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Assignment 2: Social Institutions, Globalization, & Population

Being at the church door after Sunday service, with nothing to do and nothing to distract, soon made it feel like a common sight in everyday life. The place I chose for my observation was a place of reverence, and when I reached it, it was calm and still. But I knew that in some time the service would end and the congregation would come out in the church yard to greet each other and socialize. This journal entry presents how doing nothing within a religious community space affects how people react with social responsiveness and how shared practices of being polite or communicative can influence interactions.

First, the place where I positioned myself for the observation was quite central, as almost every person was going to pass by me. I was standing outside the main doors, slightly to the side, in such a way that I could see, but not obstruct anybody. Specifically, I could hear conversations taking place between the people making their way out of the main doors, and I could see families and small groups turning towards the parking lot, which made it obvious that the service was over. Everyone was in a cheerful mood, greeting each other and exchanging smiles. At this moment, I became more prominent as I was the only one not participating in this exchange.

During the first minute of the observation, I found myself feeling awkward or misplaced. There was no place to rest my hands, and a recurring desire to pick up a phone, which I had denied myself. This shows that we do small actions to make ourselves comfortable in situations that are unfamiliar to us. I found myself trying to make a neutral, friendly face so that I would not seem too hostile to the kind churchgoers. Thus, making sure that I do not attract unwarranted attention.

Then, the first three minutes showed what people did when they noticed at first that I was standing still. Some individuals looked at me briefly and quickly walked off, while some nodded

at me or smiled. In addition, Arminen and Heino (2023) state that the act of civil inattention is to provide enough visual attention to recognize another individual and then discontinue the attention. They also discovered that acts of breaching civil inattention could be detected when gazes become prolonged or repeated. This suggests that although my behavior was normal towards them, most of the people stopped to have a second, careful look at me because I was someone new in their surroundings.

Moreover, after 4-6 minutes, I started to feel embarrassed as I was positioned in such a way that people started to go around me, while staring at me, as I was the only one standing still without any movement. Additionally, an elderly church member slowed down and looked at my face. In a kind voice, he asked whether I needed assistance, and he stood quietly, awaiting a definite response. This showed that in a religious setting, ambiguous conduct may lead to being approached and understood with an intention of help and care.

Similarly, during the last 3 minutes, I became a little relaxed and started to feel comfortable in my position as an observer. My breathing became more even, and my posture stopped changing in response to comfort. It means the body can also become accustomed to environments, and even in a tense situation, can relax. Even when the last of the parishioners came out of the church and looked at me suspiciously, I was not concerned.

Consequently, when the ten minutes were over, I felt an instant release. I felt that I had gained a new sense of mobility and motion. It felt like a burden had been removed from my shoulders. I discovered that the greatest distress was caused by being unable to move and interact with people who were passing by me. The experiment eventually made it clear that the extent to which belonging matters.

Additionally, the meaning I took from it included personal and sociological implications about how a community space assigns meaning through shared practice. The smile was accompanied by searching eye contact, and the offer of assistance was made promptly, as though people were trying to put me in a familiar position: a newcomer, a visitor, or even someone in need. In addition, Johnson (2022) proposes that ritual practices can generate social solidarity because they are grounded in trusted systems and collective narratives that enable a community to address individual issues and confusion in a concerted effort. This creates the idea that the quick friendliness which I was offered was not accidental, but an attempt by the church setting to create sanity and connection where an individual does not fit into the regular process.

Therefore, the ten minutes at the church entrance made the simple act a lesson in social behavior. I discovered that people rely on attention, distance, and small questions to maintain order in the daily life of the population, as well as to safeguard belonging. The most valuable lesson was that it was uncomfortable to be difficult to categorize, rather than because of the hostility of a particular individual. The experience revealed that even when an individual is standing still, the process of negotiation of public identity is being conducted with tiny signals.

References

Arminen, I. A. T., & Heino, A. S. M. (2023). Civil inattention—On the sources of relational segregation. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1212090>

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