INTRODUCTION
Social scientists spend much of their time investigating complex patterns of human interaction within the context of the larger society. A social scientist is primarily concerned with understanding human experience, evident in the form of collective social groups and/or individual people. One of the many methods researchers use to study human interaction is called “participant observation.” The participant observer method gives social scientists the freedom to study individuals and their counterparts by placing them directly with the groups being studied. In other words, researchers gather data through conversations, by participating at various events or meetings, while attending public talks or lectures, etc.

Over the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, similar to that of a social scientist. You will also write about your experience on a weekly basis. This packet contains a series of weekly Reflective Questions, or prompts, specifically designed to help focus your attention to understanding the complexities of the construction of deviance in US society. The Reflective Questions are designed to help you reflect on your experiences and prepare you for writing your term paper.

As soon as you leave your JEP site (or ASAP), write down as much as you can recall about your experiences. Use the Reflective Questions as prompts to guide you, but go beyond the prompts, writing about whatever seems important to you about your service project especially experiences and concepts related to understanding deviance. Use your journal to describe the social interactions and activities you observe trying to do so from the points of view of the children/teens with whom you are working.

Avoid generalizations and psychological explanations of behavior, focusing instead on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings, conversations (including direct quotes, when possible), etc. You are only required to turn in responses to the questions below. However, you are strongly encouraged to take comprehensive notes throughout the semester. While they may seem time consuming now, these notes will serve as crucial sources of information required for the research paper. To help facilitate this process, you may want to keep a small notebook with you and jot down some notes when you have a spare moment (or perhaps take a moment before leaving the site). The more work you do now, the better your paper will become! You may turn in a copy of your more extensive notes if you wish, as long as they address the issues posed by the Reflective Questions.

Please read through all of the Reflective Questions prior to beginning your assignment. Doing so will help to focus your observations and improve the quality of your journal responses. In addition to carefully reading the term paper assignment guidelines provided by your Professor, you may wish to review the chapter The Ethnographic Field Research Paper [in: Giarrusso, R., Richlin-Klonsky, J., Roy, W. G., & Strenski, E. 2001. A guide to writing sociology papers, 5th edition, (pp. 115-131). New York: St. Martin’s Press], which you can find in Leavey Library.
YOUR WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:
The core parts of each Reflection Question (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in bold. Use the additional parts of the question to guide/supplement your answer.

WEEK ONE - First Impressions of your JEP Site
Describe your initial experience at your JEP assignment. Include a detailed description of the responsibilities and activities involved in your particular assignment. What are your most vivid impressions of the site? What were some of your expectations (of the assignment, the students, or the site) prior to beginning your assignment and what were these expectations based on (e.g., mass media images, experiences of previous JEP-students, or personal encounters)?

WEEK TWO – Questions, Comments or Concerns: Issues to Discuss During 1:1 “Chats”
This week you will be meeting one-on-one with your Program Assistant to talk about your experiences in JEP. In place of a full-length journal assignment this week, we ask that you take a few minutes to write down any questions, comments or concerns that you have about your JEP assignment so far and your research paper. For example, what are your tasks at the site and how are you adjusting to your new role? How are you relating to the people at your site? Are you having any problems with any of the logistical aspects of your assignment (e.g., schedule, transportation, Blackboard access, etc.) or do you have any concerns about collecting data for your research paper? Please submit your comments (approximately a paragraph) the same way you would submit any other journal through Blackboard. Rather than providing written comments, your PA will discuss the issues with you during your “chat.”

WEEK THREE - Children’s Lives
The Fine and Sandstrom articles Researchers and Kids and Participant observation with adolescents discuss some of the methodological issues you, as a researcher, may face when attempting to study children or adolescents. Briefly summarize some of the methodological issues involved when adult researchers attempt to study children. Do adults and children perceive events differently and how could this influence the inferences you are able draw from your observations. Pick a noteworthy event or incident involving children you witnessed at your site. How might each of the children involved in the incident interpret or understand it and how would their interpretation differ from yours? On what evidence do you base your conclusions (be sure to provide specific examples/evidence for your statement)?

WEEK FOUR - Studying Children
In the Week Three Journal, you started to reflect on the method you will be using to collect your research data for your term paper. You specifically focused on the issue of interpretation. Keeping in mind last week’s question and Fine and Sandstrom’s articles (Research and Kids and Participant observation with adolescents), what are some of the most important things to remember when conducting participant observation? How do you envision your role as researcher? What are some of the methodological benefits and limitations of conducting participant observations and why? What are some of the ethical considerations that you must address? Lastly, why is an understanding of the limitations of your method important for the quality of your research analysis?
WEEK FIVE - Narrowing the Scope
By now, you will need to decide upon a clearly defined topic for your research paper. (Please check the course syllabus or research paper hand-out for more specific dates and details.) This week’s question aims to help you identify a specific research topic. Reflecting on your experiences at the JEP site thus far, what stands out to you as one of the most significant issues related to the construction of childhood and children as discussed in lecture or your readings? What is it that you want to learn about this issue and/or children as both individuals and a group and how will your JEP observations contribute to this process? What questions/issues related to your research topic might be difficult to examine and understand given the time constraints (e.g., volunteering two hours a week for eight weeks) and limits of the research method?

WEEK SIX - Writing Analytic “Memos”
Writing “memos” is an early step in the process of analyzing ethnographic data. It allows the researcher to step back from the field experience and to think about the emerging themes in an analytical and theoretical manner. The weekly Reflective Questions serve this same analytical purpose, but “memos” are less structured and allow students to pursue their own interests, hunches, and ideas. In preparation for your term paper data collection and analysis, write a “memo” that addresses your experiences at your community site. (Please note that since this is an exercise, this memo is not limited to your research paper topic, you can choose any topic) First, identify a specific and narrow topic (an issue) related to your observations at the community site. For example, this topic could be “brand name clothing and playground popularity”. Next, moving beyond a merely descriptive account (e.g., “student A is often teased because of the brand of his shoes”), begin to consider various other explanations for the topic. What are some of the other possible reasons this student is being teased? Are all students with that particular brand of shoes teased or just this student? In other words, what are your sociological hunches about this particular issue and why does it seem significant? Does it run counter to common-sense explanations about, e.g., popularity? Does it illustrate a common pattern (e.g., in our example, do you witness similar treatment of other students with certain brand name clothing?) What can you learn about children from this?

WEEK SEVEN - Theorizing about “Childhood”
Sociological theory should be an important element of your research paper. Select one of the theories of childhood discussed in class and in the readings, e.g., Corsaro, Demos & Demos or Prout & James. How does this theory help to explain “the circumstances” (e.g., learning-problems, popularity, or bi-lingual education) of the students at your JEP site? What aspects of the students’ experiences are not addressed or adequately explained by the theory and if so, why? How does this theory help you understand the topic that you have selected for your research paper?

WEEK EIGHT - Review
How have your experiences in the community helped you learn about the construction of childhood in the United States? What theories or concepts “came to life” most dramatically for you in your work with the children at your site? How have your perceptions of psychology changed, if at all? (Be sure to provide specific examples). How has JEP supplemented your classroom experiences? Highlight a noteworthy experience to illustrate your response.