What is a Discourse Community?

According to James Gee “a Discourse community is a sort of “identity kit” which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write” (Gee 484). (When discussing Discourse, Gee feels it necessary to capitalize the D, so that it separates it from just a regular discourse, or connected stretch of language.) What Gee means by that, is that a Discourse is the group that you identify with and along with that comes the rules of how to be in that group. Most people have what can be considered a primary Discourse, basically the culture and language of your family that you grow up learning and acting out in everyday life. Depending on what kind of primary Discourse group you belong to through your initial socialization can determine what secondary Discourse groups you become a part of as you get older.

A secondary Discourse is any other Discourse group that someone belongs to outside of their primary Discourse. Some examples of secondary Discourse groups would be learning a second language, a person’s job or career, hobby groups, and many other possible groups. Often time’s people will find that their primary and secondary Discourse groups do not always coincide well, but can be workable if the person is passionate about the secondary group. It’s often the morals and beliefs of the secondary group that do not coincide with the morals and beliefs of the person’s primary Discourse. Most secondary Discourses, like primary Discourse’s, have a specific set of rules or standards that need to be maintained in order to continue to be a part of the group. Knowing what it means to be a part of the secondary group is very important and understanding the meaning behind the rules that are set to be a member.

Sociology as a Discourse community

Sociology as a whole has so many ideas and new concepts that emerge every day that as a person who is interested in this field, I have a hard time choosing what I find the most interesting about it. Most sociologists study people, but not all in the same way. Some sociologists study people for research about a specific topic or to better understand why a certain culture of people lives and acts the way that they do. Other sociologists just simply study different types of people and write about it to educate the world on the
different cultures that are out there. The possibilities seem endless, and that is why I believe sociology is such an easy Discourse community to become a part of, almost anyone can find some aspect of this field that they can relate to and find interesting.

Some of the common themes amongst sociology Discourse communities, besides the study of people, are the understanding that every person is taught by the society that they live in, and that each society has its own set standards and ways of life. Some may be very similar to one another, but no two are exactly alike. Most sociologists are looking to find out what makes people act the way they do and how have these traditions and ways of life been formed. One specific example of things that sociologists study is gender and how it affects society. Relating gender to how a person grows up and what different cultures do to “form” what is masculine and feminine in that particular culture. One of my sociology professors, Viki Johnson from DSU, says it very well “sociologists take the position that most things related to gender have been learned and/or socialized into us as per our particular environments and culture”.

Some other areas of study in the field of Sociology are:

- Aging/Social Gerentology
- Social Psychology
- Urban Sociology
- Sociology of Work
- Marriage and Family
- Industrial Sociology
- Criminology/Delinquency
- Political Sociology

Those are only a few of the other fields of study in sociology. There really is something for everyone, this field is very versatile and could easily fall as a secondary Discourse for anyone who chooses it.

**Communicating through Texts in Sociology**

Research articles are the staple when it comes to texts in the field of sociology. Almost every element of sociology has had to do with some types of research, and that research has usually had an article written about it, if not several articles. In order to write a research article the writer must first decide what topic they want to write about and then they must choose what type of research that they want to do. The two most common types of research in sociology are: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research data comes from doing surveys, censuses, and comparing statistics. Qualitative research data comes from observations, interviews, and can also include the researchers own perspectives and ideas on the subject (“Sociology”). After choosing which research path they want to take, the writer then conducts their research.

An Ethnography is another type of text and way of communicating in the field of sociology. Ethnography is “the study of an entire social setting through extended systematic observation” (Schaefer 57). There are several different approaches that can be taken to collect information to write an ethnography or ethnographic research paper. Some of the more common ways to collect data are by observation and participant observation. Observation is just simply observing a particular culture and environment and
taking notes. Participant observation is when the researcher actually becomes a part of the environment that they are studying, almost like researching from the inside, out.

**Joining the Sociology Discourse community**

Knowing the basics of sociology that are described on this page are a key factor into determining if you either:A: are interested in becoming a member of this Discourse community or B: how you will enter this community and what path of it you will choose to engage in. Like with joining any group, knowledge is power, the more you know about something the more likely you are to make a decision on what role it will play in your life. Having an interest in sociology is crucial to being a member of this community.

*Works Cited*


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