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## Having Been Goffman's Student I Am Drawn to Voltaire's Dictum, "To the Living We Owe Respect, to the Dead We Owe Only the Truth"

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## Remembering Erving Goffman

### **Sherri Cavan:** **Having Been Goffman's Student I Am Drawn to Voltaire's Dictum,** **"To the Living We Owe Respect, to the Dead We Owe Only the Truth"**

This interview with Sherri Cavan, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the San Francisco State University, was recorded over the phone on November 30, 2008. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Dr. Cavan edited the transcripts and gave her approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information and additional materials inserted during the editing process appear in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as "[?]". The interviewer's questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 21-30-08]

**Shalin:** Greetings, is this Sherri?

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Good to talk to you. This is Dmitri Shalin, how are you?

**Cavan:** Doing well, and you?

**Shalin:** I want to ask you if it is OK to record our conversation and then send it to you for editing?

**Cavan:** Certainly.

**Shalin:** Wonderful. The questions I sent probably gave you an idea about the issues that interest me. The Goffman project has evolved beyond what I originally had in mind. As my respondents keep bringing up names like Herbert Blumer, Greg Stone, Harvey Sacks, and Harold Garfinkel, I realized that my inquiry should include other key players of that period. Also, this inquiry has turned into a kind of metaethnography: I speak to master ethnographers who reflect on their craft and training, remember their teachers, colleagues, and friends, and along the way illuminate their era. Now, your case is special, for no less an authority than Erving Goffman attested to your remarkable ethnographic skills. So, what I am asking you to do – to the extent that you feel appropriate – is to reflect on your teachers and colleagues, on your epoch. That's where I am at the moment. You saw the tentative list of questions, right?

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** These are only suggestions, of course. You can take this conversation wherever you want. First, if I may, do you have any memories of how you encountered Erving's work?

**Cavan:** I was a student of Harold Garfinkel at UCLA from about 1957 when I was a junior.

**Shalin:** That early.

**Cavan:** You are talking to a very elderly person.

**Shalin:** I am getting there too.

**[Laughter]**

**Cavan:** OK. I started at UCLA at 1955, but I was international relations major. Then, about 1957, in my junior year, I switched to sociology. About that time, or maybe a couple of years later, between 1957 and 1959, I started taking many classes with Harold Garfinkel.

**Shalin:** Was it by chance that you discovered him?

**Cavan:** He was teaching . . . it was very strange because his appointment was in psychiatry. It had to do with the fact that the sociology department did not accept what he was doing as a legitimate version of sociology. So even though he taught courses that were part of the core curriculum in the sociology department, his appointment was not in sociology. Somewhere along the way I must have taken one of his courses, and it must have been a straightforward course, it was called "social disorganization." It covered the general area I'd like to think of as rule making and rule breaking and rule enforcing. They had this class over the years when I was teaching at San Francisco State University, its content stayed the same but its title changed about three times. Anyway, I took a course from Garfinkel. I don't know how much you know about Harold Garfinkel, he was not a popular teacher because he was very hard to understand. Have you read any of his works?

**Shalin:** I know his classic statement, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

**Cavan:** It probably took two or three editors to get it to this point of readability. He used to lecture with the tape recorder going and, then go home and listen to what he said. Nonetheless, what he said was exciting and important; nobody was saying anything like that. He was a student of Talcott Parsons when he was at Harvard. He taught a lot of Parsonian sociology. As a grad student I took his seminar on Talcott Parsons, and at some point along in

that year or period he mentioned this guy who was teaching at Berkeley, Erving Goffman.

**Shalin:** That must have been after 1958, the year Goffman came to Berkeley.

**Cavan:** Yes, it would be like '58 or '59, I'll tell you the easiest way to date it – it was before the publication of the Anchor edition of *Presentation of Self*.

**Shalin:** That was in '59.

**Cavan:** In '59?

**Shalin:** And Goffman went to Berkeley in 1958. So you must have heard about Erving right after he joined the faculty at Berkeley.

**Cavan:** Yes, because before that time the only available edition was the wonderful monograph edition published by the Edinburg University Press. Garfinkel must have mentioned it a couple of times, and I believe I asked him if I can buy the book, and he said, No, he had only ordered a couple of volumes for himself and for somebody in psychiatry. Of course, I immediately went out to the bookstore and asked if they had a copy of this book, and they still had a copy on the shelf for the guy from psychiatry. So I bought it.

**Shalin:** [Laughing]. So it wasn't readily available.

**Cavan:** Yes. Nobody yet . . . Actually, one of the few things I still have in my library is a copy of that edition.

**Shalin:** Is it much different from the Anchor edition?

**Cavan:** No. I've never gone paragraph by paragraph through the Anchor revisions, but Anchor was the early paperback publisher. To my knowledge, *Presentation of Self* never came out as a hardback.

**Shalin:** Right away it went to paperback?

**Cavan:** Right. I think it went from the Edinburg monograph to the Anchor Press paperback. At that time people were reading it but not a whole lot was known about Goffman. Anyway, when I finished up my Masters at UCLA, I decide to go for a Ph.D., and Garfinkel was very encouraging. He actually suggested that I go to Harvard because his teacher Talcott Parsons was there, but I was getting pretty bored with Parsonian sociology then, that's number one. Number two, I realized I was just too rough around the edges to make it

at Harvard. Even if I had a scholarship and money was not an issue, I knew enough about social class to know that it would be difficult for me to fit in there. And at that time my ex-husband moved to San Francisco, so everything conspired for me to end up going to Berkeley. Garfinkel wrote me a short letter of introduction to Goffman. I came to Berkeley in the summer of 1961, so that I could start in the fall of 1961. I went to. . . . First, I got into trouble because I wanted to transfer credit that I had done for my Masters at UCLA. I wanted to transfer my language, I wanted to transfer my statistics requirements. Most of that summer was spent trying to talk to professors and get their approval. It turned out the damned bastards never wrote the letters, so I actually filed for my degree with nothing in my file saying that my statistics requirements were satisfied.

**[Laughing].**

**Shalin:** Bureaucratic nonsense.

**Cavan:** It was terrible. Somehow in all of that miasma of trying to get enrolled in the department at Berkeley, I took my letter from Garfinkel to Goffman. He read it – I knew that he was teaching a class on social interaction in the fall – and said that it would be fine if I took the class. That was my introduction to him.

**Shalin:** That was a graduate class called “Social Interaction.”

**Cavan:** I am pretty sure – I would have to look in my transcripts, but I am pretty sure it was something like “Social Interaction.” And the class was essentially made up of his lecturing from *Presentation of Self*. Not directly from the book, but all the issues he covered were for the most part from this book, although he had some publications that came out even before *Presentation of Self*. So I came off as a really good student because I had already read the book **[Laughing]**. It was not available as a textbook; it still hadn’t come out in an Anchor edition. I had a serious advantage because the material he was presenting was so different from what was then presented in sociology. A lot of students enrolled in the class – it was really hard for them to grasp these concepts and figure out what he was getting at, how it fitted into the larger sociological enterprise. You see, I had a great education at UCLA. I had really a good foundation in theory; it wasn’t hard for me to see things from the standpoint of social psychology and Simmel. I could see that this man was really connected to the larger sociological enterprise, even if that wasn’t something he spent a lot of time emphasizing. As you know, he has very few footnotes, and half of them are from novels.

**Shalin:** He had plenty of footnotes but those were usually from literally and philosophical sources.

**Cavan:** Right, not the kind of footnotes we use in our papers that show deference to this theorist or that article – you know what academic footnotes are like. He had very few of them. I was a very eager student and followed not only *Presentation of Self* but also followed his footnotes. If he mentioned a novel I haunted the used bookstore to find a copy and read it.

**Shalin:** [Laughing].

**Cavan:** So I did very well in the class. I think I took four courses with him altogether – two or three seminars and maybe another class.

**Shalin:** All different?

**Cavan:** Yes, all different. There was a very interesting seminar that he and David Matza, who had just come to Berkeley at the same time, co-taught, and that was called “Deviance and Conformity,” something like that

**Shalin:** Ruth Horowitz mentioned David as a very interesting sociologist of deviance.

**Cavan:** He wrote a groundbreaking book, *Deviance and Drift*. He is still in the Bay area, and he might be an interesting person for you to talk with.

**Shalin:** I will try to get in touch with him.

**Cavan:** He knew Goffman from the perspective of being a faculty member at the time when Goffman started at Berkeley. . . .

**Shalin:** Any other classes?

**Cavan:** There were some, I just don’t remember.

**Shalin:** It’s OK. I can probably find out by looking at the catalogues.

**Cavan:** Yes. The department must have old catalogues.

**Shalin:** How did Goffman impress you as a teacher, his classroom style, grading?

**Cavan:** Well, he was pretty low key, self-centered. You couldn’t raise your hand in the middle of his lecture when you thought of something interesting or relevant.

**Shalin:** He didn't encourage discussions.

**Cavan:** He didn't, certainly not in the classes. I think we had pretty lively discussion in the seminars. . . . You know I remember the final from that social interaction class.

**Shalin:** Please tell me about that. All the little details . . .

**Cavan:** Wait till you hear about it. The final was . . . we spent the semester learning this conceptual framework, which really didn't apply to anything in particular. For the final he played 15 or 20 minutes of a John Cage concert. Do you know who he is?

**Shalin:** Was it a jail concert?

**Cavan:** No, no, no, no. . . . It was a recorded concert of John Cage, which was of course off the wall like there are big silences . . .

**Shalin:** Oh, I am sorry, you are talking about that ultra-modernist composer working with the atonal music system.

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** For some reason I am thinking of a country singer.

**Cavan:** No, it was a modern composer of whom we heard 15 minutes of a recording. The final was to analyze what we'd heard.

**Shalin:** Wow! That's highly original. People were probably floored.

**Cavan:** Well, they were. They were really floored. But you know, you could work your way through it by saying that, first of all, it was called "a concert," which put it in a certain framework. The silences let you hear the audience shuffling, chairs moving...

**Shalin:** Very interesting. Sort of like conversation analysis, only more broadly conceived.

**Cavan:** Or more vaguely conceived [**Laughing**].

**Shalin:** What were the directions he gave beforehand – were you supposed to free-associate? It's a very interesting way to examine students. What were the instructions?

**Cavan:** No. I think he introduced it by saying that we have spent the semester studying this conceptual framework – it might not have been the

whole exam, there might have been a couple of other questions. The instructions were to use that framework to analyze the following event . . . the recording.

**Shalin:** Fascinating.

**Cavan:** I think it was a reach. He could have given us something easier.

**Shalin:** That was an offbeat exercise, to put it mildly. I wonder if you still have this exam by any chance.

**Cavan:** No. **[Laughing]**. I possibly could have [[Cavan's exam answers](#) are now posted in the EGA]. But every July I go through a purge because paper just mounts, and you have to be able to let it go. I never had a good filing system to begin with. Maybe it's around, who knows. But I do remember that I got my grade; I can see the paper right now. We were able to take home the whole thing and type it.

**Shalin:** It was a take home exam?

**Cavan:** Yes, it must have been a take home exam. I remember my paper was typed. I had cheated and single-spaced it.

**[Laughter].**

**Shalin:** The instructions said "double-spaced"?

**Cavan:** M-m-m, the convention was that you double-space it, so probably there was an instruction.

**Shalin:** If you come across this exam, I'd love to see it.

**Cavan:** I know there are a couple of places where there are papers. So, it may be in one of those boxes. I was looking just before you called to see if I could find where in the *American Journal of Sociology* my review of Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* is, something like 1981. I have a poor draft, I don't have the final version. Anyway, let me go back to this final exam. I got my paper back, and in the corner there is the teeniest little "A-" you could barley see it. If it were any smaller, you would need a magnifying glass.

**Shalin:** Do you think this was a performance? Was he sending a message of some kind?

**Cavan:** No.

**Shalin:** OK, there was no particular reason or rhyme to it.

**Cavan:** Well, there was never genuine feedback. What you saw was what you got. Sometime he would write in a margin, "Good job." I never saw other peoples' papers, but usually there were tiny checks on the margins of my papers that seemed to mark some positive response. That was about it. This was not a man who was a generous spirit. Your reward was in getting to be his student.

**Shalin:** Effusive in his praise he was not.

**Cavan:** No. It's as if he couldn't write it much smaller. And it was in pencil too . . . impermanent.

**[Laughing].**

**Shalin:** Were you pleased with "A-?"

**Cavan:** I was very pleased. As I said, most of the other people in the class were going crazy. First, they didn't get a good grasp of the theoretical framework. And second, they hadn't been prepared by being a student of Garfinkel. When you were a student of Garfinkel . . . It was equally insane, so I was used to years of insanity.

**Shalin:** **[Laughing].** You must have a special talent for bearing under such pressure.

**Cavan:** **[Laughing].** No, everything was crazy; that was no crazier than everything else that was happening in my life outside of school. So that was . . . I am trying to think – I must have taken a seminar after that, because the next thing that came up was doing a research paper, an actual fieldwork paper. And I am sure it was not in that class on social interaction. It must have been in my second class and it may have focused on *Behavior in Public Places*. At that time I was married and my husband was involved in a little theater group that met in San Francisco down at North Beach. We lived in San Francisco; I commuted to Berkeley. When I could get a baby sitter, I would go down to pick him up after rehearsals, and sometimes I was able to get down there and spend some time after the performance. We would hang out in a bar, cool down and drink . . ., and I had this funny experience.

I had gone down to pick my husband up, to meet him at the bar, I got there a little early and sat down at the table that the theater group used when a bartender came over and says, "You can't sit there." I say, "Why?" He says, "This table belongs to a theater group." I looked around the bar, and at that point, I was really interested in the fact that this public space could be

transformed into private space and that the two definitions could co-exist. This was a public drinking place with the additional definition that had been put on top of it. I thought that that was kind of curious. I was interested. I don't remember how, but somehow my husband invited the bar owner and the bartender to come and live with us in our spare room after they were evicted from their apartment and lost the bar where we had first met them. These were two gay guys, and at some point I said that I was looking for some topic for my research project, and they said, "Why don't you come down to the bar with us." Not the bar that was closed down, but this other bar that was called "The Black Cat." Later it came to be known as the "Notorious Black Cat."

**Shalin:** Lucky strike.

**Cavan:** Pardon?

**Shalin:** That was your lucky strike.

**Cavan:** Yes, it really was. This is all before Stonewall, so the entire gay subculture in San Francisco was closeted behind closed doors. There were about, maybe, a dozen bars, 15 or 20 gay bars that were known but not necessarily publicly. The Black Cat was known as a homosexual hangout and the place where tourists could see the homosexual life, so the regulars would do these unbelievable performances either to embarrass the tourists or make them leave. Because I knew these two guys, I was able to spend a lot of time down there with them. I ended up writing a paper for Goffman, called "Interaction in Home Territories" which examined this conceptual framework and applied it to the events that took place at the bar. And Goffman liked it a lot.

**Shalin:** So you got your "A."

**Cavan:** Yes. I did get my "A." Probably it was an "A-", if I remember correctly. I don't think he ever gave out an "A." **[Laughing]**.

**Shalin:** Really? Then students probably didn't care much for him as a teacher, or rather a grader.

**Cavan:** N-o-o-o, he had a small group of dedicated students, and then of course there were always students in his class who had to get their units, so they would take whatever classes were available. Now, also in his classes at the time, certainly by the time I started my research, there were all of these guys – Harvey Sacks, David Sudnow, Roy Turner, Manny Schegloff, Carl Werthman and maybe half-a-dozen others . . . Marv Scott, Henry Elliot. Sacks, Sudnow, Turner and Schegloff were Goffman's students, but

they were much more interested in the work that Garfinkel was doing. So there was always a bit of tension between Goffman and them . . . as I like to think of them collectively, "the guys." You see, while they were enrolled at UC Berkeley, they would go down to UCLA and have seminar meetings, informal meetings with Garfinkel, to get their intellectual stimulation and inspiration. They were much more interested in the work that Garfinkel was doing. They liked Goffman; I mean they liked the work that he did, whatever they felt personally about him. But they were not his students in an intellectual way. There was also a tension within the group, which might have come from the fact that I was the only one who had actually been a Garfinkel student at UCLA, but I was done with Garfinkel by that time. And of course, I was not a guy.

**Shalin:** No doubt in your mind that you would rather work with Goffman than Garfinkel?

**Cavan:** Yes, I was happy for the experience I had had with Garfinkel, but I was happy with where I was. There was no ongoing tension between Goffman and Garfinkel for me. I originally thought all these guys had had Goffman on their dissertation committee, on their oral exams, but as it turned out, they didn't. Nonetheless, they all told me fabulous stories of how they put Goffman in his place during their orals.  
How did I get there from the bars in general?

**Shalin:** We were talking about the research paper you did for Erving's class on gay bar culture.

**Cavan:** Right.

**Shalin:** Then we touched upon his teaching habits, mentoring. . .

**Cavan:** I worked really well with him. If you never came to his office, he would be happy.

**Shalin:** Really?

**Cavan:** Yes. So I never came to his office.

**Shalin:** So you figured it out early [**Laughing**].

**Cavan:** Yes, and fortunately, my personal preference was to work on my own. It was known around that. . . . I am sure this is true about all big universities, but there were little cliques within the department – students who were Goffman's students, and there were students who were Selznick's students, students who were Kingsley Davis's students. Sets of students and

their teachers would know when you came into a seminar, where you were coming from, where your commitments were.

At the same time, I had a predoctoral fellowship in the School of Public Health. It was a very interesting program. Andie Knutsen from Psychology organized this program. He brought together sociologists and psychologists and anthropologists, historians, economists. We were all graduate students, we were all predoctoral. We had an opportunity to define an area in public health that interested us and to work it into our research. In public health there was a big area of alcohol studies, although these were always studies trying to figure out how much people drink and how often. They tell you how often people were drinking , that is, consuming alcohol, but they really didn't know much if anything about drinking as a social behavior. There was a whole body of work on various forms of pathological drinking, alcoholism, abstinence programs and the like, but I was really curious about what normal drinking looked like. They never talked about ordinary normal drinking. **[Laughing]**.

First of all, you have to decide where you can see normal drinking. You can see it at social parties and conventions, but those are hard to get access to, they can have closed boundaries. But bars – they were all about drinking, they were public places, you can go there and be there. I thought that it was a great idea to study bars, and they were perfectly happy in the School of Public Health for me to do that if I knew how to do it. So, I went to Goffman and told him that was what I wanted to do for my doctoral dissertation. I asked him if he would be my advisor. He agreed, so I started doing that. . . . The only thing that he told me was, "You should go to the anthropology department and take some fieldwork classes." That was a wonderful suggestion. They had a fabulous anthropology department at Berkeley, so I took a couple of fieldwork classes, which gave me a much shaper understanding of doing fieldwork. Now, Goffman never taught fieldwork himself.

**Shalin:** There were no classes in sociology that had to do with fieldwork and ethnography?

**Cavan:** No, no, no. I'll tell you when I was teaching at San Francisco State, I started in the mid 60s but it wasn't until the early '90s that I got our department to put in a qualitative methods class.

**Shalin:** Rene Fox told me the same thing about Penn. It was not until she became a chairperson that she managed to add such a class. Please continue, I don't mean to interrupt you. Sometimes I interject things. . .

**Cavan:** Oh, no, I mean, that was the way things were. There was a lot of statistics, and a lot of fancy statistics, but there was nothing that even looked like qualitative methods. In that sense Goffman's advice to me was very useful.

**Shalin:** Did you come to Goffman with the topic in hand?

**Cavan:** I am pretty sure I had the topic but it was probably not completely developed. . . . He liked the idea, he thought the bar scene was exciting. . . . You know, it was often difficult to deal with him, because he had a demeanor that put people off. People thought he was putting them down, criticizing them. He did that to me a couple of times and watched tears roll down my cheeks. And then he never did it to me again. After that we had an easygoing relationship. I could do pretty much what I wanted, which I did.

The common knowledge at Berkeley was that if you took any part of your dissertation to your thesis advisor, you wouldn't see it for ten months. . . . The advisor would just sit on it, then finally read it and write fifteen pages of criticism, which you had to address before you can go on to the next part. I took the easy way out – I just never went to see him until it was done.

**Shalin:** [Laughing].

**Cavan:** When I finally brought him the first draft, the complete first draft. . . . There was one thing I hated, and it was that he frequently made you come to his house for office hours. You had to leave your parking place on campus, drive up the hill to his house, come back to campus and try to find another parking place. I remember seeing him in his office only two or three times, but at least half-a-dozen times in his home. . . . He did have a lovely house up in the hills.

**Shalin:** Was it on Hilgard Avenue?

**Cavan:** Yes. I remember the first time I came to see him for some reason, I knocked on the door, and the first thing he said was, "Don't look out the window for the view." And then he sat me with my back to the window.

**Shalin:** Why?

**Cavan:** He liked to control things, you know [Laughing]. I think he just did it to be in control. . . . I tried to use my restraint not to look.

**Shalin:** Was he teasing, was he serious?

**Cavan:** You were there to talk about your work, not to look out the window.

**Shalin:** OK, that was the meaning. He was earnest, no tongue-in-cheek poking.

**Cavan:** Well, I'll tell you, there must have always been a fine line between mocking, tongue in cheek, and earnest performance. I mean he wasn't a bad man, you know. He wasn't a tyrant. But he would never pass an opportunity to be one up.

**Shalin:** Very interesting.

**Cavan:** So I finally brought a draft of my dissertation – I must have left it in the office for him to pick up and then made an appointment to see him. I went to his house, and he sat me down in his nice little office. I think I was there for two hours, maybe not that long. . . .

**Shalin:** I apologize for interrupting, hold that thought for a second. I want to make sure I understand the timeline – when was that?

**Cavan:** That must have been in '64, '65.

**Shalin:** You said you saw him in his house, but somebody told me that he had an apartment. Perhaps that was a reference to an earlier time.

**Cavan:** And this apartment was in Berkeley?

**Shalin:** Yes. I think Rodney Stark told me how Angelica, Erving's wife, invited a bunch of people from the Survey Center to their apartment.

**Cavan:** No, he was living in a very lovely house in the Berkeley Hills, with a big winding driveway with Irises that were being attacked by snails, a fact I managed to point out to him, because when you are with someone who is ready to put you down, you always want to be one up first.

**Shalin:** [Laughing] Attacked by snails.

**Cavan:** They were being eaten by snails, so I pointed this out to him.

**Shalin:** So, what did he say?

[**Cavan:** when someone points out that there are snails in your garden you cannot say anything; you can only be embarrassed for exhibiting what a poor gardener you are. It was a cheap shot on my part. I could have said, "What lovely irises" or not said anything. It was pretty cheeky for someone who was still dependent on his good will to sign my dissertation.]

**Cavan:** The first thing he told me when he sat me down with my dissertation, which is something you remember for the rest of your life, he said, "You know, I am paid 75 dollars an hour for doing this," or "a hundred dollars an hour." You know, some big sum for providing feedback. I looked at him, and my mouth just must have dropped open in disbelief. What was he supposed to do? He was my thesis advisor.

**[Laughter and commotion].**

That's just the way he was. The funny thing is that this following example was the only criticism that he had.

**Shalin:** It's like he is saying, "You are getting your money's worth."

**Cavan:** Right. It's like, "You are getting for free what other people have to pay for." At one point in the dissertation I mentioned that bars were typically marked on the outside with a neon cocktail glass, so he said to me: "How do you know this?" I said, "Because I had seen it." He is, "Well, how can you prove it?" I say, "What do you mean how can you prove it?" He was asking me this damn statistical question, which I didn't think belonged in there. I said, "But is it really important?" He said, "Yes, it is." So I went out and got somebody to drive me around. Because bars are all licensed I had all of the listings of licenses in the city of San Francisco: I knew what the universe of bars in San Francisco was, and at some point I plotted them all on a map. I knew their demographic distribution. I took two streets that had the most bars on them as a convenience sample, because I was damned if I would go to every bar. And then I counted how many bars, and how many had cocktail glasses, and how many of those were neon, and how many were turned upside down **[Laughing]**. I think this ended up in a footnote. I don't know what happened to it, it must have gotten dropped someplace from the book when it was published. But that was for the most part his feedback and critique of my dissertation.

**Shalin:** You said the bar signs were upside down – did it have a special significance?

**Cavan:** No. Owners just let it be that way as a joke, instead of installing them upright.

**Shalin:** It wasn't a sign for would-be clients as to the kind of clientele the bars catered to.

**Cavan:** Well, I don't know. The truth is that I never went to look on the inside of those particular bars. I just wanted to find out the proportion of bars

that had cocktail glasses as street signs [and then, because I was a bit of a smart Alec, I broke down the figures into "painted" "neon" and "upside down"]

**Shalin:** Interesting that he wanted to know that.

**Cavan:** Yes. Sometime I would be a little amazed. Oh, let me backtrack – when I had decided on the topic and went to tell him about the thesis proposal I'd written and get him to sign on to be my advisor, the first thing he said to me was, "You cannot get into any trouble. If you get into any trouble, you will besmirch the name and the reputation of the university."

**Shalin:** He said this to you?

**Cavan:** Yes. And then he went on and said, "If something happens to you, you can't call me" **[Laughing]**. What a guy!

**Shalin:** And yet he didn't discourage you to take chances.

**Cavan:** Well, he just let me be who I wanted to be. I suppose it was possible to get in real trouble. I mean, there were wild places where drugs were dealt, prostitution, b-girls, stolen goods, there were guns, fights – a range of ways that you could get into trouble. There were the homosexual bars, there would be police around these bars, they were often raided, people inside arrested . . . it wasn't as though I couldn't get into any trouble. But if I did – don't call him. I was on my own. The funny thing is that not very long after that the free speech movement began and the university's name was in the papers in very unsavory ways.

**Shalin:** That was not because of you.

**Cavan:** No, not because of me, fortunately. So that was about it. He did call me before my prelims. He was on that committee, but the committee was chaired by Herbert Blumer.

**Shalin:** Blumer was on your committee?

**Cavan:** Yes. I had a wonderful education, contact with first-rate people. Blumer was my chair, and Goffman called me up that night. . . Well, let me tell you what else had happened. My exams were scheduled . . . well, let me back off and tell you two things.

**Shalin:** By all means, please do. I cherish those details, which sometimes tell so much more than formal chronology.

**Cavan:** My preliminary exams were scheduled in November. That turned out to be the week after Kennedy was assassinated. The week of the assassination the American Anthropological Association had a meeting in San Francisco. I cannot remember the session, but I was at the session. . . . Before Goffman became Goffman, certainly before he went to Penn, he would go to meetings and different sessions because he was not a celebrity, hardly anybody knew him, except the people who knew him. We were both at that session of the American Anthropological Association, and when we came out of this session we were informed that the president had just been shot. The first thing that Erving said was, "Oh, my God! What happened to the stock market?"

**[Laughter].**

**Shalin:** What a tidbit.

**Cavan:** It's really funny.

**Shalin:** He wasn't deadpan? Was it his natural spontaneous reaction, a response cry?

**Cavan:** No, that was not meant to be funny.

**Shalin:** He was concerned about the stock market reaction.

**Cavan:** Yes. . . . I think through his wife, he must have had a lot of investments in the stock market – his wife was very wealthy and once I had heard him say he had stock investments so I thought that he must have had a lot of money in the stock market and he was concerned that with the assassination of the president, the stock market would fall apart. But I have to say, I mean – there were a lot of things he would say that I would just look at him in disbelief. It struck me that even if that were your first thought . . .

**Shalin:** You don't blurt it out.

**Cavan:** Right **[Laughing]**.

**Shalin:** Any other memories? These are such telling things. They are to be interpreted of course, but . . .

**Cavan:** Right, right. I think the important thing to understand about Erving was that he was very bourgeois. And at the same time he was titillated by rule breaking – beside the interactional rule breaking that he did, like in the bar where he felt titillated and excited as the norms were being broken and people were acting out in ways that could get you in a lot of trouble. In the

same sense he found Marv Scott's work on the race track kind of titillating, he was really interested in this work that was outside of his immediate experience, especially if it involved some kind of risk taking. But he was basically a middle class guy, and the truth of the matter is that this is his perspective in all of his works until he gets into *Frame Analysis* – and that is so conceptual as to be unrelated to anything. All his work took a very middle class perspective.

**Shalin:** By the way, he acknowledges that much himself: "This is all about America society, about the middle class," he said it in so many words in several places.

**Cavan:** So that was him. There is another funny story. One of the ways we got along was that he liked to go to garage sales and flea markets, and I liked to go to garage sales and flea markets, so we would meet at these places sometimes. There was a wonderful flea market in Alameda, and I would run into him there. On one of his trips, he found a couple of boxes full of women's magazines, and that was the whole basis of *Gender Advertisements* – two or three boxes of women magazines. Of course, if you have never seen a woman's magazine it looks like a foreign country. About that time Lenore Weitzman did a groundbreaking study which was presented here in San Francisco, maybe at the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Anyway, she had taken children's books and had analyzed the pictures in children's books with respect to sex roles.

**Shalin:** That was Jackie Wiseman?

**Cavan:** Not Jackie Wiseman – Lenore Weitzman.

**Shalin:** I see.

**Cavan:** That's the presentation Goffman picked up on. He had these enormous resources – big boxes of women's magazines. I am not sure, it is not easy to make something into slides, I understand it is much easier today, but in the old days you had to do photographic slides. He must have had thousands of slides made up.

**Shalin:** Some were published in *Gender Advertisements*.

**Cavan:** Yes, some of them were published in *Gender Advertisements*, and some of them were published just as he ripped them out, which was always amazing to me – they were willing to publish such shoddy visual images [**Laughing**]. I mean, some were xeroxed. I had reservations with that book. Anyway, at that time . . . it must have been after 1965 because I was already teaching in San Francisco State... The women's movement was

just beginning, and there was a group of women, mainly here in the Bay Area, who had put together "Sociologists for Women and Society." Because I knew Goffman, they asked me if I could invite Goffman to make a presentation of anything at one of their meetings. He said he would do it, because he wanted to have an audience to present all of his slides, his mindboggling, unedited slides.

[The presentation was at my house. He was testy as usual. First he was pissed off because I couldn't make the room dark enough, which really pissed me off. I had gone to great effort to set everything up. I think, now, upon reflection, he was nervous – he was going to make a presentation about women's sex roles in front of an audience of women who knew about those matters in an intimate way. As an outsider he would tell them things they never saw before.]

**[Laughter].**

This event must have been in 1968. And then he refused to let in any men there, including my 10 year old son. . . .

**Shalin:** Really?

**Cavan:** Yes, this was really dumb. Who knows why he did it. So he had this captive audience. I don't know, there must have been 30 women, almost all of them sociologists, Ph.D. sociologists, not even students at that time. And he presented all of this material, talked about what he saw and he elicited discussion about what the people were seeing. That eventually became the basis for *Gender Advertisements*. That was the context of that. So one thing that set him apart from being this classic bourgeois was his interest in snooping around in garage sales and flea markets. [A bit of a ramble] Other than that . . . I mean he had a very lovely house, and of his house I particularly remember his beautiful rugs.

**Shalin:** How would you describe his house? He must have been living there at the time with his first wife and his son.

**Cavan:** Yes, you know, after his wife . . .

**Shalin:** Of course, she committed suicide in 1964.

**Cavan:** That was my next to last year at Berkeley. He was in that house, because I remember David Sudnow and Manny Schegloff and Harvey Sacks and I went to sit shiva there at his house, which was very awkward. He never encouraged intimate interactions with students, and there we were trooping into his house. I think it was Harvey's idea.

**Shalin:** I want to ask you about Erving's Jewishness and about Erving's first wife. We'll come back to that, but let's continue for the moment with Goffman as a teacher and mentor.

**Cavan:** As a mentor, he didn't mentor me very much. Fortunately, I was happy with that.

**Shalin:** He gave you really long leash.

**Cavan:** Yes. He would have been happy to have dozens of students like that. He didn't want students that were needy, that needed anything.

**Shalin:** This is a very interesting observation.

**Cavan:** Oh, I forgot to say that at my prelims he . . . he is so funny, at least at a distance . . . it's such a different world now. In the old days, when you went to a meeting, you sat down at a conference table, and in front of each person there was an ashtray. Now of course there is bottle of water, but then people smoked in class, smoked wherever, and I was a smoker at that time. So Goffman called me up ostensibly to relieve my anxieties about my upcoming exam.

**Shalin:** That was nice of him.

**Cavan:** Well, it was nice of him, of course, but then he starts . . . you know, first he says, "If you don't know something, you can say, 'I don't know'," to kind of relieve yourself. Then he says, "But you only have a certain number of don't-knows."

**Shalin:** Doesn't it add to anxieties?

**Cavan:** Right!

**[Laughter].**

**Shalin:** He was sort of cooling the mark out but at the same time he was heating the mark up.

**Cavan:** Yes. Then he says, "You better not smoke." You know, when you smoke, it's kind of relaxing. "You better not smoke because when you go to light your cigarette, your hands are going to shake, and then everybody will know how nervous you are."

**Shalin:** **[Laughing].**

**Cavan:** Of course I didn't smoke. I just kept squeezing my arms, and when I came out of my exam, I had two huge black and blue marks on the insides of my arms. But at least my hands weren't shaking.

**Shalin:** How did the exam go?

**Cavan:** David Matza started to ask me about this study, which I was actually familiar with, but not in the way David asked the question. So I used one of those "I don't know." And then he asked the same question in a slightly different way, and I used another one of my "I don't know."

**Shalin:** [Laughing].

**Cavan:** And finally the third time, when he was kind of laughing, I was really angry. That angered me more than anything in the exam. When the exam was all over, a couple of days later I ran into David [Matza]. I asked him, "Why did you do that to me? Why did you keep asking me about this study when I already said I didn't know?" And he said to me – it's amazing I am still friends with him – he said, "I just wanted to find out how much you didn't know."

**Shalin:** [Laughing]. The man wasn't pulling punches.

**Cavan:** [Laughing]. No-o-o. That was even worse than Goffman. Matza was one of his buddies.

**Shalin:** How did Goffman behave?

**Cavan:** He was, all things considered, pretty supportive. That was about a week after Kennedy was assassinated. Andie Knutsen who was on the committee – he was the head of the behavioral science project where I had my predoctoral fellowship, and he knew I was into ethnography – he asked me a question I would under other circumstances have done better on. He asked me, "As a sociologist what would you make out of the events of the past week." This was a tough question, and Goffman actually came to my defense and deflected the question, saying something like, "It's still too close to be able make any kind of sociological sense of the event." I mean, he showed some support.

**Shalin:** Ok, ok.

**Cavan:** The exams were scheduled for four hours.

**Shalin:** Oral exam – nothing in writing?

**Cavan:** No, we had written exams, but you took those first, then once you finished with your written exams, you took oral exams. I remember, as I was waiting for the exam to start and being really as nervous as you could be, Goffman looks at me and says, "Is that what you chose to wear?"

**Shalin:** **[Laughing]**. What were you wearing?

**Cavan:** I was wearing a dress and a pair of stockings **[Laughing]**. I thought I looked pretty good. I mean, "Is that what you chose to wear?" The exam lasted . . . it was scheduled for four hours, you had a break after two hours, and then you were told to wait outside. I don't know how long I waited outside, it seemed like an eternity. Blumer who was the chair of the committee came out and said – at least this is what I'd heard: "The committee has magnanimously decided to pass you."

**Shalin:** **[Laughing]**. Wow – "magnanimously"? Sounds kind of backhanded.

**Cavan:** Really backhanded, really backhanded. And I'll tell you something that is really funny. . . Of course I was close to suicide.

**Shalin:** I can imagine.

**Cavan:** I had worked so hard, and I felt I was just barely getting by. Oh, I was miserable. Well, a number of years later, at Herbert Blumer's retirement party, I wanted to say I was really so devalued by that. I said, "Professor Blumer, when you came out of the committee and told me that the committee had magnanimously decided to pass me, I felt terribly bad." He looked at me and said, "Oh, I didn't say that! I said the committee had *unanimously* decided to pass you."

**[Laughter]**.

**Shalin:** And he probably is right?

**Cavan:** Probably. Its' been years.

**Shalin:** I hear that Blumer was a different character from Erving.

**Cavan:** Yes. I have to take a quick break. Do you want to hold on?

**Shalin:** Sure, sure. I'll hold on, and then we'll continue.

**Cavan:** OK. Hold on.

## [Break]

**Cavan:** OK. That was the end of my orals.

**Shalin:** Right. You say it is you who must have misheard Blumer, not that he was trying to backtrack.

**Cavan:** I heard him say "magnanimously" and he said it was "unanimously."

**Shalin:** Is that what happened?

**Cavan:** I don't think there would be any reason for him to backtrack after all these years.

**Shalin:** Perhaps he had misspoken.

**Cavan:** Ah, maybe. Probably what happened was that I was so anxious that I misheard him. I always felt marginal. I was about the ninth woman to get a Ph.D. from that department. There were no women on the faculty. There were women associated with the faculty, like [Professor Philip] Selznick's wife [Gertrude Selznick] who was in charge of some sort of a research bureau [?]. There were no women teaching. So there were no role models of any sort.

**Shalin:** Selznick's wife was involved with the sociology department?

**Cavan:** She held some sort of a position in research.

**Shalin:** You said you were the ninth woman who had her Ph.D. from the department. If I can stop you here for a little while – Gary Marx writes that early on Goffman was skeptical about women enrolling in the graduate program. We know that Goffman evolved along the way, wrote *Gender Advertisements* and "Arrangements between Sexes," had female grad students. What's your take on the place of women in the graduate program as Erving saw it in his Berkeley years?

**Cavan:** The only person I ever heard say anything like that was Garfinkel. If you weren't right on the ball, he was just brutal with you. He told one woman that she should go get a job as janitor, like she is so inferior as a scholar. . . . But you must understand that in the old days misogyny was normal. If Goffman did things that were demeaning to women, it didn't stand out because everybody did things that were demeaning to women.

**Shalin:** The attitude was generalized. Nothing personal, so to speak.

**Cavan:** Right, right. It just came with the territory. It was only with the advent of the women's movement that women realized that they didn't have to take that kind of treatment.

**Shalin:** Would you say Erving was no different in this respect?

**Cavan:** No, he was no different. I don't think he was an early feminist in any way.

**Shalin:** But he worked with female students, and your case proves that much.

**Cavan:** Oh, yes. And then there were many women who didn't go for a Ph.D. at all. Some of them. . . . There is a book, I am trying to remember the title – *Berkeley Women Sociologists*. It's a collection of essays by the first 10 or 12 women in the Berkeley department of sociology.

**Shalin:** By Arlie Hochschild?

**Cavan:** She is in it, she is not the editor. Arlene [Daniels] is there, and Jackie Wiseman, and I had an article in there. You can probably get a sense from this volume of the kinds of experiences women had in the department at Berkeley.

**Shalin:** And the full title is . . . ?

**Cavan:** Hold on a second. I actually know where it is.

**[Pause]**

It's called *Gender and the Academic Experience. Berkeley Women Sociologists*.

**Shalin:** It came out in . . . doesn't matter, I will find out

**Cavan:** Let's see – in 1994, and the editors are: Orlean – o-r-l-a-n-s, and Wallace – w-a-l-l-a-c-e.

**Shalin:** I see.

**Cavan:** It was published by the University of Nebraska Press.

**Shalin:** So if there was a misogynist streak in Erving, it wouldn't stand out in any way.

**Cavan:** No, nothing that would set him apart from the male faculty, and as I said, all of the faculty were male. . . . From the time I was in grade school, certainly from the time I was in high school, I was regularly subjected to remarks that would demean whatever accomplishments I had by pointing out that this was done by a girl or that was done by a woman. As my friend Joan Emerson used to say, "Nothing unusual was happening." That was just the way it was. Things are very different now. In 1965 at the San Francisco State I was the first woman on the faculty there in the sociology department. Ten years later half the faculty in the sociology department were women

**Shalin:** OK, I see that your memories suggest Goffman's complements could be a little backhanded.

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Going back to the seminar – you mentioned that at Berkeley there was a seminar that was meeting regularly at Harvey's place.

**Cavan:** That was an informal seminar put together by Harvey and the guys.

**Shalin:** Who of the faculty members attended – was Erving part of it?

**Cavan:** I don't think any of the faculty were there. It was just me and the guys. For the most part.

**Shalin:** And when did it start?

**Cavan:** It must have been in 1962, because out of it came the papers published at the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. We were all taking Goffman's seminar, and maybe at the same time we were taking the seminar Goffman gave with David Matza. Everybody was working on various research projects. One of the things we would do at Harvey's was talk about the research that we were doing, mainly about the conversational analysis, which wasn't even called conversational analysis at that point – it didn't have a name. And out of these meetings came the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* vol. 8 (1964) edited by David Sudnow.

**Shalin:** I know some of the journal publications on Mead and interactionism.

**Cavan:** The seminar at Harvey's – I am sure it wasn't every Sunday evening but . . . I got into trouble with my husband because he thought that I was spending too much time at Berkeley. I mean, I was in all these classes, I was at the School of Public Health, and then I wanted to be there on Sunday nights too. It was an exciting environment, and it was always at Harvey's apartment. There would be some wine and beer and potato chips. Harvey

always had hard time sitting straight, so he would lie on that couch, usually with his shoes off and his feet up on the [armrests ?] of the couch. It was a tough intellectual crowd.

**Shalin:** How do you mean it?

**Cavan:** You couldn't slide by. You said something – and at least two people would jump on you right after you said it, putting you on the defensive, asking your source or deconstructing your logic. It was a good experience. Part of the reason that a lot of the guys had trouble with Erving was that they wanted to one up him, to show him up, get the better of him in some discussion or interaction. I felt that was a guy sort of thing.

**Shalin:** They wanted what?

**Cavan:** You know, he would put them in a position . . . he would put them down, and their first response was to turn tables on him and try to put him down.

**Shalin:** They were not afraid to take him on?

**Cavan:** Well, the truth was that they really weren't able to **[Laughing]**. It caused friction. They were always angry at him for some slight, for something that he didn't do. The last time I saw David Sudnow was about a year ago before he died . . . I cannot believe it – how many years Goffman has been dead, like almost 20 years? [Goffman died in 1982] – David was still kvetching about something that Erving had done to him.

**Shalin:** Like what?

**Cavan:** Usually it was that he didn't fulfill his expectations, that he was supposed to have written a letter [of recommendation] or done something for him, and he didn't do it, and this made him really mad. I couldn't believe it! Of course, I only half-listened to those complaints, but I was amazed that David was still complaining after all these years**[Laughing]**.

**Shalin:** Well, if you are applying for a job and Erving promised to write a letter of support, and then he failed to follow through, I can understand why they were . . .

**Cavan:** It could have been something like that, or he wanted him to get in touch with some editor. When I applied for. . . Let me tell you a bit about Goffman's sponsorship. Here I am finished with my dissertation and all the paperwork that they messed up when I first arrived. I am all ready to get my degree, and I have to decide about the job. I had a possibility of a

postdoctoral fellowship at the School of Public Health. So I wasn't too anxious, although I felt it was about time I got out of school. I was also getting a divorce, so it would have been nice to have a real income. I was at Goffman's office and mentioned to him that I'm going to start looking for a job. He looks down at the manila folder on his desk and says, "Different universities often get in touch with me and ask for recommendations." Then he takes this folder and studiously sticks it into a drawer **[Laughing]**.

**Shalin:** What does it mean?

**Cavan:** It means they may have asked me for a recommendation, but I am not giving you any.

**Shalin:** That's what it meant?

**Cavan:** That's what it meant to me. It was clear that people were contacting him from various places like, "Do you have any good students? Are they interested in applying there?" But he was not about [to recommend me].

**Shalin:** How did the issue of recommendation come up? You mentioned that you were beginning to look for a job, right?

**Cavan:** Yes, yes. [Of course I assumed that the folder contained letters of inquiry for recommendations. It might have been empty or contained something unrelated. Yet when I found a job on my own, he was lukewarm in his praise.]

**Shalin:** And then, unprompted, he went into this spiel.

**Cavan:** Yes. He didn't say, "I am not going to recommend you." He just took the envelope and put it into his drawer. It was funny. I mean, it's amazing that I managed to maintain my good humor through all of this **[Laughing]**. It was a kind of mean-spirited thing to do. San Francisco State was the only place I applied to. I asked Goffman and Garfinkel and a couple of other people that I had studied with to write letters of recommendations, and he said that he would. I never thought of those letters of recommendation until many years afterwards when I went through my dossier in the Dean's office where they keep nearly everything, all the records you generate as an employee. I am looking, and here is this letter of recommendation from Goffman. You know there are full size pieces of paper and half size letterheads; it was an official paper but only half size. So my letter of recommendation was on this half-size piece of paper. It had something like four sentences: "She is a good student. She has done very well. I am worried that she might not be able to project her voice to the back of her class. Sincerely, Erving Goffman."

**Shalin:** Some recommendation [**Laughing**].

**Cavan:** Yeas. The fact that I even got the job was amazing. The department never hired a woman before. They got a promise from the Dean that they would have a position to fill. So they had this position with those people, including myself, who had applied, and then they didn't get the authorization to fill. It was probably in September or October when we applied. The department didn't get the authorization until May – the middle of May. By that time their first four choices (all men) had already accepted the jobs elsewhere.

**Shalin:** You were probably lucky the way it unfolded.

**Cavan:** I was certainly lucky. I am sitting right here at the desk where I got the telephone call informing me that I'd gotten the job.

**Shalin:** You must have been excited.

**Cavan:** I was very happy to have that job. I was happy to have that job for the first 25 years; the last 10 years – eh, not so much. But the first 25 years were great.

**Shalin:** If we could go back to the seminar at Harvey's – would you say that it was an exciting place, that people were honored to be part of it? And also, what happened to Harvey's dissertation committee when Goffman stepped down from it? Did you hear anything about that?

**Cavan:** So far as I know, Goffman was not on any of those dissertation committees.

**Shalin:** He wasn't?

**Cavan:** No. I found this out much later.

**Shalin:** There is a published account by Schegloff where he tells about the controversy caused by Harvey Sack's thesis and Goffman's role in it. According to Schegloff, Erving disagreed with something in it and refused to give his approval until other committee members essentially asked him to step down. Schegloff recounts the story in his introduction to Harvey's *Lectures*. You didn't hear anything about it?

**Cavan:** He was on that committee? I am pretty sure he was not on John Irwin's committee.

**Shalin:** That's what I read. [John Irwin wrote in his autobiography that he had intentionally left Erving off his dissertation committee].

**Cavan:** Everyone could select their committee members, and I learned they didn't select him. It always seemed very strange to me because Marv's [Marvin Scott's] work was strictly ethnographic, and so was David's. Harvey's was much more conceptual, and Manny's too, I think. It's hard to remember now, and to separate the seminars at Berkeley from seminars at UCLA. I know I never had to prepare as hard for Goffman's seminar as I had to for the ones at UCLA. In the seminar that Goffman gave with Dave Matza – they gave a bit of a theoretical framework for studying deviant behavior, and then everybody presented the work they were doing. I don't remember it being particularly tense.

**Shalin:** I quote Schegloff in my paper on Goffman's bio and the interaction order. It would be interesting to compare your memories with those of Manny Schegloff. His narrative features the thesis committee, Goffman digging his heels, and Cicourel dispatched to persuade Erving to step down from the committee and allow the defense to proceed.

**Cavan:** That could well be. That's not something I had any knowledge of at the time.

**Shalin:** If you have a chance, check this episode.

**Cavan:** That was in the second paper you sent me?

**Shalin:** It was in my ASA paper titled "Goffman's Biography and the Interaction Order: A Study in Biocritical hermeneutics."

**Cavan:** It certainly is possible. Aaron was there at that time; he was a very sweet guy, and if there was any friction, I am sure Aaron would have gone out of his way to try to mediate.

**Shalin:** So, if I got it right, those attending Harvey's seminar felt that Goffman didn't give them enough positive reinforcement.

**Cavan:** Right, because they already signaled their allegiance to Garfinkel.

**Shalin:** They were distancing themselves from the dramaturgical analysis and moving toward ethnomethodology.

**Cavan:** That's what I think was happening there.

**Shalin:** Could you, then, elaborate a bit – and I revel in your reminiscences, Sherri – on the relationship between Harold and Erving?

**Cavan:** Well, I'm trying to remember how Garfinkel met Goffman. When I first heard Harold talk about Goffman, it seemed as though he already knew him. There used to be a lot of informal seminars and groups getting together to discuss intellectual questions at UCLA. Garfinkel had all kinds of meetings for example on issues of trust. Different people came, presented papers and people discussed the work. Somewhere along the ways their paths must have crossed. When I met Garfinkel he knew Goffman and knew of his work, but he never gave me an impression that he knew Goffman well.

**Shalin:** OK, that means they might have met after Erving came to Berkeley.

**Cavan:** I am sure that is the case. Garfinkel came from Harvard and Goffman came from Chicago, and from very different traditions. Garfinkel truly was a student of Parsons and Goffman obviously was not. They must have met in some informal way, and Goffman might have told him about his book, *Presentation of Self*, because the first time I heard Garfinkel talk about that particular work, Goffman had already published on class and a couple of other articles. I used to have a whole collection of his writings, but I don't remember at this point. He must have had other publications before *The Presentation of Self*, but that was the one Garfinkel was particularly enamored with. One person who used to go down to LA all the time was Egon Bittner. He was still a graduate student, but he was very very close to Garfinkel. I believe he taped Garfinkel's class. As students in Garfinkel's class we would go to Egon and asked what Garfinkel said. Erving might have gone to one of those meetings. I know that Schegloff and Sacks and Sudnow did. Sudnow ended being Garfinkel's editor. He was the one who would take Garfinkel's terribly fractured prose and...

**Shalin:** [Laughing].

**Cavan:** . . . and turn it into a more or less readable sentences. . . . I know that the guys had been going to these meetings, and Goffman might have gone with them. They were more taken with what Garfinkel was doing than what Goffman was doing. I never understood why they were enrolled at Berkeley and not at UCLA.

**Shalin:** Indeed, why?

**Cavan:** It was never answered. I never specifically asked anybody, but it was always clear to me that they were much more interested in Garfinkel. This created a certain tension with Goffman. Ostensibly they were his students but they spent a lot of time with Garfinkel. He [Goffman] should have been the center of their attention.

**Shalin:** It makes sense.

**Cavan:** So that might have been part of the problem with Harvey. Goffman must have been distressed at how Garfinkel and Harvey's work was.

**Shalin:** But intellectually, Goffman and Garfinkel had respect for each other.

**Cavan:** Yes, yes. I wouldn't have become Goffman's student if he didn't already have the respect of Garfinkel. I wouldn't have brought a letter of recommendation from Garfinkel and Goffman wouldn't have accepted it as friendly if he did not respect Garfinkel in return.

**Shalin:** I understand that later on the two had a fallout, sometime in the 70s perhaps.

**Cavan:** Garfinkel and Goffman?

**Shalin:** Yes.

**Cavan:** Those guys always had fallouts. It was de rigueur to be on the outs with somebody. When did Goffman leave Berkeley? It must have been around '74, '75?

**Shalin:** He left Berkeley and went to Penn in 1968.

**Cavan:** OK. Once he left Berkeley the only times I would see Goffman would be at meetings, although I saw him socially between the time that I finished my degree and the time that he left the bay area.

**Shalin:** You mentioned that you saw him socially – how was he at parties, social gatherings? Did you have a chance to get a big picture of the man, of his social skills?

**Cavan:** First of all, the word "big picture" is a misnomer – "small picture" is more like it. [you see, Dmitri, this is an example of a cheap shot; now it embarrasses me that I made it.]

**Shalin:** OK, how would you describe his physical appearance? I hear somewhat contradictory accounts of his height, for instance.

**Cavan:** He may be a little taller than me. I am about 5.5, so he might be about 5.7 – 5.6 or 5.7.

**Shalin:** Mel Kohn told me about the letter from the Las Vegas sheriff inquiring about "one Erving Goffman" who wanted to be trained as a dealer. The sheriff's letter stated Erving's height as 5.2.

**Cavan:** Well, I don't think he was that short.

**Shalin:** You say that he was close to your size.

**Cavan:** Yes, he was probably 5.6. I don't remember him being shorter than me. [Of course, if you are 6.2 Goffman might appear short, but if you are an average sized woman he might not look so short.]

**Shalin:** What kind of dresser was he?

**Cavan:** Kind of academic casual. I don't remember him wearing khaki pants. Maybe he wore something like corduroy pants. I am trying to remember if he wore a tie – I know he wore a jacket, which he would take off. I don't think it was a suit vest, but I remember he had a sweater vest or something like that.

**Shalin:** Was he an elegant dresser?

**Cavan:** No. He could pass in a crowd of academics and you wouldn't really notice him.

**Shalin:** And his overall demeanor?

**Cavan:** He was always Erving – he would always do something that put people slightly on edge, say something usually rude. He could not resist it. Have you talked to John Irwin?

**Shalin:** Yes, I did. He sent me an excerpt from his autobiography where John talks about his interactions with Goffman. It was very helpful. You can find it on the web in the Goffman archives.

**Cavan:** John and Marsha became dear friends with Erving. John and I go way back. We were at UCLA together, then separately ended up at Berkeley and then separately ended up teaching at San Francisco State.

**Shalin:** You say Erving could be rude sometimes – how you interpret this demeanor of his?

**Cavan:** From my perspective that was just Goffman being Goffman. It's like my grandson showing off, it's just Luca being Luca, acting in a funny way just to express "This is me." I also think Goffman liked to take control of the

interaction, like when he told me before the exam, "Is that what you're wearing?" It could be an innocuous statement but it is also the one guaranteed to make the recipient very self-conscious and slightly off balance. He did that a lot, and he did it to maintain control, just to be the top dog.

**Shalin:** Interesting. Would you say he was a bit of a macho man?

**Cavan:** A bit of a what?

**Shalin:** You know, machismo . . .

**Cavan:** I guess you can call it that. It is something men routinely do to each other. Yes, that [the interaction order] was the area where he could assert his control over the guys, where he was putting them down so they had to reassert themselves and he could come back with an interactional double-punch. It wouldn't be in class that would happen but afterwards. That's why I couldn't even listen when David [Sudnow] was saying that after all these years he was still pissed at him. I mean, Erving had been dead for 15 years, 20 years, and David would still go on, "He didn't do this or he didn't do that. He never . . ." You know how it is when somebody says something to you and you respond and then they come back again with the same story. You can respond or let it go. David never let it go.

**Shalin:** Right, right. But driven inside, those emotional cysts threaten to burst at any moment. They stay potent for a long time.

**Cavan:** Apparently [**Laughing**].

**Shalin:** But somehow you didn't feel wounded in those situations, you never carried a grudge.

**Cavan:** Well, no. And this is pretty remarkable because I am not a particularly forgiving person. As I say, I felt so vulnerable anyway. I really couldn't afford to take any of that personally.

**Shalin:** You just rolled with the punches.

**Cavan:** Yes, pretty much so. That's why eventually Erving and I had a pleasant casual relationship. Eventually he gave up doing those things to me.

**Shalin:** When did it happened approximately, when did your relationship changed?

**Cavan:** I am pretty sure after I graduated. The norm in that department was that professors referred to their students by their last names until they passed their prelims: "Mrs. Cavan," "Mr. Sudnow," or whatever [No Ms. in those days]. And after you passed your exams, you were referred to by your first name. It might not be so in other places, but that's the way it was at Berkley at that time. But Goffman could never bring himself to call me by my first name. After I took my prelims, I became a "Kiddo."

**Shalin:** He skipped the "Sherri" stage and went right to "Kiddo."

**Cavan:** Yes. He skipped it altogether. You know, you could say that he treated me like a child, gave me a nickname, demeaned me, but I understood that it was hard for him to refer to me by my first name, and that was fine with me. In fact, I felt special.

**Shalin:** Why was it hard for him to call you "Sherri"? How do you interpret that?

**Cavan:** A-h-h, it might have had to do with the formal relations between sexes. Calling me "Sherri" would have allowed that we had a more intimate kind of relationship. . . . The truth of the matter is that I don't know how he referred to other women. There were other women in the department. Afterwards there were women like Arlen Daniels . . . I think he had a nickname for Arlene also. I somehow remember that he called her something that wasn't her name.

**Shalin:** It seems like women were less likely to take personally such slights while men would stand up to him.

**Cavan:** Yes. Well, it was so different then. As a woman you had a tentative pass that any moment would be taken away from you. You had to be careful to look two steps ahead and see what the possibilities were. What would have happened if I told him, "I don't like to be called by a nickname, it demeans me." And anyhow, I really didn't mind. At first I thought this was just a passing thing, but even after he left Berkeley I was still "Kiddo."

**Shalin:** You say that the relationship with Erving was fairly pleasant afterwards.

**Cavan:** Yes. The Irwins were big foodies. John and Marsha really liked to go out to eat, and Erving liked to go out to eat, and I liked to go out to eat, so the four of us or more would go out to dinner together every so often. And those [outing]s would be really pleasant . . . Now, John Irwin is like 6.2, so there was only so much pushing that Goffman would do against John. Because John was so big, Goffman didn't challenge him all that

often. So they really had quite a pleasant relationship. And he had a pleasant relationship with Marsha. I think he did call her "Marsha," so far as I know, but she never was one of his students. That might have been a different factor. We often went for a Chinese dinner, which always was very frustrating because John would take everything off the plate – you know, those big serving plates. And then he would hand the plate to Marsha, and she would hand it to Erving, and I would get it in the end when . . .

**Shalin:** There was nothing left.

**[Laughter].**

**Cavan:** . . . when there was virtually nothing left. And there were often issues with Erving . . . It's often the case that when people go out to dinner, there would be issues about the check: "I will pay for just what I ate," if they ate different things, or "Why don't we just divide the check" and "How much for the tip." He was always game to make the end of the meal and paying up a big event.

**Shalin:** Who – Erving?

**Cavan:** Yes. He never picked it up himself to my memory.

**Shalin:** OK, so he wasn't particularly generous.

**Cavan:** No. The question was how the bill would be divided. I would say, "Let's just divide it evenly," and he would say, "Oh, no – the Irwins had drinks."

**Shalin:** It wasn't evenly divided.

**Cavan:** Right. Finally, Marsha would come to dinner with a little pocket calculator.

**Shalin:** **[Laughing].** And Erving wasn't exactly joking, right?

**Cavan:** No, he was always on edge. He couldn't just let it go. When you tallied everything up with the calculator, the difference might have been something like \$3.

**Shalin:** He would carry on. Part of it was his need to be in control, and part of it, what – his real concern for money?

**Cavan:** A-h-h-h, no. More like making a joke out of it. Like making the Irwins and me look like we were the ones who were overly concerned with money.

**Shalin:** So that was part of teasing.

**Cavan:** Yes, but it was done so regularly that it became part of the ceremony, the ritual ending of the meal.

**Shalin:** And during the meal – was he in good spirits, would he lead the discussion?

**Cavan:** I remember it pleasant. There was no negativity, there was never any anger. We talked about sociology, we gossiped, small talk, whatever. We didn't talk about politics. He was very conservative.

**Shalin:** What about his politics – how would you describe his political leanings?

**Cavan:** I don't know if he was a Republican, but from my perspective he certainly was very conservative. Part of the reason he left Berkeley was because of the student strike and the free speech movement. He found it terribly upsetting. He felt that students came to the university to study and that all of this rabble-rousing on campus was just disruptive to the academic enterprise.

**Shalin:** Interesting. The one who knew a thing or two about rule breaking wasn't especially sympathetic to students who were doing that.

**Cavan:** No, not at all. I found it amazing. I always thought that if somebody had a critical perspective on society, it would be hard to maintain these more conventional ideological positions. But no, he was very conservative in his political outlook. Of course other people in the Berkeley department were pretty conservative too. It wasn't just Goffman who was upset by the student movement. But he never talked about politics. After years of doing ethnographies of powerless people, I realized that I was on the wrong track, that the really interesting ethnography would be ethnographies of powerful people.

**Shalin:** Who are not easy to observe.

**Cavan:** That's true. Those observations are not easy to get to. In my eyes Goffman was not politically evolved. When I finished my degree I became very close to Alvin Gouldner. That really transformed my whole understanding of the sociological enterprise. Until then I was quite happy being a chronicler of

the poor people at the bottom of the system. Al helped me understand that real power and politics were a vital part of everyday life, and if you missed that, you omitted an important dimension of social life. I learned other things from Gouldner's critiques as well.

**Shalin:** Alvin wrote interesting things about Erving Goffman and his particular accommodation to the status quo.

**Cavan:** Yes, he did.

**Shalin:** In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* there is a chapter on Goffman. Would you say that Goffman was not that sympathetic to John Kennedy, or that he just didn't like to wear his politics on his sleeve?

**Cavan:** Well, I know a lot of people like that, people who just don't want to be bothered with politics. It is not on top of their interests. I think his remark when he found out about the Kennedy assassination – I think it came direct from his psyche. The first thing he thought about was how it affected his pocketbook, how it affected him personally, not looking at the larger society, looking at how it affected the collectivity.

**Shalin:** Did you have a chance to observe Erving's first wife, Angelica?

**Cavan:** I never met her. Knowing that you were going to call, I was trying to think how I had found about her death, and I don't really remember. I remember David Matza called me when Harvey died, but I cannot remember who told me about Goffman's wife. I remember that they told me that she had committed suicide, and that she committed suicide off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. Now, there are three major bridges in this area – nobody commits suicide off that bridge, nobody.

**Shalin:** Why not?

**Cavan:** First, it doesn't have a walkway. You have to drive yourself out and then abandon your car. That is also true for the Bay Bridge. Maybe two or three people have committed suicide off the Bay Bridge whereas really hundreds of people have committed suicide at this point off of the Golden Gate Bridge. What I remember most of all in our discussions as student was how strange it was that she chose San Rafael Bridge to commit suicide. And then, the guys and I went up there and we gave our condolences and sat with him Goffman for a few hours.

**Shalin:** Who sat shiva alongside with you?

**Cavan:** It was me and David [Sudnow] and Manny Schegloff and Harvey Sacks. Maybe Marvin Scott was there also, and maybe Carl Werthman. I think there were the five of us. I wouldn't have done it on my own were it not for one of them who suggested it. It was really awkward. Goffman never made any effort to have personal relationship with his students. He didn't invite us to his house for any kind of informal get together; we would go to his house to discuss our theses or for office hours. He didn't hang out at the student center for coffee or that sort of thing. Certainly not with me.

**Shalin:** Did you just show up at his door? Did you know about the shiva?

**Cavan:** They knew; it wasn't improvised. Of course after his wife committed suicide we were all looking to see whether there was anything new or strange or different about him, but I don't remember seeing anything in him like outward expressions of grief, or that he was distraught, for example, that his clothing was disheveled or he was unshaven. Unless somebody told me that his wife just committed suicide, I wouldn't have ever known it.

**Shalin:** You never met his son.

**Cavan:** I never met him. In all of the time that I went to his house as a student or afterwards, I never met him. I understand that he [Goffman] had a daughter with Gillian, his second wife.

**Shalin:** That's right. I believe she is at Princeton working on a dissertation in sociology.

**Cavan:** Really?

**Shalin:** His son is an oncologist. Not sure if there is any connection, but his expertise is in the area related to his father's death.

**Cavan:** That's interesting. You know that Goffman was elected the president of the American Sociological Association. I remember when he was running in the election, he . . . I called him and I asked him why was he doing this, because he never ever showed any interest in holding an office. Occasionally he would go to a meeting and give a paper, but never did he serve on committees or anything like that. He certainly didn't do much committee work when he was at Berkeley. And here he was, going to run for the president of the American Sociological Association. I asked him why.

**Shalin:** What did he say?

**Cavan:** I can't remember his exact words, but he essentially said that he wanted to validate that he had made it.

**Shalin:** Really!?

**Cavan:** It was something like, "Because I can." Most of the people who ran for office were on committees and chaired this and chaired that and worked their way up the echelon, and then they became president of the association. He had done none of that, so far as I know. But yes, his response was basically that he wanted to validate that he was now the chief sociologist.

**Shalin:** Somehow it must have been important to him.

**Cavan:** And of course it was really tragic that he died right before he [was to be inaugurated].

**Shalin:** He died before he could deliver his presidential address.

**Cavan:** Yes. I think he and Gillian had gone to France that summer, and when he came back, he went to the hospital. At first they thought that he had an ulcer, and then he died very quickly after that.

**Shalin:** I understand that once they opened him up, they realized things were much worse than that. Do you know Gillian?

**Cavan:** I never met her.

**Shalin:** Just to finish with Angelica, was there any sense in your circle as to what happened, why she committed suicide?

**Cavan:** Well of course everybody thought that Goffman has driven her to suicide because he was such a bastard.

**Shalin:** Oh, really?

**Cavan:** I mean that was the gist of what people had to say. It was like, "Anyone who had to live with him would jump off the bridge" . . . . No, I had never met her. The talk was about how ironic and strange it was that she had chosen that particular bridge. That was a jocular way of talking about it, that obviously he was the cause.

**Shalin:** But there was no hard knowledge, just a kind of dark humor, right?

**Cavan:** Yes. There might have been people who knew more than I did. I am sure there were people who knew more than I did. What stuck in my memory was that he seemed so untouched by it. But you know that's only from the outside. Who knows what really was going on on the inside.

**Shalin:** Of course, of course. He must have been tormented by the whole thing. There is a tangent here that bears on the biocritical supposition that our theories are autobiographical. Angelica saw a psychiatrist while Goffman did his work at St. Elizabeth's. In *Asylums*, Goffman puts mental illness in quotation marks. After his wife committed suicide he wrote one of the most moving papers he ever wrote, "The Insanity of Place," where he describes what it is like to live with a disturbed person, drops quotation marks, and acknowledges that mental illness might have the "organic" roots. [There is something about early Goffman that suggests to me his uneasiness about the embodied dimension of human existence: "In truth, the life is just a wedding," he assures us, and the body is just "a peg on which society hangs up its manufacture for a time." He changed his tune later on, as we can see in *Stigma*, but even his mature interaction order theory may be undervaluing the role of somatic framing in society].

Anyhow, I have more than one account that features a red jaguar on the San Rafael Bridge, its motor still running, after Sky had jumped to her death. By the way, do you know Rodney Stark?

**Cavan:** Yes, I do.

**Shalin:** I had an interview with him, which was an eye-opener. His perspective is tinged with strong sentiments.

**Cavan:** He was a survey researcher.

**Shalin:** Right.

**Cavan:** Need I say more? **[Laughing]**. There were little moieties within the department, as I told you, like Goffman and people doing qualitative work, working in symbolic interaction, who formed one little cluster. Then there were people doing historical work with Bendix, and they formed another little cluster. The survey researchers formed another cluster.

**Shalin:** Charlie Glock sent me an excerpt from his autobiography bearing on his relationship with Goffman and Blumer. I understand that Rodney wrote something with Charlie Glock.

**Cavan:** Stark was involved in survey research. Sometimes you would be looked over if somebody wanted you in their stable **[Laughing]**. I had one of those lookovers once when Selznick and his wife Gertrude invited me over for dinner. It was very uncomfortable for me. They were making a decision about who they were going to run for some office in the PSA [Pacific Sociological Association], that kind of thing. In the course of that dinner Selznick was speaking of Goffman and his work and dismissed it with, well, "It

is just Hollywood sociology.” I thought it was really a put-down. He meant that it was all glitter but no depth to it. And that probably reflected what other people in the department who were not part of Goffman’s small group – and that was a very small group of faculty – felt about him. . . . And of course when he was at Berkeley he wasn’t Goffman in a sense that we know. He was just a struggling Goffman.

**Shalin:** And Philip Selznick – did you take any classes with him?

**Cavan:** Yes, I did. I think I did.

**Shalin:** Any impressions about him as a teacher?

**Cavan:** M-m-m-m-m, when I was an undergraduate at UCLA, we had to read Broom and Selznick, *Sociology*. At that time this was the only introductory text. So I cannot really remember that I actually had a class with Selznick. The person I was really impressed with was Leo Lowenthal.

**Shalin:** What was he like?

**Cavan:** Oh, gosh, you would go into one of his lectures and he would have these huge historical and philosophical perspectives. He spoke two or three languages; maybe more. I was just stunned. He was all of the things that I thought a classic academic should be. I was really impressed with him. It wasn’t something I particularly wanted to do, but I really enjoyed his class. And then, oddly my work eventually began to incorporate a bigger, historical perspective.

**Cavan:** Yes, he was. He wrote some things about popular culture. I don’t think I can muster enough of my brain cells to remember exactly what it was. I don’t think I took a class with Bendix. I did take classes with Herbert Blumer.

**Shalin:** What do you think about Herb? How did you find him as a teacher, a scholar, and a person?

**Cavan:** He always came across as a very thoughtful, very thorough scholar. He was a big guy. Apparently he played pro football at one time. He was huge. His voice would cover three or four octaves when he spoke and lectured: “Pe-e-e-ople! They make indi-ca-a-tions to themselves!” **[Laughing]**. We’d be in a small seminar room, and he would walk around the room, behind us, so your neck would always be swiveling to keep an eye on him. But he was great, I really liked him a lot.

I did have one uncomfortable experience with him. At that time we had to

have a reading knowledge of two foreign languages, and while there is some number of things that I could excel in, foreign languages was not one of them. It was a terrible struggle when I was at UCLA where we had to have a reading knowledge of one foreign language; I chose Spanish, and I finally passed it. When I came to Berkeley, they refused to give me credit for having passed Spanish. I had to take it again, and then take a second language as well. At UCLA there was a graduate foreign language examiner who examined all the students for their reading proficiency. At Berkeley different faculty members, whatever their expertise, did so. Blumer read my Spanish exam.

**Shalin:** Did he know Spanish?

**Cavan:** I guess so. Better than I did **[Laughing]**. He failed me twice, actually. The first time the exam featured a grammatical form of the historical past that was written in the present. The instructions were to translate this passage into proper English, so I translated it all into the past tense. I got back my paper, and he circled every single past tense ending in red. As a new student in the department, I didn't feel I could credibly argue with him, and my knowledge of Spanish wasn't that great to begin with. I agreed to take it a second time. And of course you get another passage to translate. I came back to take it the second time, and he failed me the second time! Well, I mistranslated a number 14 as 40 or 40 as 14. And then there were two other small errors. He said, "If you don't know the numbers, you don't know your language." So I took it the third time, and I finally passed. Then I had to take another language. I took two semesters of French and Goffman was my examiner for French. We were not supposed to take two Romance languages and somehow I squeezed through the rules. I went on to pick my exam, expecting the worst because I did so miserably on the Spanish. It was such a struggle for me. I go to his office and he says: "Mrs. Cavan" – [he always mispronounced my name, he used to say "Cay-vin" instead of Ka-von] "Mrs. Cavan, you've passed." I was phenomenally relieved. And then he says, "But just barely."

**Shalin:** That was Erving.

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** How was his French, by the way?

**Cavan:** I am sure it was better than mine **[Laughing]**.

**Shalin:** "Just barely" – that was so Erving.

**Cavan:** Exactly! That was so Erving. He could have just skipped that part.

**Shalin:** Blumer, on the other hand, was not a teasing type.

**Cavan:** No.

**Shalin:** How was he with students in general?

**Cavan:** He was very good natured. And of course he was a student of George Herbert Mead, which made him special in our eyes. Everybody, including myself, had the utmost respect for him. He was the chair for my preliminary exams and eventually told me that the decision of the committee was "unanimous." As I said, I went for years thinking it was "magnanimous" **[Laughing]**. . . . I remember that his classes were very rich. He brought up all his knowledge of Mead, he provided an elegant symbolic interaction framework, it was fascinating. No specific memories, though, at this time. Just the general exhilaration.

**Shalin:** You mentioned Aaron Cicourel as a kind-hearted person. Did you have much interaction with him?

**Cavan:** I don't think he was on the faculty at Berkeley. If he was, it was just barely. I always think of him with the graduate students. He was just in the process of writing *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, which was a brilliant, phenomenal, groundbreaking book showing how evidence was assessed. He may have occasionally come to Harvey's [seminar]. I just don't remember. . . . And then he went to Santa Barbara. Most of my memories about Aaron are from Santa Barbara. . . . He had a lot of friends there, people that I knew from UCLA who were teaching at Santa Barbara. I regularly went down to Santa Barbara and interacted with Aaron in that context.

**Shalin:** And Harvey Sacks – what stands out in your memories about Harvey?

**Cavan:** My personal interactions with Harvey were always very pleasant. Actually Harvey was quite sweet, because sometimes after our formal seminars he would come up to me and say, "You should have said it in a different way, this could have been your comeback," and he would always do it in a supportive way. I never felt that he was putting me down. He was showing me that I'd missed the opportunity to counter some remarks.

**Shalin:** That shows he empathized with you.

**Cavan:** I never felt he was doing a number on me like some of the guys who would put me in a situation that was intellectually awkward and then show me up. The guys – they were really rough with each other.

**Shalin:** Were they paying you a complement by treating you in the same way?

**Cavan:** For the most part they did not treat me that way. I don't think I would have survived. I would have collapsed, I really would have. It's the same thing when Goffman would start picking on me, making me lose my balance. I would start tearing up, and then he would stop picking on me. [Thinking about it now I was shy and it was difficult for me to assert myself. My tears were probably some kind of defense mechanism. I never felt as if I was as tough or as bright as you needed to be to survive in that intellectual setting. I always thought that at some level I was just faking it, that indeed the committee had magnanimously passed me, probably out of pity.]

**Shalin:** You wrote to me how you'd tell him, "If you pick on me, I'd start crying."

**Cavan:** Not exactly. He learned it firsthand. I remember sitting in his class with tears rolling down my cheeks. Well, I wouldn't go like boo-hoo-hoo, but I would well up and those tears would just start rolling. I am a very emotional person. I could cry if I read an ad for lost dog. So it doesn't take a whole lot of . . . although usually I don't cry for myself. I cry for other things. I think I crumbled and it brought me to tears when I would see my whole career collapsing [**Laughing**].

**Shalin:** The stakes were too high.

**Cavan:** Yes, yes. You know, sometimes Goffman might not have realized when he drew blood. It's as though he was only planning to maim but then he draws blood and so he stops. With me he drew blood really early.

But the guys were always arguing back and forth, pushing and shoving each other. Over the years they had terrible fallouts, particularly after Harvey died. Manny [Schegloff] and David [Sudnow] were really close friends at one time, and in the end David was threatening to kill him.

[Harvey died about ten years after I left Berkeley. David Matza called me to tell me the sad news soon after it happened. He said Harvey was in Southern California (I surmised around Laguna Beach where he was living while he was teaching at Irvine.) Harvey was the only person in his car. It was a head on collision. Matza may have said the collision was with a truck, or maybe he thought that was what happened. A few years later David Sudnow told me that Harvey was not killed immediately, but was taken to the hospital and put on life support. Sudnow, Schegloff and Garfinkel were at the

hospital. These were excruciating days, three or four days, maybe five. Harvey was brain dead and the decision had to be made to take him off life support. It must have been particularly difficult for Sudnow whose ethnographic doctoral dissertation focused on the social organization of death and dying, on how these kinds of decisions were socially constructed in the hospital. Now, instead of being the observer he was a participant. There is a vagueness to my memory here; the conversations were very emotional; I remember the emotion more than the facts. David spoke as though the decision was one that had to be made by himself, by Manny and by Harold. But certainly there must have been relatives there who were there and they had this responsibility. David (Sudnow) also told me that they had found Harvey's personal papers on his desk, in a neat pile, with his insurance policy on the top. David didn't say what would have come next in the conversation. Neither did I. I don't think Sudnow and I ever talked about Harvey's death again. But it remained as a marker in our conversations after Harvey died.]

**Shalin:** What happened?

**Cavan:** There was a big row over Harvey's papers. Manny was made the executor of Harvey's literary estate. Harvey may have published one or two things, but his major writings were his lecture notes. I was tangential to what was happening; I only learned about it shortly before David died. Maybe it was Manny who didn't want people to have free access to Harvey's papers and David thought that they should be open to everyone. It was terrible. In the end it was very sad, because David managed to alienate everybody. . . .

**Shalin:** What's your take on Manny Schegloff?

**Cavan:** I think Manny is very ambitious. A lot of things that he did were to satisfy his ambition. He really wanted to get ahead; he really wanted to become the chair of the department at UCLA and the best known conversational analyst. It might have been that Harvey would have eventually moved in the same direction, but at the time he died, I certainly wouldn't have used the term "ambitious" to describe Harvey. . . . [He was] creative. He had ideas, wanted to carry them out, develop them, he wanted to spark interesting ideas in others.

After we all left the department at Berkeley, Manny went to UCLA and David and Harvey went to UC Irvine. I think that's where they were when Harvey died. And then David lost his job, didn't get tenure, got fired or something from Irvine. He went back East, then went here and went there and then someplace else.

**Shalin:** But Manny's career advanced.

**Cavan:** Yes, it was like a straight line, as best I could tell.

**Shalin:** Have you met Tom Scheff?

**Cavan:** Yes, he was down at Santa Barbara. . . . Tom was really bright, but often kind of distracted. I think his wife was very sick, so I am not sure if his distractedness when I knew him had anything to do with his wife's situation. But he always seemed like . . . when I knew him at Santa Barbara, he would give a paper and be very focused but then seem kind of vague.

**Shalin:** Vague?

**Cavan:** He was a tall guy with the loose limbs who would walk with a kind of shambling motion. But there was always something about him – "vague" is the only word that comes to mind. Like someone who walked around with his head in the clouds.

**Shalin:** You mean distant?

**Cavan:** Yes, maybe distant. I didn't know him that well. He was in Santa Barbara, part of the crowd of people that I knew and hung around. I knew him more from his work, from his sociology. So I expected this keen, insightful, pointed person, but he was more general and vague. The only memory that I have from this period was that he had a cat[**Laughing**], and the cat had fleas, so he took these cat flea collars and put them around his ankles, and then he had this terrible allergic reaction. Isn't it ridiculous that this is what I remember, that he got some terrible allergic reaction?

**Shalin:** A tidbit, all right.

**Shalin:** Did you know Gary Marx?

**Cavan:** Oh, yes, I knew Gary. I liked Gary a lot, and I liked his work. I thought it was re-e-e-lly good and really interesting! He was politically meaningful in a way that the work of a lot of other people was not. It's ironic – Gary was an undergraduate at UCLA when I was a graduate student. I was working on my masters, and I think I had him in my class I TA'd for. Then I would run into him at Berkeley and frequently run into him at meetings. I thought his work was first class.

**Shalin:** Did you meet Dean MacCannell?

**Cavan:** MacCannell – I think only once. Didn't he do a book on tourism?

**Shalin:** Yes, yes, he does work on tourism, social geography.

**Cavan:** I know I must have met him once or twice. I went to a lot of professional meetings. You meet people at meetings, have a drink with them, know them at least by name or by subject matter, but you don't really have a connection with them in any way.

**Shalin:** Looking back at the last few years of Erving's life – you say you would run into him mostly at meetings.

**Cavan:** Yes, after he left Berkeley.

**Shalin:** Anything stands out in your memory regarding Erving's last few years? Did you notice any changes in him – had he grown mellow, became less edgy?

**Cavan:** I think so. Here is a funny story. At one of the meetings we were sitting at the bar – not at the bar – at some tables, close to the bathrooms. I guess this was in the early years of the women's movement, because we were talking about the prospects of genuine equality between men and women. And Erving said, "No, there never will be a genuine equality as long as bathrooms are marked 'Men' and 'Women'." I said, "Well, maybe we should liberate the bathrooms." Goffman: "Who would do something like that?" Of course I said, "I would." So I went into the men's room, used the men's room, and nothing happened of course. Oh, God, Erving was just so chagrined! "You did what!?"

**[Laughter and commotion].**

That was the kind of middle class morality, the kind of bourgeois worldview. I mean, I just visited the bathroom, for God's sake!

**Shalin:** This is something I would like you to elaborate on. Remember you said that Goffman admired your willingness to take chances, to break the rules. On the other hand, he felt that you might have gotten too far. There is something about rule breaking and unconventional behavior that is inordinately important for Goffman.

**Cavan:** Yes. Take the free speech movement – that was clearly the case of big time rule breaking, and he was clearly upset with that. He had no awareness, interest in how social change happens.

**Shalin:** How do you know that? Do you surmise, did he say something indicting that he was not happy about the commotion?

**Cavan:** Oh, yes. He often talked about how disruptive it was, how difficult it was to maintain serious academic discourse with all this nonsense going on: "These are just kids, they ought to settle down." . . . I don't think Goffman really thought about social change. Sometimes he would look at historical work only to find historical examples that apply today.

**Shalin:** Erving read so widely, but his perspective was synchronic rather than diachronic. That's to say, he did not pay much attention to historical transformations, focusing instead on the systemic, structural-grammatical properties of micro-interactions.

**Cavan:** You are correct – he doesn't focus on the historical [dimension]. Therefore he really cannot grasp the nature of social change. It is only through an historical perspective that you can see that things used to be this way and now they are different . . . like in the old days they used to put out ashtrays on the tables at meetings and now they put out bottles of water to mark your place. As I say, he was very upset by the commotion; he did not connect that commotion to a changing society. He was not alone – there were a lot of faculty members who were upset by what was happening on campus with students. And I can see why. When I was at San Francisco State, we had a big strike that lasted seven or eight months and closed down the entire campus for two or three months. Teachers went out on strike along the side of the students. Faculty was told by the university lawyers that the one thing that we had to do to keep our job was to turn in our grades. That was the way our job was defined. So we better stop this nonsense like not turning in grades and not meeting classes.

**Shalin:** And get back to the adult world.

**Cavan:** It was amusing because . . . academics really didn't understand what the strike was all about. A strike is when you withhold your labor. They thought of us as professionals who had a higher calling. They would meet their students off campus, grade papers on the sly. I remember some people would assign grades and then turn them over to one of our lawyers who would put them into a safe, so we would have met the terms of our employment. I was very excited by the whole thing and right in the middle of it. Marv Scott, who was at State at the time, was very upset by the process, maybe feeling that the university was the sacred ground and it was OK to have change someplace else. You shouldn't march around and shout, "I am on strike, shut it down."

**Shalin:** Obviously, you knew Marvin Scott.

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Any memories of him as a scholar, as a colleague?

**Cavan:** Well, I liked Marv too. After his dissertation he published a lot with Stan Lyman, and their work was really interesting. They did an essay called "The Sociology of the Absurd" which was brilliant and is quoted everywhere. Then they wrote what I thought was a terrible book, *The Revolt of the Students*, and the reason I thought it was terrible was because I thought it was politically incorrect; it demeaned the historic role of the student revolt. In the end Marv and I had a falling out, because he felt that I had become too political and therefore no longer an objective sociologist, as though there were such a thing as an objective sociologist. After the strike Marv left San Francisco State and went back to New York, to Hunter College.

**Shalin:** Is he still there?

**Cavan:** He might have retired, but the last time I knew he was there. I know he is the same age as I, although there are people who teach forever.

**Shalin:** Did you have a chance to interact with Stan Lyman?

**Cavan:** Yes. I knew Stan, a funny guy. He was actually a bit of a dandy. Then there was another really bright guy full of all kinds of imaginative ideas who died quite young by the name Don Ball. Lyman died, I don't know . . .

**Shalin:** He died about two years ago.

**Cavan:** For some reasons I thought it was quite a while ago.

**Shalin:** I may be mistaken. I don't think it was more than three years ago. You mentioned John Irwin, also.

**Cavan:** Right. Of course John's whole career is very interesting. He came to the university out of prison. You don't know many success stories of people coming out of prison and becoming a successful Ph.D.'s. At UCLA Don Cressy, the world renowned criminologist, took him under his wing . . . not because he was an ex-con but because he was bright and lively and personable. Anyway Cressy was his mentor. I cannot remember – I think I came to Berkeley before John did, and then John arrived. He must have been in one of those seminars because he wrote a research paper on surfing that eventually became his dissertation.

**Shalin:** Right, he describes this in his memoir posted in the Goffman archives.

**Cavan:** I am sure that was what caught Erving's attention. If he liked your topic, you had it partially made. John was not studying an established institution. Bars and surfing were more amorphous, and I think this appealed to Erving. . . . I am trying to remember – John must have finished a couple of years after I did, because I was already hired at San Francisco State. Marv [Scott] was also at State. And then of course Jackie Wiseman was at SF State. And there was another guy who might have been in one of those seminars with Goffman – Taylor Buckner, who wrote about UFOs.

**Shalin:** I haven't heard the name.

**Cavan:** At some point almost half of the sociology department at San Francisco State were qualitative sociologists who had studied with Goffman. And that was until the student strike. John and I were on strike. Marv was not. Jackie was not. So there was a lot of animosity between us – who was on strike and who wasn't on strike. Very soon after the ending of the strike Marv went to Hunter and Jackie went to UC San Diego, John took a leave of absence and went to teach at Sonoma State, and I took a leave and went to live for a year with rural hippies.

**Shalin:** You mentioned David Sudnow – what happened to him?

**Cavan:** He was bright – they all were really bright. There was a lot of competition – who was the brightest. But Harvey died young and David just couldn't get it together. I don't know – four wives, four children, endless job changes, he could no longer get even a part time job in academia. He was very . . . arrogant, I guess is the word. He tended to be dismissive. For whatever reasons, he didn't meet his own expectations. He became bitter.

**Shalin:** I'm so grateful for your humoring my curiosity. You must be very tired, Sherri. So, very briefly, a couple of quick questions, if I may. There wasn't much correspondence with Erving, I understand. The last time, or the last couple of times, you interacted with Erving was at the meetings?

**Cavan:** There was at least one time when I talked to him on the phone – that was about his decision to run for the president of the American Sociological Association. I must have called him. We might have talked about other things as well, but seriously – he gave me the impression that he wasn't interested in committee work and doing the kind of thing you need to do . . .

**Shalin:** He wasn't interested in bureaucratic work.

**Cavan:** No, he wasn't.

**Shalin:** You wouldn't happen to have any of his letters, comments on your work?

**Cavan:** No. When he became "Erving Goffman" people would want to take pictures with him at the meetings, but he wouldn't let them take a photograph.

**Shalin:** When did he grow so big that everybody wanted to get a piece of him? Would you say it happened in the 70s?

**Cavan:** Well, it must have been sometime before he left Berkeley. By the time he left Berkeley, he was already a name. That's how he got the job at the University of Pennsylvania.

**Shalin:** One more thing, if I may. There is something puzzling about Erving, and I wonder if you have some wisdom to share on that. Goffman taught us about the backstage region, he spent his life peering behind the curtain, so to speak, yet he vigorously protected his own backstage. We don't find much self-reflection in his work. I understand, also, that he chose to seal his archives, insisting that he should be judged on the basis of his publications. Why such a reticence do you think?

**Cavan:** You present the front and protect the backstage, you don't let anybody go there because it is messy back there. [He didn't like others to see the messy parts, the strings and shims and bubble gum that is holding the whole enterprise together. But then who does?]. It's like nobody wants others to see their field notes. Field notes are as good as they are, but they are never as good as they look in the final draft.

**Shalin:** And I don't think anybody ever saw a page of Erving's field notes.

**Cavan:** You know, one of the things I used to have, but it might have disappeared in one of my purges, is a copy of his dissertation.

**Shalin:** U-h-h-h, I'd love to see that one!

**Cavan:** I know you would. It's really too bad, I looked for it and I couldn't . . . I think you can probably get a copy from the university of Chicago library.

**Shalin:** Probably.

**Cavan:** It was on a microfiche, and they made a xerox copy for me. That was the last time, or perhaps the only time, that he wrote something that looked like a classic ethnography.

**Shalin:** Even then, he didn't have an easy time defending it. According to Anselm Strauss, he was literally sweating it out. If you recall Erving's observation about the person under the mask, anxiously struggling to survive – that was Erving during his thesis defense. So I figure that it was hard for someone like Erving with his insight into impression management to carve out a persona for himself. Once he published *Presentation of Self*, Erving's personal being in the world would become a challenge. Exposing other people's pretenses and flouting everyday conventions is one strategy that would be available to him.

**Cavan:** I see what you are saying. I see the dilemma, but I think that he didn't want others to see his backstage because that's where you maintained your front stage, where you pull the strings, where your messy field notes are, or whatever. You mentioned that Erving went to Las Vegas to be a – not a croupier – what's the word?

**Shalin:** A dealer.

**Cavan:** A dealer, right. The amazing thing is that he never wrote this up as an ethnography.

**Shalin:** Or it was never published. I've heard the talk that there might be a manuscript someplace on that subject.

**Cavan:** He published things like "Where the Action Is," but he never published it as an actual ethnography. I don't know how long he was in Las Vegas. I don't think it was that long.

**Shalin:** I have hard time discerning the particulars of that story. You are right that we all try to protect our backstage where we manufacture front appearances, but look at yourself, look at me – we are willing to be self-reflexive and let people in on what is going on behind the curtain.

**Cavan:** It depends on how hard you have to work to maintain the front stage. If it takes a lot of efforts, you are much less likely to let others see what's going on there. If you are more casual about it – "This is how I look and these are what my props look like" – then, you know . . .

**Shalin:** Like: "this is my underwear, never mind."

**Cavan:** Yes, yes.

**Shalin:** In your view, then, Erving worked hard to maintain his front.

**Cavan:** Oh, yes. I think so. I mean, there was nothing particularly casual about him. I can only speak about my own experience, but I certainly didn't get the sense that . . . Sometimes professors would get to know their students and try to have a close warm relationship, but that was not Erving. The truth of the matter is that he would have been happy not to have any students at all. That's why he was so happy when he went to Penn.

**Shalin:** Nietzsche used to say that every great philosophy is a kind of involuntary memoir, and I think Goffman's life is a great example. Erving's work appears to be autobiographical in a nontrivial kind of way. "Symbols of Class Status," his first major publication, might have been inspired in part by his encounter with Angelica, a high society lady, who would become his first wife. *Asylums* and "The Insanity of Place" point in the same direction, reflecting first hand encounter with mental illness.

**Cavan:** That could well be. All our work reflects our person, from the topics we are choosing to the way we go about solving our problems, personal experiences are implicated.

**Shalin:** But a lot of people go with the conventional discourse and ignore their emotions which may point in a new direction. Truly gifted people, on the other hand, are not afraid to let their emotions point the way, to lead them toward new paradigmizations.

**Cavan:** You don't get much of a sense that there is a physical body in Goffman's writings.

**Shalin:** That's what you sense in *Presentations of Self*, but *Stigma* is a different story. Anatomy is here nearly destiny. From the body that is merely a "peg" you move to the body behind the mask that is a throbbing, emotional being.

**Cavan:** Well, in the months after his wife died, there was certainly no visible expression of emotions. If I didn't know what had happened, I wouldn't have guessed. It's like someone playing their hand close to their chest.

**Shalin:** You find in Erving's writings occasional references to sex that are rarely developed at any length, and you wonder [about his *vita voluptuosa*, as ancient biographers called it], about anything that gave him pleasure in life. Even if you don't know anything in particular, what was your hunch about that side of Goffman's life?

**Cavan:** It's an interesting question. To my knowledge, he never was flirtatious in an era when the faculty would endlessly come on to the few women who were in the department. You know it's an interesting question,

and the first thing that I thought when you raised it was that his relationships with women were more familial, kind of like brother-sister, mother-son rather than what might be seen as charged with sexuality.

**Shalin:** Right.

**Cavan:** I know that after his wife died and before he left Berkeley, he was not seeing or dating anyone, because John Irwin was always talking about fixing Erving up with someone. I was surprised when I found out that he had remarried.

**Shalin:** It's a sensitive subject, and even raising it might seem like prurience. I mean, this is a private matter and none of our business, but in the classic era the biographer was expected to consider the person's *vita activa*, *vita contemplativa*, and *vita voluptuosa*, with the last dimension having to do with the body, desire, fantasy and so on. In this respect Erving is a puzzle to me. I don't have a sense of the kind of things that he craved in life. [Did he smoke, what kind of music he liked, what were his hobbies?]

**Cavan:** There were certainly plenty of faculty members who would use their power to garner various kinds of sexual pleasures, but . . . Shoot, in all of the years that I have known him I had never felt any kind of sexual tensions. Although he was a difficult person, he was easy to relate to in that way. Even with my research on gay bars and homosexuality, he was no more interested in the sex than he was, you know, in the delivery drivers who were delivering beer to the bar. All of that was of interest to him but I never got the sense that . . .

Did I mention to you that he introduced me to a psychiatrist, Martin Hoffman? I don't remember the circumstances under which Goffman had met Martin. My feeling is that Martin had introduced himself to Erving at some point and Erving took an interest in him. Martin was homosexual and he was interested in doing field work in a homosexual community. Erving told him to get in touch with me because he knew I took a class in the anthropology department and thought I could be of help to him. I met Martin a few times, a couple of times at Erving's house. At one point Martin bought a new car. It was BMW or Jaguar, some big expensive car. He had a leather interior died because he wanted it darker. At Erving's house we spent the whole evening listening to Martin who was furious because they charged him a lot of money to do the job but they didn't do it properly. So Erving had a series of stories to offer on how tradesmen had screwed him up in one way or another. That was the evening when we decided that we would drive in Martin's car to Las Vegas. "OK, who is going to drive?" Erving wanted to drive. "No," Martin would say, "it is my car" **[Laughing]**. They got into a terrible argument, and

I realized that the last thing I want to do is to drive with them. So I ended up with Martin driving me home.

I'll tell you one other story, one time that I actually asked Goffman for something. That was when I no longer was a student. There was some sort of a social get-together. I was driving home and I got hit by a Berkeley cop who was jumping a light and he pretty much totaled my car. I cracked a rib and chipped a tooth but other than that I was okay. When the cop finished writing up what they usually do when you have an accident, I was stuck with this car that I couldn't do anything with. So I called up Erving and told him that I had this accident and could he come and pick me up because my car wasn't working. He assured me that he would come and pick me up. I waited and I waited and I waited – he didn't show up. I called again, and there was no answer. I called the third time, and there was no answer. Finally, I ended up calling somebody else. Next time I saw him I was a little pissed off . . .

**Shalin:** And he volunteered?

**Cavan:** He said, "I came down but you must have given me the wrong address, because I couldn't find you." I knew he was lying. I am pretty sure about it. [Remember] – "Don't get into trouble, and if you get into trouble, don't call me." . . . I might have given him the wrong address, he might have gone to a wrong address and actually looked for me, but I just got the feeling that he didn't do anything about it.

**Shalin:** Is Martin Hoffman still around?

**Cavan:** No, Martin committed suicide, oh, five or six years ago. Maybe longer.

**Shalin:** I see. The very last thing, Sherri, and I just cannot thank you enough. Looking back at your encounter with Goffman's scholarship would you say that your perception of his work has changed over time?

**Cavan:** You know his work changed a lot. For me *Presentation of Self* was very substantive, and at the end you get something like *Frame Analysis* – I could never finish *Frame Analysis*, I just gave up on it. It was unreadable to me, it was just words. That might be a natural progression, as he became more abstract and more abstract. In a funny way he became more Parsonian. What used to drive me crazy about Parsons' work – it was just all categories. You move this way and you move that way, but there was no "there" there for me. It was not grounded. It didn't start and end with observable events. Although Parsons sometime wrote about the profession or on medicine or something like that, and then you could see how his

understanding of the professions might have been informed by his theoretical model. *Behavior in Public Places* might have been the last book that I really read. I read most of his essays, but I never read *Frame Analysis*, and I never told him that I didn't read it.

**Shalin:** Yet, his earlier stuff remained fresh for you?

**Cavan:** Well, yes and no. I became more political in my thinking, so it became less relevant. [And yet when I went to study Richard Nixon I actually relied heavily on Goffman, for example, titling one chapter "Impression Management in the Oval Office.]"

**Shalin:** I see. You saw that the political dimension was missing.

**Cavan:** It was always useful as a language, it was always useful as a metaphor, but in terms of grappling with the reality of everyday life, it was not political, and I was becoming more political because of the very experiences I was having in terms of my own historical progression.

**Shalin:** The more I listen to people, the more I realize that there might be a reason why Goffman impressed them so much at an earlier point in their careers and why their attitude toward him might have changed with the passage of time as they have evolved.

**Cavan:** When I was teaching Goffman – students loved it! It was rich and fresh, and they ate it up. It gave them a sense of connectedness to the everyday world where a lot of sociology didn't. That was certainly true for me. In the last years – I didn't use Goffman that much.

**Shalin:** Maybe there is something in your career at its early stage that makes Erving's theories resonate. You try to fit into the social world, you don't have much power, and you need to present yourself in front of powerful people. As you grow more comfortable in your skin and gain security, your perspective changes.

**Cavan:** Yes, it's like a lot of things that are good at some point then you grow indifferent after a while. As I progressed, his writing became so ethereal for me that I couldn't read it.

**Shalin:** Sherri, that's more than enough.

**Cavan:** Good, I am getting tired.

**Shalin:** I am grateful to you. If you come across anything that has a trace of Goffman's existence – a letter, recommendation – let me know. I would love to see any embodied trace of his existence.

**Cavan:** OK, I will. As I say, I periodically go through the paper purges, and the only way I can get rid of papers is if I don't look at them very closely.

**Shalin:** I sure know the feeling. I just want to see his hand-writing.

**Cavan:** [It was] small and very cramped. Did you see his signature? Of course I was seeing it a lot because he was always signing [my papers]. Small little letters, big "E's" and big "G's." I certainly remember the tiny grades he would put on my paper.

**Shalin:** OK. I will transcribe our conversation and send you the draft, so you can work with it. You are in San Francisco?

**Cavan:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Maybe I can take you out to dinner and we can celebrate.

**Cavan:** That would be lovely.

**Shalin:** I would love to take you out. Thank you so much.

**Cavan:** OK.

**Shalin:** By by.

**Cavan:** By by,

**[End of the recording]**