

Paper Project #1: Double-Entry Observation

For my location I chose to observe Seattle/Tacoma (SeaTac) International Airport. More specifically the Southern departure/arrival gates of Northwest Airlines (NWA). Included in this area is a mini food court, with various restaurants and food establishments, and the gate departure/arrival seating portions. This public area seemed appropriate due to my recent exposure to airports because of my latest travels. These observations took place on Easter Sunday, April, 8th 2007 around the mid-morning to the late afternoon.

There were not many people at the airport at this time. Due to Easter Sunday I would assume, most people had already done their traveling and were home for the holiday. The only people that were there were the various maintenance, airline, and food employees along with passengers waiting for departures. The bulk of these passengers were waiting at the food court and the seats in front of the gate due to a delay of an NWA Minneapolis flight, which was scheduled to leave at 7:20 AM that morning. It was rescheduled for 12:30 PM. This account mostly observes these people.

While these travelers and employees waited they centered themselves two areas. One, the tables at the food court. And two, the seats in front of the departure gate. Mostly families or couples ate, mostly breakfast, at the food court. I found this due to the smell of eggs and hash browns emanating from the restaurants. One thing I found interesting was that there were so many options for food, but in almost every case, family members decided to eat from different locations and have different types of food. Overall, it was a quiet atmosphere. Adults mostly read the paper, while kids listened to their iPods and played video games. The other group of people that gathered at the food court was male

airport employees. They sat in a remote corner of the food court, sitting with their chairs turned backwards, drinking coffee, and talking amongst themselves. Not exclusively, but occasionally they spoke something other than English which I could not discern. I wondered why these men of similar linguistic backgrounds worked together as similar employees. Was this merely coincidence or a result of a particular group pursuing similar employment intentionally? I assumed that these men were all maintenance workers.

The other center of gathering was the seating around the departure gate for the delayed flight mentioned above. The other gates were completely empty of travelers and employees. The most interesting aspect of this gathering place was the electrical outlets. The outlets were limited and spread out, and were the areas of concentration for passengers. Businessmen needed them for their laptops, others to charge their cell phones. It was interesting to watch as people jockeyed themselves into position to snatch an outlet as soon as it became available. They wouldn't say anything to accomplish this, rather just watch attentively and try to act quickly. In present day, people are dependant on electronics, and this scene was clearly evident of that.

The airport served its purpose for observation, but I was surprised at even though it was a public facility, people kept to themselves in small groups. I wondered why people segregated themselves at this public airport.