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## Introduction

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## The Erving Goffman Archives

We would like to bring to your attention the Erving Goffman Archives (EGA). Located on the web site of the UNLV Center of Democratic Culture, this web-based, open-source project serves as a clearing house for those interested in the dramaturgical tradition in sociology and biographical methods of research, <http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/ega/index.html>. The EGA collect critical studies and biographical materials about Erving Goffman and his era. Postings on the EGA web site are divided into several overlapping sections: "Documents and Papers," "Biographical Materials," "Critical Assessments," and "Comments and Dialogues." The biographical section contains previously published materials, as well as new interviews and memoirs.

The theoretical groundwork for this undertaking is laid out in an article "Signing in the Flesh: Notes on Pragmatist Hermeneutics," <http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/Sept07STFeature.pdf>, and preliminary results are summed up in a paper presented at the 2008 ASA meeting in Boston, "Goffman's Biography and the Interaction Order: A Study in Biocritical Hermeneutics," <http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/ega/bios.html>. When you cite the materials collected for the EGA, please use the following reference: [\*Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives\*](#), Dmitri N. Shalin, ed. (UNLV: CDC Publications, 2009).

Socrates believed that the unexamined life is not worth living and extolled bios philosophicus or bios theoretikos. We take this to mean that our lives must be informed by principles and our principles embodied in our lives. Goffman's life is a prime example of bios sociologicus – a life dedicated to the science of society, with no sharp division between Goffman the scholar and Goffman the man. As the interviews and memoirs collected for the EGA suggest, Erving was a participant observer par excellence, constantly exploring, experimenting, testing social conventions, charting the boundaries of the interaction order, and unnerving those around him in the process. The biocritical inquiry and the Goffman archives it spawned explore the intersection between the biographical and theoretical corpus of Erving Goffman and people of his era.

We see the EGA as a collective enterprise, with all those interested sharing info, writing papers, offering comments, engaging in dialogues, serving as sounding boards for each other. This promises to be a different kind of history and study of society, an inquiry that transgresses the lines separating the subject and object of research, where we can not only do justice to our teachers, colleagues, and friends, but also engage in collectively-festive therapy, settle some old accounts in the spirit of charity and fairness, and exorcise the ghosts of academic years past.

The site co-directors are Serri Cavan, [scavan@sfsu.edu](mailto:scavan@sfsu.edu), and Dmitri Shalin, [shalin@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:shalin@unlv.nevada.edu). Members of the EGA Advisory Board include Ruth Horowitz, Peter Manning, Tom Scheff, and Jacqueline Wiseman. Frances Goffman Bay and Esther Besbris are the project consultants. The site managers welcome readers' comments and contributions. If you had a chance to observe Erving or heard a tale worth retelling, you can contribute a memoir or have your interview recorded and added to the Goffman archives. More online resources can be found in the [Intercyberlibrary](#), [Pragmacyberlibrary](#), [International Biography Initiative](#), and [Culture and Intelligentsia](#) sections of the [Center for Democratic Culture](#) web site.

*Below you will find a list of questions presented to EGA contributors. This list is tentative; it is meant to give a broad idea about the issues central to this project, and it is updated as new interviews and memoirs are added to the site.*

*Thank you for your interest.*

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## **Questions for EGA Contributors**

- 1. Do you recall the first impression that Goffman's ideas made on you when you discovered his writings? What in particular attracted you in his scholarship?**
- 2. Did you choose the graduate program at Berkeley/Penn because Goffman taught there? How did you connect with Erving?**
- 3. What impression did Erving make on you when you first met him? Did anything stand out about his appearance, clothes, and demeanor?**
- 4. What were Goffman's social skills at common gatherings, how did he interact with his colleagues, what was his style in interpersonal communications?**
- 5. Erving's first wife, Angelica Schuyler Choate, had an ABD in anthropology from the University of Chicago and, according to some reports, was involved with Erving's work. Are you familiar with this dimension of the relationship between Erving and Angelica (Sky) Goffman?**
- 6. How would you characterize Goffman's political preferences (assuming he had any)? What was his reaction to the student movement at Berkeley?**
- 7. How well did Erving fit into the Berkeley/Penn sociology department – did he get along with colleagues and administrators, what was his reputation around the campus? And why did he decide to leave for Penn?**
- 8. Are you familiar with the seminar held at Harvey Sack's house: its participants, atmosphere, and topics discussed?**
- 9. What was Goffman like as a teacher – his lecturing style, class room behavior, grading habits? How did students respond to Goffman?**
- 10. What made you choose Goffman as a dissertation adviser and/or led you to study with him? Was he sympathetic to your interests, sociological project, how did you settle on your research topic, and what was Erving like as a mentor?**
- 11. Did Goffman favor a particular methodology, theoretical framework, research site? Were there any major mid-course corrections in your thesis, problems with finishing it?**
- 12. How far would Erving let you go in your ethnographic endeavors? Which chances he thought you should be taking and which ones you should avoid?**
- 13. How did Goffman react to the final product and assess your overall efforts as a Ph.D. student? Did he help you land your first job, publish your work, further your career?**
- 14. Which other teachers made an impression on you while you were doing your undergraduate and graduate work? What were their classroom routines, grading habits? Any one in particular influenced your own work?**
- 16. Did you keep up with Erving after you have left the school? Any memories about the last time you saw him or communicated with him?**
- 15. If you look at Goffman's scholarly achievements from the vantage point of the present, do you find that your perception of his scholarship has changed over time?**
- 17. It must not have been easy for someone like Goffman to carve out a persona for himself after he discovered the conartistry at the heart of human existence. Do you feel that his existential**

**persona interfaced with his theoretical insights? How would you describe Erving's life's project?**

**18. Do you have any mementos related to Erving, any traces of his embodied existence – photos, letters, recommendations, syllabi, term papers, lecture notes, comments on your work?**

**19. Looking back at your own work and the way it has been influenced by Goffman, do you see anything in your research agenda that might link with your biography, reflect your origins?**

**20. Any memories you would like to share about prominent scholars who lived and worked in the same time period (e.g., Herbert Blumer, Everett Hughes, Greg Stone, Tomotsu Shibutani)?**