

Ethnography report

Business



Madison Cerda Interpersonal Communications Ethnography Report Social Penetration Theory October 1, 2012 As I began this assignment I wasn't completely sure what concept I was going to observe. In result, I went to a location without knowing what exactly I was looking for, I just observed my surroundings immensely. As I sat there in Starbucks for over an hour I felt a bit out of luck since nothing was catching my eye that would relate to a concept that we had learned about within the past few weeks. This is until a man in his early 20's entered the Starbucks on Lexington and 55th, did my assumptions quickly change.

This man who I later learned was named Connor entered the Starbucks somewhat spiffed up and I was a bit confused when he sat besides me at a table looking a bit nervous. I quickly realized that he was meeting someone at the Starbucks. About five minutes after he had sat down a woman of about the same age walked in the store.

He quickly got out of his seat to greet her with a very firm looking handshake. They both smiled and he asked her what she would like to drink, she replied and sat down while he went to go get them drinks. After retrieving the drinks he returned with a friendly smile on his face.

He handed her the drink and quickly got to talking which instantly made me realize what concept I was observing. The concept I began to observe was the social penetration theory.

This means that the self has many layers and people learn more and more layers of a person based on the breadth and depth they are allowing to go with you. Breadth is the different perspective one may reveal in each layer

and depth is to what extent they reveal something and how informative it is about the subject. This idea was able to relate to this situation because they seemed to be what was their first date, in my eyes what seemed like a blind date.

They began to talk about what schools they went to although they seemed as though they already knew that small amount of information about each other. Connor then asked the woman, whom I wasn't able to catch her name, what her major was and what she wanted to do with her major when she was done with school. She explained that she was hoping to continue to medical school and he praised her on how awesome he thought that was.

Once she felt like she said enough about herself regarding school she asked him the same question he had previously asked her.

As they discussed more in depth about school and their aspirations I was thinking of the “ onion-like structure”, of the social penetration theory. Their conversation seemed very much on the surface. I could tell they were holding back a bit, most likely to impress each other. They then continued to talk about where they lived before coming to New York City for school; she was from New Jersey while Connor was from Illinois.

This was all part of their peripheral layer; all the basic facts one learn when meeting someone for the first time.

He talked about how he had always wanted to come to New York City for college since he was in middle school and she agreed although she stated she was able to come into the city a lot as a kid since her hometown wasn't too far from the city. Their conversation flowed very smoothly because they

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had so many different topics to talk about that all fell along the peripheral layers when discussing the concept of social penetration. As the date continued on, twenty or so minutes into it they started talking about family. Connor talked about being an only child and how much he loved it because he was able to be really close with his parents.

She then explained how she had two older brothers who were quite over protective over her. This is when I realized their conversation was getting a bit deeper in the fact that you wouldn't tell someone on the street this information. This is when they started dipping into the intermediate layers of the social penetration theory. He explained how he understood what she meant since he was pretty protective over his younger female cousins. He claimed he probably acted that way since they didn't have brothers and he would fill that role.

She understood and knew where he was coming from and they shared a few laughs here and there.

As I sat there pretending I was listening to music on my headphones I quickly realized that their what seemed to be first date conversation, got quite deep. They continued to talk about mutual friends they had which I am guessing is how they were introduced. By the end of thirty minutes the date seemed as though it was coming to the end. They stopped talking and wrapped up the date before they reached the central layer of each other, which is natural on a first date it seems. As I observed the date I was able to notice that Connor seemed more open and revealed more of himself by "peeling back" parts of himself.

The date seemed very natural and a healthy amount of information was told to each other. They were able to not tell each other their life story but at the same time express themselves enough to make the date not boring and personal. This situation which appeared to be blind date is the perfect example of the social penetration theory. They shared information from their peripheral layers such as their college majors, hometowns and mutual friends. They then continued on to tell each other about parts of their intermediate layers, which included details more in depth about family and future aspirations.

In this date they didn't discuss anything too controversial such as politics.

They also didn't go too deep into their values, traits, and fears, which is all part of the central layers of a person based on the social penetration theory. This involvement was casual and a stepping-stone to what possibly will continue in the future. This man and woman were able to communicate in a healthy and deep enough for a first encounter. Although the process of figuring out what concept I was going to discuss in depth took a while to come along the concept and situation I ended up coming upon was a perfect example.

It showed the different rates of letting someone into their lives, such as how Connor was able to just state he was over protective over his cousins.

Even though this was the first date he was able to quickly connect with her and let her into his intermediate layers. She was also able to do that when she stated that her own brothers were protective over her and that she was able to connect them interpersonally. They didn't share a big part of their

central layer but that is healthy and normal, no one wants to learn someone's life story the day they meet them.