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Professor Riman

PSDS 3100 B

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Cultural Probes

This individual assignment lays the groundwork for a group project that can be reviewed in the Week 6 Module. **First**, we begin by introducing or deepening your knowledge of probes and asking you to reflect on your own.

Cultural Probe Kits are not meant to be scientific so much as stimulative to the creative process. **Gaver writes:** "We have to see our volunteers in terms of our own experiences, understanding their responses **empathetically, not intellectually**. Rather than producing lists of facts about our volunteers, the Probes encourage us to tell stories about them, much as we tell stories about the people we know in daily life.

Read Chapter 3 of [Design Probes](#) by Tuuli Mattelmäki and write a 2-page response paper. This is a great resource to go deeper with on your own.

1. **What** are the essential points presented in this reading?
2. **Identify** the potential value and/or challenges of using probes.
3. **List 3** ideas you'd like to use for your probe design.
4. An additional resource some of you may have read. [Gaver: Cultural Probes and the Value of Uncertainty](#)
5. Submit your written work as a PDF file named:
6. PSDS3100B_Probes_Reading_LastnameFirstInitial_S19
7. **Example:** PSDS3100B_Probes_Reading_rimanj_S19

Response:

In this reading, the overarching topic is about cultural probes. Cultural probes were created in the 1990s to encourage senior citizens having an active role in the community. This promoted exploring design opportunities in a few ways: for the user, for the creator of the probe, and finding approaches to user-design that we have never thought about before. The most important characteristics of a cultural probe are that they are designed to encourage user participation by using the subject's perception and allow for personal exploration. There are types of probes with different focuses, such as residential, communication, technological. Furthermore, there is a type called the empathy probe, which is used to look at the interaction between objects and each subject. By making cultural probes interesting and fun, it also motivated users to complete as well as served a dual purpose of directing their thinking. A few examples of tasks could be drawing or keeping a diary which shows detailed experiences. A few reasons why these sensory activities are important for designers are to inspire, to inform, to participate, and engage in dialogue. The human-centered design is in four stages 1) understanding and defining the context of use 2) making up a definition of the user 3) producing the design solutions 4) evaluating the solutions. This helps to achieve the goal that the designer has set out for themselves.

The value of using a cultural probe is that we as designers are able to directly engage our potential users. By observing the manner in which the participant used the probe or had issues

with designs, we are able to pinpoint and improve those aspects for the betterment of society.

Furthermore, we may be able to gain more design ideas from seeing how the probe could potentially be used. One of the challenges designers could face would be getting participation.

From my previous experience, we were assigned a classmate's probe to complete for how many ever tasks they instructed for the number of days that they designated. Even when it was considered a normal class assignment, the entirety of the class did not end up doing the assignment or completed it halfway. It was difficult to remind the subject or make the probe such that they would not forget. Another challenge is being able to integrate the tasks into the subject's daily life so that it is easy for them to complete. However, if the tools are provided or very simple, it allows the subject to complete the probe much more easily.

One idea that I had was making the probe themed. It could be a theme that college students would relate to. I am unsure as to what that would look like but, once we are able to display the information, it would also make for a much more interesting presentation to the class. Another idea would be to take photos or draw. Since I would be giving the probe to Parsons students, a lot of them enjoy using a camera or drawing. They could give themselves a caption, which would allow us to delve into getting to know a little bit about the subject. A third idea, that is a little more involved, would be to see the number of ways subjects could solve a puzzle. So we would give a few basic materials and give an odd task like "build a raft".