

## **Observational Exercise**

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### **Observational Exercise**

An integral aspect of qualitative studies is observation, which includes systematic notation of events, behaviors, and interactions between subjects within a specified environment. Field notes, or observational records, are detailed, concrete, and objective (Marshall, 2014). The following observation notes and analysis are an observational exercise guided by two questions:

1. How do patrons follow COVID-19 social-distancing protocol attending a tavern?
2. How do staff members follow COVID-19 social-distancing protocol while serving in a tavern?

### **Observation Notes**

The setting is the bar at the Lighthouse Tavern on the corner of Washington and Morris in the Paulus Hook area of Jersey City, NJ. The location is an upscale eatery with a main dining area with a long wooden bar to the right. The ceilings are high, as are the windows. The observation takes place on Tuesday, September 29, 2020, at 5:40 pm. The weather is warm enough that the restaurant has the massive front doors open. Interspersed between the stools at the bar are spaces. Three stools are at the foot of the bar, followed by an empty spot from which a seat was removed. The vacant spot is followed by two more seats and another empty spot. Dispersed through the bar, which would typically fit about 16 stools, are empty spots.

Three patrons enter wearing masks and take three stools at the foot of the bar. The female takes the stool closest to the wall. The males hesitate, then one sits next to the female, and the third sits on the cornered edge of the bar; all are about 1 foot away from each other. All seem to be about mid-50s.. The bartender, also middle-aged, is a male of average height and build and is wearing a mask; he walks to the end of the bar and greets the patrons. The end-of-bar patrons (EOBP) exchange banter with the bartender, apparently ordering drinks. A male table server,

also masked, at the service area of the bar calls something out across the bar to the EOBPs who wave and call out the server's name. At this point, the female is masked while the males are not. The tavern owner walks over and greets the EOBPs; the males put on their masks and all bump elbows. The owner stands about three feet away as they talk. The owner walks away and appears a few minutes later with a ladder he takes outside.

The drinks arrive for the EOBPs. The masks are off and remain off for the remainder of the observation. The bartender walks to the center of the bar and lowers his mask while watching something on the one tv in the dining area. A woman in her 40s wearing a mask walks in says something to the bartender about telling her friend there is room at the bar; if the EOBPs are in sports 1-3, and spot 4 is empty, she is in a spot 6. The bartender takes her order.

The bartender walks to the EOBPs and leans in towards them. He pulls his mask a bit away from his face without removing it as he speaks. A male enters with a mask and sits next to the woman. They greet each other, and it seems he is the one she told there was room. She does not have her mask on when she greets him. A male and female enter and take spots 14 and 13. They take off their masks once seated. While the bartender takes their order, the table server from before walks behind the bar to the EOBPs and banters with them. He lowers his mask and either says something or makes a face, and they laugh. He pulls his mask back in place and walks out from behind the bar. A young female server wearing a mask brings food to 5 and 6. Another patron enters and takes spot 8 (7 has no stool) and removes his mask. The bartender takes his order and proceeds to the taps. Two males walk in and proceed to spots 11 and 12. As they sit, they spread their stools further apart and sit somewhat half-turned and facing each other. The patron in spot 8 shifts his chair closer to the empty 7 spot. The woman in spot 6 looks at the man

then turns back to her companion. The bar is full except for one available seat when this observation ends.

## **Analysis**

I am a frequenter of the Lighthouse Tavern and appreciate the employees and ambiance. I refrained from incorporating my interactions to minimize bias. I chose a day early in the week for two reasons: I wanted to go during an unfamiliar time, and I wanted to see how social distancing manifests when there are more space and fewer patrons. In reviewing my notes, several patterns emerged.

First, the staff was careful about wearing their masks around those whom they seemed less familiar or less friendly. Interviews would need to be conducted to determine the reason as it might be attributed to trust they will not be reprimanded by a regular patron or trust the regular patron would tell the staff if they were sick or exposed. Regardless, two of the instances of mask breach occurred when the bartenders were bantering.

The patrons largely adhered to the constraints which the tavern placed for them. No one moved a stool into an empty place. However, the distance over the empty stool space was about three feet, not six. Additionally, one patron moved his stool to a proximity closer than three feet to another patron. She was not observed expressing concern about the distance between him or the bartender. The patrons did not replace their masks to speak with the bartender. That may have had an effect on the compliance of the staff. The patrons did not distance with their companions but did maintain distance from other patrons. This may also be due to familiarity.

Overall, it seems that the compliance with COVID-19 requirements for masks and social distancing with staff and patron respectively were followed, though not consistently. Further

study might include a day of the week with more customer volume or a day when the owner is not present.

## References

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.