

## Assignment 1 – Doing Nothing

Bernard McGrane suggests that we actually “do” rather than just study sociology. His book *The Un-TV and the 10 MPH Car* (1994) features exercises designed to help students experience the micro level of society. This exercise is an adaptation of one of his experiments.

### **Step 1: Conducting the Experiment**

This exercise requires that you go to a relatively busy public space (a mall, square, plaza, street corner, park, sidewalk, etc.) and literally do nothing for ten minutes. That means just stand there and be unoccupied. Don't be waiting for someone, taking a break, sightseeing, or otherwise engaged in a normal kind of activity. Also don't daydream, fantasize, think about the past or the future; don't entertain yourself with plans or internal dialogues. Don't whistle, hum, fidget, look in your purse, play with your keys, take notes, or anything else that might distract you from just being there and doing nothing. Do, however, observe the reactions of others to you, and pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings during these ten minutes.

### **Step 2: Thinking and Writing About the Experience**

After conducting the experiment, write an essay (casual in tone and written in the first person) describing the experience and its meaning to you. Describe other people's reactions and your own thoughts in as much detail as possible. When writing about your thoughts and other people's reactions you should also write about *why* they and you reacted as you did. This should take around 2-3 pages.

The purpose of this exercise is to get you to see that changing your perspective (from “doing something” to “doing nothing”) makes everything different. It helps turn the ordinary world into a strange place. It makes you more aware of your own sense (or lack) of self and how identity is constructed in society. You can't take for granted that you “just know” what other people are doing or thinking or how the meaning of a situation is being defined or interpreted. Divested of your usual perspective as an everyday actor, you'll learn how the most mundane activities (like just standing around) can become major objects of critical inquiry.

For full credit on this assignment you must cover all of the following (any part not addressed will result in points off your grade on this assignment):

- Where exactly did you go and where did you position yourself?
- Describe other people's reactions to you.
- Why did they react as they did?
- How did you feel AND why did you feel that way?
- Why did I have you do this assignment?