed Participant E finishing his walk on the treadmill and waiting near the chest machine for Participant D to finish his push-ups. He used non-verbal cues, specifically hand gestures, to ask Participant D if the flat chest machine was in use. After his push-ups, Participant D waved his pointer finger, pointing towards himself and Participant E, signaling a willingness to share the machine. Participant E nodded in approval and placed his fist over his heart as a gesture of thanks. Both Participants D and E shared the flat chest machine space. Interestingly, no words were exchanged; their communication consisted solely of non-verbal cues and taking turns.

Multiple participants were observed conversing while walking on treadmills, engaging in casual conversation, and offering mutual encouragement. Participants A and B completed their leg workouts and then moved toward the treadmills. They left one empty treadmill between them and began walking on an incline, each with their headphones on. After their walk, they joined each other and started talking.

The fire alarm suddenly went off, and some gym members appeared worried, speaking to each other with confused expressions or showing verbal frustration at being unable to continue their workouts. Those who had just entered expressed disappointment, while one participant was overheard saying, “I guess it wasn’t meant for me to work out today, but at least I stepped into the gym.” The staff and management announced over the intercom, “Evacuation now, please exit the gym. We have a fire alarm.” Once outside, it was interesting to see members continue their workouts by engaging in calisthenics, walking, or jogging until it was safe to return. Some did jumping jacks and lunges, while others waited to go back inside, walked or jogged around the parking lot, or engaged in phone conversations. Meanwhile, the gym owner was on the phone with the police department.

After approximately 20 minutes, we were allowed back inside the gym, and the music resumed as members picked up their workouts where they had left off. With the staff’s announcement that it was safe to re-enter, the energy shifted back to motivation and focus, accompanied by laughter and conversation. Some members resumed their workouts, while others went to the locker room for their belongings or headed to the treadmills, and Participants A and B went to get a post-workout shake.

Analytic Section Part #1 - Coding

Observation Notes	Theme
The setting for my observations was the gym on a Saturday morning between 10:00 AM and 11:30 AM.	Setting and Atmosphere
As I walked in, the atmosphere was vibrant, with several members gathered around the Shakes station while others were seated at the round tables, busy with their cell phones.	Setting and Atmosphere
The gym was filled with energetic music from a diverse workout playlist that included pop, hip-hop, and reggaeton hits from the 90s and 2000s.	Setting and Atmosphere
I made my way outside of the aerobics class area, finding a bench that offered a panoramic view of the entire gym.	Observation/ Space
From there, I observed the various interactions among the gym members.	Engagement and Interaction
Some participants engaged in lively verbal conversations, while others communicated through non-verbal cues, which I found interesting as I realized how much of the social dynamics in the gym are conveyed through these non-verbal interactions.	Engagement and Interaction
Participant A and Participant B exchanged a fist bump before commencing their leg workout; they appeared motivated and excited.	Social Interaction
Meanwhile, Participant C was focused on leg exercises at the squat machine, frequently glancing at their phone in between weight-lifting sets.	Focus/Distraction
The dynamic between Participant A and Participant B, where one was lifting weights while the other provided support and encouragement through "spotting," which is a frequent gym term used so that when one is	Support and Encouragement

lifting weights, the other is actively watching to prevent injuries.	
I observed Participant A lifting weights while Participant B provided spotting and verbal encouragement.	Support and Encouragement
Supportive interactions and comments were observed.	Support and Encouragement
Both were wearing their headphones.	Individual Experience
From there, Participant D approached the chest workout station, greeting members with a smile.	Social Interaction
It was noted that there were no verbal communications; instead, Participant D conveyed greetings through smiling as other members responded with smiles, head nods and fist bumps.	Non-Verbal Communication
Participant D appeared focused while wearing his wireless headphones.	Individual Experience
He began his workout routine with push-ups and then used the flat chest machine to perform shoulder shrugs.	Workout Routine
He repeated this routine three times.	Workout Routine
I observed Participant E finishing his walk on the treadmill and waiting near the chest machine for Participant D to finish his push-ups.	Observation
He used non-verbal cues, specifically hand gestures, to ask Participant D if the flat chest machine was in use.	Non-Verbal Communication
After his push-ups, Participant D waved his pointer finger, pointing towards himself and Participant E, signaling a willingness to share the machine.	Non-Verbal Communication
Participant E nodded in approval and placed his fist over his heart as a gesture of thanks.	Non-Verbal Communication

Both Participants D and E shared the flat chest machine space.	Cooperation
Interestingly, no words were exchanged; their communication consisted solely of non-verbal cues and taking turns.	Non-Verbal Communication
Multiple participants were observed conversing while walking on treadmills, engaging in casual conversation, and offering mutual encouragement.	Social Interaction
Participants A and B completed their leg workouts and then moved toward the treadmills.	Activity Transition
They left one empty treadmill between them and began walking on an incline, each with their headphones on.	Individual Experience
After their walk, they joined each other and started talking.	Social Interaction
The fire alarm suddenly went off, and some gym members appeared worried, speaking to each other with confused expressions or showing verbal frustration at being unable to continue their workouts.	Response to Disruption
Those who had just entered expressed disappointment, while one participant was overheard saying, "I guess it wasn't meant for me to work out today, but at least I stepped into the gym."	Response to Disruption
The staff and management announced over the intercom, "Evacuation now, please exit the gym. We have a fire alarm."	Authority/ Communication
Once outside, it was interesting to see members continue their workouts by engaging in calisthenics, walking, or jogging until it was safe to return.	Adaptability
Some did jumping jacks and lunges, while others waited to go back inside, walked or jogged around the parking lot, or engaged in	Adaptability

phone conversations.	
Meanwhile, the gym owner was on the phone with the police department.	Authority/ Communication
After approximately 20 minutes, we were allowed back inside the gym, and the music resumed as members picked up their workouts where they had left off.	Resumption of Activities
With the staff's announcement that it was safe to re-enter, the energy shifted back to motivation and focus, accompanied by laughter and conversation.	Resumption of Activities
Some members resumed their workouts, while others went to the locker room for their belongings or headed to the treadmills, and Participants A and B went to get a post-workout shake.	Resumption of Activities

Analytic Section Part #2 - Analyzing Findings

My observations shed light on how gym-goers provide support and motivation and use non-verbal communication during workouts. The analysis below connects these findings to the research questions, focusing on their impact on engagement and shared gym spaces.

Support and Motivation During Workouts: Throughout my observations, it was evident that gym-goers provided support and motivation to one another in various ways. For example, I noted how Participant A and Participant B exchanged a fist bump before starting their leg workout, which created a sense of camaraderie and excitement. Additionally, Participant B's role in spotting Participant A not only ensured safety but also demonstrated a form of encouragement that enhanced Participant A's motivation to lift weights. These interactions highlight the importance of social support in a gym setting, where members actively engage in behaviors that foster a motivating environment. The verbal encouragement provided by Participants A and B,

along with their shared experience of working out together, contributes to a positive workout experience, reinforcing their commitment to fitness.

Non-Verbal Communication Strategies: My observations revealed that non-verbal cues were pivotal in facilitating communication among gym-goers. For instance, Participant D and Participant E effectively communicated without words while sharing the flat chest machine. Their use of hand gestures and facial expressions conveyed their intentions and allowed them to coordinate their use of equipment seamlessly. This reliance on non-verbal communication strategies highlights the significance of such interactions in a shared space. It suggests that even in a noisy environment filled with music and activity, gym-goers can effectively communicate and support one another without verbal exchanges. This non-verbal interaction fosters a sense of community and collaboration, further enhancing the overall gym experience.

Impact of External Disruptions: The fire alarm incident provided insight into how external disruptions can affect gym dynamics. Initially, members expressed concern and frustration, indicating a temporary obstacle in the supportive atmosphere. However, once allowed back inside, members quickly resumed their workouts, illustrating resilience and a commitment to their fitness routines. This moment highlighted the ability of gym-goers to adapt to disruptions while maintaining their focus on personal fitness goals. The swift return to normalcy and the restoration of motivation and camaraderie illustrate the solid community bonds formed among gym members.

Conclusion

This observational activity may present some observer bias due to my status as an avid gym-goer. My familiarity with gym culture and non-verbal cues may influence my interpretations, potentially leading me to view interactions more positively than others might.

Additionally, the specific time of day I chose for my observations, on a Saturday morning, may not capture the full range of gym experiences, as different times can yield varied dynamics and interactions among members. At the conclusion of the observational exercise, there was a strong sense of community among participants, with both verbal and non-verbal communication fostering a supportive environment. Instances such as Participant A and Participant B exchanging encouragement through spotting illustrate the motivational dynamics present during workouts. The disruption caused by the fire alarm seemed to momentarily hinder this community spirit; however, the quick return to activity highlighted the participants' resilience and commitment to their fitness routines, illustrating the significance of social support in enhancing engagement and experience in the gym setting.

References

- Kawulich, Barbara B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method [81 paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 6(2), Art. 43, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502430>.
- Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011). Writing ethnographic fieldnotes (2nd Edition). University of Chicago Press.