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Erving Goffman as a Pioneer in Self-Ethnography? The "Insanity of Place" Revisited*

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The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is the task and its promise. To recognize this task
and its promise is the mark of the classic social analyst.

C. Wright
Mills 1959:6

I have shown that into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the
person knowing what is being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but
a vital component of his knowledge.

Michael
Polanyi 1952:viii

Much of any man's effort to know the social world around him is prompted by an effort, more
or less disguised or deliberate, to know things that are personally important to him; which is
to say, he aims at knowing himself and the experiences he has had in his social world
(his relationship in it), and at *changing* this relationship in some manner.

Alvin
Gouldner 1970:41

Introduction

The question mark in this paper's heading highlights its polemical nature. Everything we know about Goffman indicates that he was averse to self-revelation – he forbade his lectures to be tape-recorded, did not allow his

picture to be taken, gave only one known interview for the record, and sealed his archives before he died with the explanation that he wished to be judged on the basis of his publications (Jaworski 2000; Lofland 1983; MacCannell 2009; Winkin 1999). More than that, Goffman specifically disavowed research where scholars turn their attention to themselves.

Among the biographical materials collected for the Erving Goffman Archives is an interview with Gay Alan Fine (2009) who recalls how he proposed to do self-ethnography for a class he took with Goffman at the University of Pennsylvania. Gary was getting married at the time, with a society wedding planned for some 800 guests, so he proposed a participant observation study of this momentous occasion. The suggested piece of ethnography would have been in keeping with Erving's famous dictum, "The world, in truth, is a wedding" (Goffman 1959:36). This was not to happen, however. When Goffman heard his pupil's proposal, he said, "Only a schmuck studies his own life." As Gary Fine noted in the same interview, he shunned self-ethnography ever since, taking issue with commentators who claimed his work was autobiographical.

Notwithstanding such testimonies, I will argue that much of Goffman's writing is crypto-biographical, that his sociological imagination drew on his personal experience, and that key turns in his intellectual career reflected his life's trajectory and its historical context. I propose to focus in particular on "The Insanity of Place" (further abbreviated as IP), a study that Goffman published in 1969 in the journal *Psychiatry* and then reprinted in his book *Relations in Public* (Goffman 1971). Several commentators surmised that this paper occupies a special place in Goffman's writing, that "it is, arguably, autobiographical" (Fine and Manning 2000:459).   Although the author does not make direct references to himself, he appears to be drawing on his own painful experience. Goffman's wife, Angelica Schuyler Choate-Goffman, committed suicide in 1964 after a long bout with mental illness.

There are indications that Goffman attached a special significance to this opus. When Denzin and Keller (1981) took Goffman to task for deviating from symbolic interactionist tenets and evincing a structuralist bias, Goffman (1981) published an extensive reply where he singled out "The Inanity of Place" as a study belying pigeonholing and consistent with the Cooley-Mead tradition.

How personal the IP narrative is one can glean from testimonies assembled in the Erving Goffman Archives (further abbreviated as EGA), a web-based project that collects documents, critical scholarship, memoirs, and interviews with people who knew Goffman. The vivid details in which IP describes the hazards of living with a mentally impaired family member dovetail with the accounts Erving's contemporaries left about his own household. It is hard to

avoid the impression that we are dealing with the "message in a bottle" meant to communicate how the author coped with a personal tragedy at a crucial junction in his life.

For all that, "The Insanity of Place" is clearly a scholarly work, a programmatic update on Goffman's better known study *Asylums* (Goffman 1961), where he urged that "the 'mentally ill' . . . suffer not from mental illness, but from contingencies" and treated symptomatic behavior of patients in psychiatric wards as a product of willful "situational improprieties" (Goffman 1961:135).   Less than ten years after *Asylums*, the author's perspective evolved to accommodate the experience of a normal person trapped in a relationship with someone afflicted with manic-depressive disorder.

The writing in IP is vintage Goffman, combining minute observations with systematic generalizations and sparkling conceptual asides. It is also a theoretically problematic and ethically ambiguous statement. This thinly disguised piece of self-ethnography shows the promise and pitfalls of the genre, and as such, it serves as a starting point for the present investigation.

I begin with the theoretical framework articulated in *Asylums* and the transformation it underwent in "The Insanity of Place." Next, I cross-reference Goffman's narrative with the accounts left by his contemporaries with an eye to showing the interplay between the author's biography and his evolving research agenda. After that, I stake a more general claim that Goffman's theoretical commitments fed off his experience as a son of Jewish immigrants struggling to raise himself from the obscurity of Canadian Manitoba to international stardom and that his continuously evolving theoretical agenda mirrored his personal transformation and self-discovery. In conclusion, I touch upon the uses of the Goffman Archives and the contribution the large database assembled therein can make to biocritical hermeneutics (Shalin 2007; 2010a), a research program that finds its object on the intersection of "biography and history" (Mills 1959) and illuminates the vital role that "personal knowledge" (Polanyi 1952) and "personal theory" (Gouldner 1970) plays in sociological imagination.

From *Asylums* to the "Insanity of Place"

Asylums, a pioneering ethnography conducted in the 1950s, is a powerful indictment of total institutions and the abuses inmates suffer from conniving relatives and self-serving professionals. The parallels Goffman drew between concentration camps, mental hospitals, boarding schools, monasteries, and similar institutions rang true to the generation that witnessed the rise of totatlitarian states, the horrors of World War II, and the onset of the Civil

rights movement. Described in gruesome details, the deprivations that the involuntarily institutionalized suffer in total institutions make *Asylums* a compelling reading today, even though it seems apparent with the passage of time that Goffman downplayed the organic dimension of mental illness. One is also struck by the fact that Goffman's response to the excesses in mental hospitals was anything but reformist.

The terms "mental illness" and "sickness" were often placed in quotation marks in Goffman's early work, with the scare-crow quotes meant to communicate the author's disparaging attitude toward psychiatry and his skepticism about the mental institutions' professed goal. Goffman (1961:163) distanced himself from "a current psychiatric view [that] necessitates a certain amount of blindness, especially at higher staff levels, to other ways of viewing the ward system, such as a method for disciplining unruly persons through punishment and reward." Mental illness was, for him, a social construct designating a spoiled identity that colluding others successfully impose on a victim. In reality, "the 'mentally ill' . . . and mental patients distinctly suffer not from mental illness, but from contingencies"; "the craziness or 'sick behavior' claimed for the mental patient is by and large a product of the claimant's social distance from the situation that the patient is in, and is not primarily a product of mental illness" (Goffman 1961: 135, 130). Deplorable as the situation in psychiatric facilities might be, it calls for a sober-minded forbearance rather than reform:

Nor in citing the limitations of the service model do I mean to claim that I can suggest some better way of handling persons called mental patients. Mental hospitals are not found in our society because supervisors, psychiatrists, and attendants want jobs; mental hospitals are found because there is a market for them. If the mental hospitals in a given region were emptied and closed down today, tomorrow relatives, police, and judges would raise a clamor for new ones; and these true clients of the mental hospital would demand an institution to satisfy their needs. (Goffman 1961: 384)

Missing in Goffman's early work is an acknowledgment that psychiatric treatment may help patients in some ways, that it achieves anything other than pacifying relatives and flattering the psychiatrists' inflated sense of self-worth. This stance galled critics who were quick to pounce on Goffman's desiccated view:

For unknown reasons, some people come to be exiled to buildings called mental hospitals. The official function of the hospital is to treat psychiatric illness, but its true function seems to be to subdue, degrade and humiliate the people who are confined there, so that they will be easier to control. . . . Goffman has managed to conjure up something that is worse than a

concentration camp, a total institution in which the inmates live in a frightful exile for no reason. (Siegler and Osmond 1971:167, 169)

The ascription of a psychiatric pathology to what are not more than 'situational improprieties' enables society to punish (or, in Goffman's terms, 'sanction') these lapses of 'decorum and demeanor' by passing the offender over to the authorized medical agencies. It is not the hallucination, the depression, the vocal rumination, the manic excitement, the mentioning of the unmentionable . . . that, in Goffman's view, constitutes the symptom, but rather the occurrences of these and kindred behaviors in a setting where other people's sense of etiquette is outraged. (Sedgwick 1982:194-195)

In 1964 Goffman published a paper "Mental Symptoms and Public Order," later reprinted in*Interaction Ritual* (Goffman 1967), where he continued to insist "that symptomatic behavior might well be seen . . . as a form of social misconduct, in the sense that Emily Post and Amy Vanderbilt recognize the term," that "mental hospitals, perhaps through a process of natural selection, are organized in such a way as to provide exactly the kind of setting in which unwilling participants have recourse to the exhibition of situational improprieties" (Goffman p. 1967:140, 147). One senses a slight change in perspective in this latter work. Whereas in *Asylums* Goffman focused on the involuntarily institutionalized and excluded from consideration outpatients, now his target is the odd-balls at large and the impact their "situational improprieties" have on the general public. "It is suggested that a psychotic situational impropriety is an act that one cannot easily empathize with, leading one to feel that the actor is unpredictable and untrustworthy, that he is not in the same world as one is in, that one cannot put oneself in his place." (Goffman 1967:141) The author goes on to assert, "I know of no psychotic misconduct that cannot be matched precisely in everyday life by the conduct of persons who are not psychologically ill nor considered to be so; and in each case one can find a host of different motives for engaging in the misconduct, and a host of different factors that will modify our attitude toward the performance" (Goffman 1967:147).

Fast-forward to 1969, the year "The Insanity of Place" appeared in print, and you discover that the author's agenda had evolved. The tone in which Goffman discusses situational improprieties is now urgent, pained, bordering on indignant. Gone are scare-crow quotation marks with which the author surrounded, literally or figuratively, references to mental illness in his early work. Without evincing a trace of irony, Goffman refers to "the manic," "psychotic," "sick person" while painting the broad-brush picture of a family devastated by the unpredictable behavior of a genuinely disturbed member. The offensive behavior is no longer downplayed as mere nuisance; rather, the author grimly talks about "a life in which a family member behaves

himself insanely," "the household [which] can become a hospital away from the hospital," and "the insanity of place" which offers no escape to the family coping with a mentally hobbled member (IP 337-338). Nor does Goffman inveigh against the collusion between the doctors and the relatives conspiring to put the troublemaker away – now it is the offender and the doctor who form a "collusive relationship . . . in regard to the responsible others," the latter unfairly blamed for creating an intolerable atmosphere for the perpetrator disturbing the family peace (IP 384).

In contrast to his early work, IP accentuates the somatic dimension of mental illness: "No doubt some psychoses are mainly organic in their relevant cause, others are mainly psychogenic, still others situational. In many cases etiology will involve all of these causal elements" (IP 345). It would be a stretch to say that Goffman denied the organic roots of mental illness in his early work, but he effectively bracketed the psychosomatic factors, downplaying their significance in understanding psychiatric disorders and explaining a moral career of mental patients. The latter appears in a decidedly different light in IP where Goffman made no effort to spot "different factors that will modify our attitude toward the performance" which he had touted so extravagantly just a few years back. The change in attitude is striking yet subtle, not meant to draw attention to itself; the author is careful to highlight the continuity between his early statement and the present formulations. "Whatever the cause of the offender's psychological state – and clearly this may sometimes be organic – the social significance of the disease is that its carrier somehow hits upon the way that things can be made hot for us" (IP:389). Goffman aims to update his thesis, foreground the previously discounted ways in which mental illness can disrupt everyday life, and suggest fresh avenues for conceptualization and research.

We should bear in mind that when Goffman was collecting his data at St. Elizabeth's hospital, psychiatry was dominated by psychoanalysis, so the author had reasons to be skeptical about the standard talking cure patients received under widely diverse diagnoses. The new family of psychotropic drugs – benzodiazepines – was still in the experimental stage, their spread at least a decade away. Such was the historical context in which Goffman embraced a constructionist view of mental illness that gained currency through the works of scholars questioning "the myth of mental illness" (Szasz 1960). Along with his colleagues, Goffman decried the view of mental illness as a purely biological phenomenon, exposed the abuses of psychiatry in the United States, and contributed to the deinstitutionalization movement (see Laing 1960, 1967; Scheff 1966, 1968; Manning 1978; Pilgrim and Rogers 2005).

Goffman did not go as far as some of his colleagues in dismissing the biological origins of mental illness, nor did he endorse the deinstitutionalization movement, even though his work figured prominently in the Congressional hearings that paved the way to the Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963 and subsequent reforms that precipitated the sharp decline in forced institutionalization. Yet he fully embraced the patient's perspective that cast inmates as victims of circumstances sucked into the funnel of betrayal by family members colluding with medical professionals conspiring to institutionalize inconvenient individuals, who were then left to cope with the degrading conditions through the secondary adjustments and situational improprieties, which often served to confirm questionable psychiatric diagnoses.

"The Insanity of Place" marked a notable shift in Goffman's perspective. His sympathy is now with the families that have to endure the inanities of manifestly disturbed members whose antics, induced at least in part by the organic ailment and sometimes downplayed by the doctors, turn home interactions upside down. Situational improprieties are cast here in a starkly negative light, with no romanticizing of the rebellious tactics celebrated in *Asylums*. These are a scourge of the families beset by disruptive behavior that has little to do with the quest for freedom and a good deal with insanity. This shift in perspective was underscored by the urgent, even anxious tone that sharply contrasted with the detached and ironic discourse of *Asylums*, as well as by the adjustment in a theoretical frame put forward to account for a career of mental patients. No longer cast as hapless victims of conniving relatives and overreaching professionals, would-be patients now appear as seriously impaired individuals overdue for institutionalization and deserving of their plight.

To understand this shift, we now turn to the biographical context within which this transformation took place.

"The Insanity of Place" and the Family Dynamics

The biographical materials collected in the EGA contain an unsubstantiated report (Heilman 2009) according to which Goffman's wife might have been a patient at St. Elizabeth's while her husband was doing his fieldwork there. This seems highly unlikely, for Schuyler's financial resources would have allowed her to seek treatment in private practice and outpatient institutions. What is well established is that Schuyler sought psychiatric help in the 1950s, that her husband was uneasy about the therapy she received, and that his interest in mental institutions was reinforced by his experience with a disturbed family member. People with concurrent appointments at the

National Institute of Mental Health where Goffman worked while researching mental institutions confirm that Schuyler "saw a psychiatrist at the time" (Jordan 2009), that she "already saw a therapist when he was at St. Elizabeth's" (Kohn 2007). Jordan Scher (2004; 2009) reports that Goffman's wife tried to commit suicide in the late 1950s. According to Melvin Kohn, Goffman "was not happy with psychiatry":

Erving Goffman was furious – yes, he was angry sometimes – he was furious that psychiatrists generally and mental hospital psychiatrists in particular applauded his work. He had meant to show those bastards up. He was fighting them. And everybody attributed this to his wife's therapy and his hating psychiatrists. When he wrote 'Moral Career of Mental Patient' – even though he never said so himself – all of us thought, 'Aha, if I had not got those bastards with mental hospital as a total institution, then I'm really gonna give it to them now'. (Kohn 2007)

The situation might have been exacerbated by the couple's marital problems. Apparently, Schuyler did not immediately follow Erving to Berkeley when Herbert Blumer had offered him a job in 1958, staying behind with their son for some months, and possibly as long as a year (Kohn 2007). At Berkeley, the couple's relationship remained rocky. In the early 1960s, Erving and Sky separated for a while, as she took up a job with the Survey Research Center and continued to seek therapy (Clark 2009; Room 2009; Smelser 2009; Wiseman, 2009). Schuyler's colleagues at the Survey Center remember her as a knowledgeable coworker always ready to help others with their chores, who also suffered from occasional bouts of depression. By 1963, Schuyler's mental illness symptoms became obvious to her colleagues, relatives, and friends. Esther Besbris remembers Erving's mother telling her that "Sky might have been bi-polar (the term they use today)," that "she was always a very conservative dresser – no jewelry, very simple, very plain [and then] quite suddenly, Auntie Annie would tell me, she began to dress differently, wear makeup and jewelry" and act out in an uncharacteristically outgoing way (Besbris 2009).

Crucial evidence comes from Schuyler herself, who acknowledged in her correspondence that she experienced psychological problems. Schuyler was aware of Erving's strong feelings about psychiatry, yet she did not necessarily share them with her husband. In one letter she thanks her friends for helping her pull through in the difficult times:

For a variety of reasons I am currently higher than a kite despite or maybe because of a new bout of arm trouble. Sometimes I think oh well, this is just the manic phase; occasionally I think my god, maybe a non-depressive life is possible. (You know, I feel I've never adequately expressed to you how much

I owe you and Addie for the general shoring up and salvage work, especially that first grim winter out here. I know one isn't supposed to say these things – especially if in any way affiliated with one E. Goffman – but I often think it) (Schuyler Goffman, Letter to D. Schneider, June 5, 1963 [?])

The problem Sky alludes to predates the couple's move to Berkeley, and even though one cannot be certain about the precise causal relationship, it is plausible that from the start, Goffman's research agenda had a personal as well as professional dimension. Such was the impression Melvin Kohn and his colleagues formed, thinking of *Asylums* as a work that sought to settle accounts with psychiatry and its practitioners.

We are on firmer grounds interpolating Goffman's life and work once we get to "The Insanity of Place." The tell-tale signs scattered throughout IP leave no doubt that the change in Goffman's perspective echoed his personal tragedy. On April 27, 1964, Schuyler Goffman committed suicide by jumping off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge (Oakland Tribune, 1964). Several symptoms mentioned in IP strike the reader as highly specific, even idiosyncratic, yet perfectly aligned with the Goffman's family situation as reported by numerous witnesses who recall Schuyler's highly emotional reaction to the Kennedy assassination, obsession with national politics, preoccupation with philanthropic ventures, references to her great ancestors, tendency to invite strangers to family gatherings, and so on. Certain behavior patterns Goffman attributed to the manic-depressive persons in his paper are gender specific and stereotypical – the propensity to indulge in excessive shopping, engage in flirtatious conduct, and associate with inappropriate male partners.

Reading the EGA accounts, we should notice that those who knew Schuyler do not always agree on her mental health. Some observers saw few signs of impairment in Goffman's wife. "In our encounters," recalls Charles Glock (2009), one-time sociology chair at Berkeley, "I sensed that Skye [sic] was a disturbed personality. However, I never got to know her well enough to recognize how severe the disturbance was. That knowledge only came with her successful attempt at suicide by jumping off an area bridge." "She was always very civil and courteous and gracious as a hostess," remembers Saul Mendlovitz (2009). "When you talked to her, it was clear that she was familiar with the concepts, understood them, was bright and all that. I did not catch any of the – what should I call it – dementia or psychotic behavior. I never sensed that at all at any time." Robin Room (2009) remembers that "Sky was really into everything around the office, doing editing of papers, helping us with the fieldwork stuff, and so forth. She was really a kind of mentor to me in that job. What I knew about her was that she was a daughter of a newspaper owner. She was quite vivacious, took to urging us to come up to

their house for drinks on Friday afternoons, and so forth. . . . And eventually people would say Sky was bipolar, a manic-depressive."

Those close to Goffman were more apt to spot symptoms of mental illness in his wife. Neil Smelser, who says he "became as close to Erving as anyone else in the sociology department," testifies that Schuyler "went into some kind of psychological tailspin after the assassination of John Kennedy in November of 1963. That in turn drifted into a kind of hyper-manic stage, in which she developed a fix on the idea that she, using the money in her family, could, with the help of a number of us (myself included), launch into some kind of world-saving enterprise" (Smelser 2009). Walter Clark, one time student and an admirer of Goffman, has similar recollections: "Sky did end up in treatment for a long period of time, but her swings up and down got worse and worse and worse, and eventually, as you know, she jumped off the bridge. . . . Yes, at times she would be hyper, and often when the gatherings at her house would take place. There would be people she ran into, some of these commercial contacts, some academics, some of the people from our own organization where we worked. Other times she would be depressed and perhaps wouldn't come to work." An important testimony comes from Jane Allyn Piliavin, the widow of Erving's friend, Irving Piliavin, who offered this recollection: "My husband told me that he [Goffman] had become increasingly concerned that she was suicidal and he called her psychiatrist with his concerns, and the psychiatrist basically blew him off, 'No, no, no. She is not suicidal. Don't worry about it.' And like the next day she jumped off the bridge." (Piliavin 2009).

Many things could have influenced the reminiscences deposited in the Goffman archives. Some EGA contributors heard directly from Goffman about his home situation, others read IP or familiarized themselves with the EGA accounts before sitting down for an interview. Recounting the past from the vantage point of the present makes one susceptible to a retroactive bias. The period in which the memoirist knew Schuyler could also be a factor, as well as the relationship a particular witness had with the Goffmans. Those close to Erving were generally more inclined to perceive Schuyler as a troubled person and proffer accounts consistent with the IP narrative. While EGA contributors differ in their interpretations, they converge on many specific details found in Goffman's seminal paper. Here are a few snippets from the IP narrate where Goffman recounts what a family goes through when it finds a disturbed member in its midst:

The manic begins by promoting himself in the family hierarchy. He finds he no longer has time to do his accustomed share of family chores. He increasingly orders other members around, displays anger and impatience, makes promises he thinks he can break, encroaches on the equipment and space

allocated to other members, only fitfully displays affection and respect, and finds he cannot bother adhering to the family schedules for meals, for going to bed and rising. He also becomes hypercritical and derogatory of family members. He moves backward to the grandiose statements of the high rank and quality of his forebears and forward to an exalted view of what he proposes soon to accomplish. (IP 364)

Assistance is volunteered to persons and organizations undesirous of receiving it from this quarter – the patient appreciating that an offer is an unwarrantable means of making contact with the recipient. Public life is entered through its least guarded portals: participation in voluntary work; letters to politicians, editors, and big corporations; celebrity hunting; litigation. Critical national events such as elections, war policy statements, and assassinations, are taken quite personally. . . . A manic patient who can become too large for his home can similarly become too large for his job. Starting with a commendable increase in enthusiasm for his work, he begins to offer fellow workers wanted help and advice, extends this to what is seen as interference in the spheres of others, and finally takes to giving unauthorized directives and acting as a spokesman for his work-organization when he is away from it. (IP 370)

He promotes get-togethers of work personnel, and embarrasses status divisions by trying to bring together for conviviality everyone at work who is remotely within his social rank. . . . Family secrets are confidentially divulged at informal gatherings to persons who are merely acquaintances. Newly formed friends are enthusiastically praised to the family, giving the impression that the patient's capacity for deep involvement is being exercised capriciously. If the patient is single, unsuitable mating may threaten to occur across age, race, or class lines. If married, then unsuitable re-mating. And some sexual promiscuity may occur of the kind that can be easily realized at will because it trades on marked status differences. In all of this, the patient either takes advantage of others or places others in a position to take advantage of him, in either case to the deep embarrassment of the family. (IP 370-372)

Goffman does not tell the reader what happens when the family turmoil runs its course, how "normal" members respond to the family emergency, but we can gathered that from those attending a party shortly before Schuyler's tragic death. Robin Room (2009) volunteered this eyewitness account: "Of course, Erving himself was fairly . . . not a very sociable person [laughing]. This clearly was rubbing him the wrong way, from what I could see as a young innocent. . . . At some point, I remember, Erving came to us on one Friday occasion and sort of saying urgently, 'Can't you see my wife is a sick woman? Will you please leave?'" Here is a similar account: "She would want everybody to come on and party and what not. That sort of things. By the

way, when she just began to work at the center, a bunch of people went over there on Friday night. Goffman came home and kicked them all out. Then Sky would go into those long absences, and during one of her absences she jumped off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge." (Stark 2008)

Even if Goffman consciously modeled his narrative on his family situation, we should not presume that every single detail or episode listed in IP had a counterpart in real life. A chart placed in the Appendix at the end of this paper matches the symptoms found in IP with eyewitness accounts, and at least one difference comes to the fore – the tendency to engage in inappropriate sexual conduct attributed to a manic person. The "unsuitable mating may threaten to occur," writes Goffman, yet no evidence surfaced to substantiate such an occurrence in regard to his wife. "Sky was a damn good looking woman. . . . When she was normal, she was a charming person, she was fun to talk to . . . small talk, semi-flirting. . . . I certainly have no evidence or reason to believe that she slept around or anything. But as a lot of pretty women at the time, her style with certain kinds of men was a little bit flirtatious. That wasn't unusual." (Stark 2008).

This difference notwithstanding, the unmistakably autobiographical nature of IP narrative calls for analysis and interpretation. We can now take a closer look at the interplay between Goffman's family situation and his theorizing mental illness.

Mental Illness as Experience and a Theoretical Construct

It should be noted that the full-fledged assessment of Goffman's theory is beyond the scope of the present paper whose primary goal is to ascertain the biographical dimension of sociological imagination. What I will try to do in this section and the one that follows is to show how personal experience illuminates the social world we inhabit and how the same experience can obscure some of its properties that contradict the scholar's affective proclivities.

Did Goffman's research interests precede his wife's health problems, or was it the other way around? We cannot answer this question with certainty, but the two had clearly intersected at some point. We don't know which course of action Goffman favored when his wife began to evince manic-depressive symptoms, yet we can surmise that his distaste for psychiatry entered the calculations. We also know that Schuyler did not entirely share Erving's attitudes toward psychiatry, for she credited her friends for helping her pull though the depression while subtly disparaging "one E. Goffman" whose anti-psychiatric sentiments could have lead him to make light of her affliction. It is

hard to imagine the author of *Asylums* recommending institutionalization for his wife. His skepticism about mental institutions was not unfounded at the time, and it won praise from many scholars, especially within the social science community, who continually praised Goffman's "passionate defense of the self against society" (Freidson 1983:359) and backed up his stance as "compassionate and sensitive, even, at times, one of moral outrage at the way individuals are treated" (Williams 1987:221).

As Sky's affliction grew more severe, Goffman must have experienced a cognitive dissonance between the constructionist view he took at the onset of his studies and the practical need to help his wife and stem the worst-case scenario. On the verge of his wife's suicide, according to Irving Piliavin, Goffman warned her psychiatrist about Schuyler's dire conditions, only to be told that the situation was nowhere as bad as Goffman saw it, that his wife was not the type to attempt suicide. Within a few years of his wife's suicide, Goffman writes "The Insanity of Place," which marks a change in his theoretical stance. Rather than highlighting this transformation, Goffman presents his theory as a straightforward update on his earlier work. He incorporates into his paper the minute details of his wife's disease, and at the same time, glosses over some of its conspicuous symptoms and wider theoretical implications.

By focusing on the manic-depressive disorder, Goffman completely left out from his analysis the conditions like schizophrenia that generally do not produce the emotionally charged, highly disruptive interactional effects central to Goffman's argument (Sedgwick 1982:210). Even within the target disease, Goffman sets aside the depressive and concentrates on the manic phase of the disorder. Here is how Goffman explains his decision to limit the case under study:

In case of withdrawals – depressions and regression – it is chiefly the internal functioning of the family that suffers. The burden of enthusiasm and domestic work must now be carried by fewer members. Note that by artfully curtailing its social life, the family can conceal these disorders from the public at large and sustain conventional external functioning. Quiet alcoholism can similarly be contained, provided that economic resources are not jeopardized. It is the manic disorders and the active phases of a paranoid kind that produce the real trouble. It is these patterns that constitute the insanity of place. (IP 363-364)

When it comes to a theoretical frame, Goffman stakes the position that splits asunder the somatic and affective dimensions of mental illness. The IP theoretical framework hinges on the dichotomy between medical and mental disorders:

Medical symptoms and mental symptoms, so-called, are radically different things. As pointed out, the malfunctioning that medical symptoms represent is a malfunctioning of the human organism and only very rarely constitutes an elegant denial of social functioning. However impaired physically, the medically ill person can almost always express that he is not intentionally and openly opposing his place in the social scheme of things. So-called mental symptoms, on the other hand, are made up of the very substance of social obligation. Mental symptoms directly express the whole array of divisive social alignments: alienation, rebellion, insolence, untrustworthiness, hostility, apathy, importunement, intrusiveness, and so forth. These divisive alignments do not – in the first instance – constitute the malfunctioning of the individual, but rather the disturbance and trouble in a relationship or an organization. (IP 387)

The "'psycho-medical dualism'" (Sedgwick 1982:193) underlying Goffman's position is a prominent feature of his theoretical stance that places him on shaky historical ground. It flies in the face of recorded history where medical symptoms have been subjected to conflicting social definitions and provoked institutionally coded responses. Epilepsy, leprosy, syphilis, depression, tuberculosis, AIDS – every one of these ailments has been culturally framed, with direct, sometimes deadly, consequences for those on the receiving end of a social diagnosis, depending on whether the medical disorder was cast as divine inspiration, demonic possession, moral degeneracy, or a mysterious scourge setting panic within the community.

"Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wide social unit; our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks" (Goffman 1961:320). Contrary to the common view, this lofty pronouncement does not withstand close scrutiny as a humanist declaration and an epitome of the critical attitude toward the plight of humans oppressed by social institutions. I agree with Gouldner, Sedgwick, Williams, and other scholars who contend that Goffman's theory "entails an accommodation to existent power arrangements" (Gouldner 1970: 379). The uplifting verbiage we find in *Asylums* and some related writings is politically conservative. "Goffman's general politics are therefore quite clear. The ruling classes and their managerial hierarchies are to be left firmly in charge of 'the solid building of the world': such ruling-class domination is indeed necessary, for it gives us, importantly, 'our status', and the radical alternative to the pursuit of status – namely, social liberation – is nowhere envisioned in Goffman. Only 'the cracks' are left for us to expand in, the licensed loopholes of idiosyncrasy, to whose sympathetic cataloguing, across innumerable crannies of private integrity (along with their negotiated exits and entrances), Goffman has dedicated an entire moral career of his

own" (Sedgwick 1982:203). Given that Goffman never explicitly endorsed deinstitutionalization and urged to leave bad enough alone, we have to be skeptical about the reformist implications of his theory.

I am also troubled by the fact that the symptoms listed in IP are often associated with rebellious classes, groups, and individuals whose mental status is questioned by the authorities. "The manic is someone who does not refrain from intruding when he is not wanted," declares Goffman (IP 389). "He does not contain himself in the spheres and territories allotted to him. He overreaches. He does not keep his place." True enough, but many protest movements are to be judged "manic" on this reckoning. Some have actually been disparaged by those in power who portray insurrections as the work of "deranged lunatics," "mad crowds," and "obsessive truth seekers." This goes for the French Revolution, antislavery activists, civil rights protests, the Soviet dissidents, and padres de familia of all ages who used to castigate their family members unwilling "to keep their place" and determined to sustain "uppity self-concepts" as inane, and sometimes downright insane. The home place is sure to look "insane" to the entrenched powers that lament the growing "inanity of place" and demand reigning in "troublemakers" bent on breaking out of the established mold.

Which brings me back to Schuyler Goffman. There are strong indications that Sky's behavior was rooted in the psychosomatic ailment inscribed in her family history (see Besbris 2009). But just as *Asylums* underestimates the medical side of mental illness, "The Insanity of Place" downplays the socio-historical conditions embedded in family life that may exacerbate depressive symptoms. We know from numerous sources, including her own letters, that Sky had reasons to be unhappy with her family life. She did feel depressed when her husband trundled off to Las Vegas, leaving her alone with their son on Christmas Eve (Schuyler Goffman, Letter to David Schneider, January 7, 1963 [?]). She cast about for a better use of her intellectual gifts, as did many other educated faculty wives at Berkeley (e.g. Gertrude Selznick) who were thrust into lowly positions at various university organizations, feeling marginalized in the academic world where women scholars were still a rarity. She did set aside her intellectual aspirations while spending long hours helping her husband with his manuscripts and galley proofs (Erving Goffman, Letter to David Schneider, n.d., circa 1961). She did harbor a strong desire to go back to school and finish her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Chicago, with or without the approval of her husband, and in fact, took practical steps toward that goal late in her life: "As of today I am resigning from my job – on good terms with my boss, Genevieve Knupfer – so I can get down to work on going back to graduate school and can help get what's left of my family over the various humps that always follow a death in the family. So at last I can

relax and get around to doing what I want" (Schuyler Goffman, Letter to David Schneider, January 7, 1964). Given Goffman's reverence for family hierarchy, it seems logical that Sky would rebel at some point and try to carve out a niche for herself in the family and the world. It is also likely that her new assertiveness, coupled with manic outbursts, would embarrass her husband who frowned on her philanthropic ventures and stabs at social reform (Glock 2008).

While someone could be genuinely mad, what he or she is "mad about" is influenced by the historical conditions within which the person developed a particular set of symptoms (Epstein 2006; Shalin 2009). Without a doubt Schuyler's depression had somatic origins, and yet it might well have been aggravated, or at least colored, by her struggle to overcome the barriers that American society erected at the time in the path of women seeking fulfillment outside the domestic sphere. "Sky started doing work around the Survey Research Center. Can't quite remember which project she was [involved with, but] I got to know her and started to worry if I could help her get her damned dissertation done." (Star 2008) Another contemporary familiar with the Goffmans paints a scenario that features a high-powered scholar thwarting his wife's professional aspirations: "The great part of her problem was that she felt that she had the right to her world and her life, that she was not just to be a devoted, totally subservient wife to Erving. Erving was so self-absorbed, self-centered, and what not. Although she worked with him and helped him as much as she could, I think it rankled her to be not just second but maybe the third, or fifth, fiddle in his orchestra." (Scher 2009) Then, there was a rumor making the rounds at Berkeley that blamed Schuyler's plight on her husband's eccentricities: "Well of course everybody thought that Goffman has driven her to suicide because he was such a bastard," remembers Sherri Cavan (2009). "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'."

We should exercise the abundance of caution with respect to such reconstructions, which tend to originate outside the Erving's immediate circle where an entirely different opinion prevailed, the one in which Goffman figures as something of a martyr: "And then there was that nasty Californian gossip that Erving had driven Schuyler mad. What nonsense. The gossips had no idea what he went through, how he cared for her and for his son. (I knew how he cared for them from mutual friends who had known us in Chicago and kept in touch with Erving and Schuyler in Berkeley.)" (Bott Spillius 2010)

Divergent and biased as such interpretations are, they all may have some purchase on reality, and we should handle them with the circumspection we generally accord to ethnographic data by rigorously comparing reports,

double-checking the information, consulting objective records, exploring the sources of bias, and so on. Still, we can at this point formulate a few preliminary hypotheses on the crossroads between biography, theory, and history as they converge in the case of Goffman's research on mental illness.

The evidence presented so far suggests that Goffman's work on mental illness exhibits an increasingly personal agenda behind his conceptual forays. The IP narrative is based in part on self-ethnography, albeit unacknowledged, which allowed the author to paint a rich panorama of the family life upset by the presence of a mentally disturbed member. The IP analysis yielded a number of conceptual insights into the stigmatizing impact that the presence of a manic has on the family's standing in a community, the disruption paranoid behavior causes in routine family transactions, the breach in the emotional division of labor, the challenge to the established structure of authority, the dilemmas the family faces in trying to convince the disruptive individual to seek help, and the potential for aggravations when the would-be patient colludes with the doctor in keeping one's family members in the dark.

While having first-hand, personal experience with mental illness sensitizes the investigator to the hidden dimensions of phenomena in question and opens new horizons for research, it can also blind the interpreter to dynamics inconsistent with the specific case in which one is intimately involved, foreclose additional avenues for research, and make the over-engaged scholar partial to conclusions reflecting his or her bias. As a scholar and a person, Goffman was very sensitive to the interactional conventions, and so he must have been deeply embarrassed by his wife's behavior that did not accord with his notion of propriety and family hierarchy. Hence, he focused on the disruptive consequences of mental illness associated with manic behavior while glossing over its less interactional manifestations. Absent in Goffman's analyses is any reference to the "psychogenic factors" he acknowledged to play an independent role in the etiology of mental disorder. Such an analysis would have required him to look into the genesis of the case under review and might have served as an occasion for self-reflection, if not self-criticism. Rather than considering the possible interplay between the somatic, psychogenetic, and sociological factors in the etiology of a manic-depressive disorder, Goffman postulated a questionable dichotomy between the "medial" and "mental" phenomena, assimilating his case to the latter conditions injurious to decorum and considering them in isolation from their somatic sources of mental illness. One has to wince, also, at the ethical implications of Goffman's decision to use his family member as a research object and divulge his wife's conditions to third parties, before and after her death. Even if Goffman drew on his personal experience only after his wife's death, we can question his decision to incorporate into IP intimate details of his family life

and draw attention of several confidants to his paper as a definitive account of what had happened between him and his wife (Wiseman 2009; Piliavin 2009). Such an approach opens the door to questioning the IP narrative – seminal though it is – as one-sided and perhaps self-serving.

There are other tangents bearing on my thesis (e.g., Goffman's unwillingness to highlight the discontinuity between IP and his early work, the failure to consider the implications of his analysis for the institutionalization, the gender bias that informed Goffman's analysis), but we can consider the outlined case sufficient to justify further inquiry into the intersection of biography, theory, and history that informs the agenda of biocritical hermeneutics.

Goffman's Lifework through the Prism of Biocritical Hermeneutics

David Mechanic (1988:150) brings up this intriguing tidbit in his paper on medical sociology: "Later in Goffman's life, after he had to live through an episode of mental illness involving another person close to him, he is said to have remarked that had he been writing *Asylums* at that point, it would have been a very different book." I was unable to trace the origins of this remark (David could not recall who made it), but the IP narrative is not the only instance of such a revision. After studying his life and work, I feel that Goffman was prone to amend his views throughout his professional life, that his quest for self-discovery made him engage in a tacit, and on rare occasion open, self-critique which produced noticeable changes in his behavior and research agenda.

Given the space constraint and the vast amount of material in the EGA, I can only sketch in the barest of detail the interplay between Goffman's biography and theory and the historical context within which the two had intertwined. To elucidate the relationship between key junctions in Goffman's intellectual career and his life's circumstances, I will start with Goffman's family roots in Canadian Manitoba where his parents settled in the early 20th century after emigrating from Russia. Next I move to Erving's graduate work at the University of Chicago where he developed his long-term preoccupation with the presentation of self. Skipping the work on *Asylums* considered in the previous sections, I will take up Goffman's research on stigma and stigmatizing behavior, the subject he knew from personal experience. And finally, I take up his research interest in gender inequality that he developed in the late 1960s and the 1970s and that produced pioneering work on gender typing and the arrangements between sexes.

A series of conversations with Goffman's sister, cousin, and other relatives (Goffman-Bay 2009; Frankelson 2009; Besbris 2009; Zaslov 2009, Bay 2009)

offer a rare insight into the origins of Goffman's dramaturgy, both personal and theoretical. We need to bear in mind that some of the relatives who volunteered their reminisces have been following Goffman's life and work for decades, that their memories are inevitably selective, and that in some cases they might have been influenced by the materials previously deposited in the archives. Still, there are invaluable particulars that could have been known only to those closely affiliated with the sprawling Averbach family, its matriarch Muni Averbach who came to the U.S. around 1913, and who gave birth to four brothers and four sisters, including Erving's mother, Anne Averbach. Max Goffman, Erving's father, was a dry goods merchant who had a store in Dauphin, a little town with a dozen or so Jewish families, and who later moved his family to Winnipeg, in part because he wished his daughter Frances to have a richer Jewish environment and better pick of suitors once she reached an eligible age (Goffman-Bay 2009). Some Averbachs did considerably better than others in the competitive world of Canadian immigrants, with the successful families moving to the more affluent parts of town and the less fortunate ones growing self-conscious about their less fortunate conditions (Zaslov 2009; Besbris 2009; Frankelson 2009). Esther Besbris recalls an expensive photo album conspicuously displayed on the coffee table in a well-to do Averbach household, which was meant to underscore the family affluence and which she connects with a strikingly similar example in one of Goffman's books. Marly Zaslov (2009) recalls the deep embarrassment that a visiting relative who fell asleep at a family gathering caused to those present. Status anxiety, control over appearances, efforts to avoid embarrassment in front of the relatives were part of the Averbach family dynamics.

By all accounts, Erving was a smart, precocious kid who managed to get himself into trouble after stealing neighbor's apples or blowing up his basement in the course of a chemical experiment gone haywire, for which he used to get a generous spanking. His sister describes him as "sensitive," "sentimental," "emotional," suggesting that "he was far more emotional than he wanted to exhibit" (Goffman-Bay 2009). Among the memorable examples of this was the "Ode to Mother" Erving wrote and recited at his bar mitzvah, a performance that brought tears in those present, or the necklace he went to a great length to procure for his sweetheart cousin (Besbris 2009). As Erving got older, he grew more emotionally detached, developed an acerbic sense of humor, distanced himself from his family, and according to some accounts, from his Jewish roots (Frankelson 2009; Zaslov 2009; Mendlovitz 2009). Saul Mendlovitz, a close friend of Erving at the University of Chicago, had this to say on the subject of Erving's ambitions and his Jewish heritage: "He knew he was culturally Jewish, even though he was trying to become a Britisher. It wasn't the Yom Kippur part of Jewishness. . . .   I forgot who said that [he

was] 'a Jew acting like a Canadian acting like a Britisher,' but it was well known by the small group of ours that that was what he aspired to be." (Mendlovitz 2009) An additional piece of evidence comes from Dell Hymes who recalls Goffman commenting on his growing up Jewish in a little Canadian town: "I grew up (with Yiddish) in a town where to speak another language was to be suspect of being homosexual" (Hymes 2000:56). It is hard to avoid the implication that being Jewish was a stigmatizing experience to Erving.

It fits the pattern that Goffman married a woman from an illustrious protestant family whose father owned a Boston newspaper, supported various philanthropies, founded the Choate prep school, and cut a major figure in local political and social crosscurrents. Numerous commentators interpreted Goffman's marriage to a person with a distinguished pedigree and vast financial resources as a sign of his upward mobility aspirations. Some stated bluntly that "he married her because, again, she was an upper class WASP." (Mendlovitz 2009) Few commentators knew that Angelica Schuyler Choate was an intellectual in her own right, and none I spoke to seemed to be aware that she wrote an M.A. thesis on upper class women where she quoted her future husband, a fellow U. of C. student, Erving Goffman (Schuyler 1950). The two shared an interest in class status, which first surfaced in the paper Erving wrote for E. W. Burgess (Goffman 1948) and which became the subject of his first professional publication (Goffman 1951). The comparison between these documents is instructive not only because it reveals the possible indebtedness of Goffman to Schuyler's intimate knowledge of Boston high society, the upper crust status symbols, the inflation such symbols underwent in middle class America, and the nouveau riches' propensity to manipulate tokens of success, but also because it suggests that Goffman's abiding concern with the presentation of self and status hierarchy was more than theoretical. Passing, fitting in, maintaining decorum was a practical matter for Goffman, a Jew from a small town Canada, a promising student still unknown to the outside world, who had to pass muster in front of the Boston Brahmins. If Goffman ever suffered from an imposter complex, it would have been during his years of courtship and subsequent marriage to Angelica Schuyler Choate. By the way, neither Goffman's sister nor his parents appeared to have attended the wedding, which was shrouded in mystery so far as Goffman's relatives and friends were concerned (Goffman Bay 2009; Besbris 2009).

Status consciousness, one-upmanship, and the loss of face incurred by a social climber's poor performance would become a master theme in Goffman's writing as well as in Goffman's own presentation of self. EGA contributors attest to numerous occasions on which Erving prided himself on his wine connoisseurship or food expertise, poked fun at people's book shelves or home

decor, cut someone down to size or humiliated a hapless interlocutor, snubbed the relatives or told his academic hosts that he would not attend a reception in his honor because he wasn't paid to do so (Gamson 2009; Dynes 2009; Frankelson 2009; Handel 2009; Bott Spillius 2010; Wiseman 2009; Cavan 2009; Sarfatti-Larson 2009; Kurt Lang 2009). But Erving knew when he met his match and was exposed for trying too hard to look superior. On one restaurant outing, Goffman pressed Magali Sarfatti-Larson, whose sophisticated family background was known to him, which wine she preferred, and was told that she could recall only one specific brand she liked. "It's like saying, I only have sex in elevators," quipped Goffman. To which Magali coolly replied, "Erving, where I come from, you don't have to know about wine." "Touché," answered Goffman, apparently feeling bested. But then, Erving appears to have had a weakness for attractive, smart women who were not afraid to stand up to him (Larson-Sarfatti 2010; Daniels 2009; Gladys Lang 2009).

Goffman's writing about stigma reveals a searing personal dimension. Consider his take on the stigmatizing qualities that could set back an American male: "There is only one complete unblushing male in America: young, married, white, urban, northern, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective. Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior." (Goffman 1963)   Half of the traits on this list would apply to the author. Commenting on a passage from *Stigma* where Goffman cites a letter from a woman with a severely disfigured face, Peter Manning (2007) observes: "I think the quotes from *Miss Lonelyhearts* are 'deep Goffman.'"

Of particular concern to Goffman must have been his height. Contemporary estimates vary range between 5'1 and 5'8 (conversations with Erving's sister and an examination of the family photos suggest Goffman was closer to 5'5). Erving's sister refers to him as "tiny" and does not recall him being interested sports (Goffman-Bay 20009). Joe Gusfield (2008) muses about Erving's relationship with women, recalling that he never saw him dancing at the parties: "I don't know what Erving's relationship was with women. He was certainly not a midget but he was short." Jackie Wiseman (2009) remembers how Goffman offered her a chair at his house while placing himself on a tall stool that made him hover over the visitor. She also recalls Erving discussing the dilemma of a plain looking guy entering a bar and wondering how to make those present aware that he was really an accomplished fellow. And here is this perceptive observation by Carol Gardner (2008): "His height would have to have made an impression on anyone. When I saw him

for the first time, I recalled immediately that sentence in *Stigma* where he suggests that, when anyone enters a room, the person is expected to have certain basic physical characteristics, including being of a certain height. How many rooms must he have entered, I thought, when he was immediately aware of in some way having disappointed strangers' expectations."

Notice the broad-brush quality of Goffman's articulation when it comes to stigmatizing properties. Amusing and elegant, such generalizations may seem farfetched upon closer examination. Would the lack of "recent record in sports," "rural" residence, or "unmarried" status automatically make you feel stigmatized? Is it true that in America "any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways" is bound to feel inferior? Goffman's writings are replete with such generalizations on the fly, which, after allowing for a rhetorical license, one finds rather sweeping. They do make sense, however, when placed in the biographical context of the person uttering such witticisms. When Goffman describes marriage as a scene of cold war hostilities or contends that women are unsuited to graduate school, we may wonder how much of his insight is traceable to his own experience. When staking such claims, Goffman reveals himself grounded in a particular time and place in history, with the perceptions of his social strata spurring his sociological imagination and informing his technical formulations. A model case of this tendency is Goffman's attitude toward women in academia, which had undergone a remarkable transformation and showed the man's capacity for growth and self-renewal.

The language of Goffman's early writings was unabashedly sexist. Thus, in *Encounters*, he talks about "a child's portion of manliness," "the individual [who] can show what kind of a guy he is," "sociologists *qua* person [who] retain the sacred for their friends, their wives, and themselves" (Goffman 1961:98, 140, 152; see Julia Penelope, 1988, for a fine analysis of such examples of sexism in Goffman's writings). These were standard features of social science writing in the 1950s and the next few decades, as were the condescending attitude that mostly male faculty openly sported toward their female colleagues and students. Not surprisingly, Goffman is reported to have told a pregnant female student seeking his guidance that he did not think women in her condition belonged to graduate school (Andy Fontana, personal communication, November 20, 2009). Ann Swidler (2010) recalls in her memoir that "he advised [me] that Berkeley was the best place for graduate school, and then said (of course this was 1967, before women had a significant future in academia), 'There's no point in your going to graduate school. The same thing always happens. The best looking woman in the cohort marries the smartest man, and she drops out.' (Swidler 2010) Gary Marx offers this incisive comment that captures the excitement Goffman brought to the

classroom but also makes us aware how much he was buffeted by the conventions of his time:

In his dealings with students there were at least two Goffmans. One was wise, warm, and of good humor, eager to impart knowledge via morality tales and specific advice and make the student feel like he or she was within the chosen circle of persons in the know. His use of the inclusive term "student" to refer to himself and others involved in scholarly endeavors made you feel a part of the enterprise. The other Goffman was controlled, insensitive, and indifferent and made sure the student knew his place. Most of the 'Tales of Goffman' are negative. In many of his dealings with others he did not reflect the sensitivity and concern for the underdog shown in his early written work.

In the deviance class he seemed unconcerned about violating the norms of tact. There was a badly crippled woman in the class yet he persisted in talking about "gimps." There was also a student with a severe stuttering problem. This did not prevent her from asking questions. Acting as if she was not present, Goffman offered material which was sometimes humorous about how stutterers managed (e.g., by taking jobs as night watchmen). He reduced another female student to tears during an office hour meeting. He was critical of her ideas and told her he did not think women should be in graduate school (although this is inconsistent with the strong support he gave to some other female students). At the end of the last class session a black student said "this is all very interesting Professor Goffman, but what's the use of it for changing the conditions you describe?" Goffman was visibly shaken. He stood up, slammed shut the book he had open on the desk and said "I'm not in that business" and stormed out of the room. (Gary Marx 1984:67-68)

As was the case with his other theoretical commitments, Goffman's views on women in academia changed over time, with the new sentiment becoming noticeable in the second half of the 1960s. It was around that time that he and Sherri Cavan discovered at a flea market in Alameda two boxes of women's magazines that Goffman (1976) used for his work on *Gender Advertisements.* On behalf of "Sociologists for Women and Society," Sherri Cavan extended to her teacher an invitation to speak on any topic of his choice, which led to a landmark presentation at Sherri's home where a few dozen women sociologists (men were not invited to this gathering) listened to Goffman expounding on the gender bias in American society (Cavan 2008). "The Arrangements between Sexes" was another landmark publication where Goffman continued to explore sex typing and symbolic codes designed to keep women in subordinate positions. From that point on, Goffman had more women graduate students than men, showing ample sensitivity in his dealings with budding women sociologists. Carol Gardner, a student afflicted

with a neurological ailment and perhaps the last person to write a dissertation with Goffman, offers this moving testimony about her mentor:

I do know he was unfailingly courteous to and supportive of me at a time when he needn't have been – when there was simply nothing for him in it. If he believed in you, he stuck with you; he told me at one time that women were a lot better than men at noting the sorts of things he was interested in, and I suppose that was nice to hear – although I couldn't help but privately note to myself that neither Lyn Lofland nor Sherri Cavan had been rewarded by what should have been a grateful profession by being named a Franklin professor at Penn. I certainly know how much he thought of Lofland and Cavan, for he used their work as exemplifying what I should require of myself. . . . It was always clear to me that, if it wasn't Goffman's purpose to teach in the spirit of Mark Hopkins on one end of that log with you, the lucky student, on the other, then he achieved that model anyway. After work was submitted and critiqued, he invited you to his house and would talk with you about what you had written for two, four, six hours. The same was true of phone conversations, if distance separated you and he, when working on the dissertation. I don't have words enough to describe his generosity. (Gardner 2008)

The shift in Goffman's research agenda, attitudes, and behavior was truly remarkable, and for once, we have evidence that he was conscious of his earlier sexism and made deliberate efforts to show respect for women scholars. We owe the following insight to Mary Jo Deegan (1995:356):

The late Erving Goffman said he was a blatant sexist prior to a major transformation in his consciousness in the mid-1970s. He thought all the men in his age group and cohort were similarly biased against women to greater or lesser degrees. He said this during an intense discussion we had at the American Sociological Association meetings in the New York City, in August 1982. Goffman had prepared a three page, single-spaced, typed critique of a paper a group of us had prepared on his sexism that he had read prior to this hour-and-a-half interview/meeting/confrontation. (Nebraska Feminist Collective 1981)

Let's hope this three-page critique will surface some day. Meanwhile, we can sum up the main points discussed in this section.
Erving Goffman's work continuously fed on his life just as his intellectual insights impacted his everyday existence. The sociological imagination of this remarkable scholar was circumscribed by the hermeneutical horizons of his time and place, which enabled him to see afresh everyday life while blinding him to certain prejudices of his era. A son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Goffman strove to raise himself from the obscurity of Canadian Manitoba,

something he succeeded in brilliantly by writing some of the most memorable scholarship of his generation, becoming the most quoted American sociologist of the second half of the 20th century, and reaching the international stardom few social scientists ever managed to achieve. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*can be read as an extension of Goffman's impostor complex that he managed to parlay into a major intellectual franchise, with his emotionally charged memories of lifting himself up from modest conditions to a major figure in his professional field producing outstanding scholarship in years to come. Goffman was not content to straddle a discourse, to work within a well-established paradigm, daring instead to ride an emotion and consult his deeply personal experience, which delighted his contemporaries immersed in the struggle for dignity and status that hitherto American society tended to reserve for the well-heeled and fully-connected. If Goffman's work met such a welcome reception, especially among the middle classes, the young, and the rebellious, it is because post-WW II America experienced a major upward social mobility push that provided to millions of war veterans and lower class hopefuls access to a university education with its promise of better jobs, better salaries, better quality of life. With this push came the status anxieties that the social climbers felt on the way up as they strove to fit in the middle and upper-middle riches of society. Not surprisingly, some of the EGA contributors fascinated with Goffman in their earlier years grew more critical of his self-presentational emphasis in their later, more established years (Cavan 2008; Shlapentokh 2009).

Goffman's life is a prime example of *bios sociologicus* – a life dedicated to the science of society, with no sharp division between Goffman the scholar and Goffman the man. As the interviews and memoirs collected for the EGA suggest, Erving was a participant observer par excellence, constantly exploring, experimenting, testing social conventions, charting the boundaries of the interaction order, and unnerving those around him in the process. A self-ethnographer, albeit an unacknowledged one, Goffman drew on his own experience for his insights into presentational strategies, the emotional cost of failure, the insidious consequences of stigmatization, the codes of gender inequality, and the intimate workings and filaments of the interaction order. But the reliance on personal experience also biased his perception and compormised the privacy of his subjects. The one-upmanship Goffman practiced in personal communications and his persistent flouting of conventions took a toll on those involved. To be sure, such practices had different meaning at the time when no IRB scrutiny governed ethnographic work, the social mores were tolerant of bullying, and public opinion embodied sexism and misogyny. By placing Goffman's life and work in their historical context, we can learn a good deal about our society, its past and present, and perhaps its future.

Conclusion

In my work on biocritical hermeneutics (Shalin 2008, 2010a, 2010b) I have been guided by various lights, drawing in particular on the work of C. Wright Mills, Alvin Gouldner, Michael Polanyi, and Charles Peirce. From Mills (1959:6), I took the precept that "No social study that does not come back to the problem of biography, of history and their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey." Polanyi (1952:26) impressed me with his conviction that scholarly ideas have "a passionate quality attached to them," that "no sincere assertion of fact is essentially unaccompanied by feelings of intellectual satisfaction or of a persuasive desire and a sense of personal responsibility." Gouldner (1970:40, 41) has reinforced this message with the notion that "every theory is also a personal theory, inevitably experiencing, coping, and infused with the personal experiences of the individuals who author it," and that "however disguised, an appreciable part of any sociological enterprise devolves from the sociologist's effort to explore, to objectify, and to universalize some of his own most deeply personal experiences." Mead and Peirce have been an inspiration in my intellectual journey from the start, with Peirce's pragmatist maxim – "the ultimate meaning of any sign consists either of *. . .* feeling or of acting or being acted upon" (Peirce 1931–1935:5.7) – guiding my quest for meaning.

The Erving Goffman Archives is a web based project (URL: http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/ega/index.html) advancing the research program of biocritique that explores the biographic dimension of sociological imagination. The EGA has an advisory board that includes Ruth Horowitz, Peter Manning, Gary Marx, Tom Scheff, and Jacqueline Wiseman – all of whom knew Goffman and shared their reminisces about Erving the scholar, the teacher, and the man. Frances Goffman Bay (Erving's sister) and Esther Besbris (Erving's cousin) are the project consultants who supplied rare photos and the invaluable insight into Erving's Russian-Canadian-Jewish roots. Sherri Cavan, who wrote a dissertation with Goffman, co-directs the project with me.

The EGA has assembled and continuously updates a large database that allows scholars interested in the life and work of Erving Goffman and people of his era to interpolate Goffman's writings, the biographical context of his lifework, and the memoirs-interviews of his contemporaries. The idea is to interface biography, theory, and history as they transpired in Goffman's scholarship. Biocritical hermeneutics proceeds on the assumption that we cannot escape the cultural competencies acquired in our formative years and informing our ethnographic sensibilities. This is true of Margaret Mead's inquiry into the coming of age in Samoa where she had discerned the free-

wheeling spirit she longed for in her native America. The same can be said about Erving Goffman whose struggle to lift himself from the obscurity of Canadian Manitoba to international stardom is reflected in his numerous publications. Perhaps all inspired ethnography harnesses our personal experience to the cause. That is to say, all ethnography is self-ethnography, all brands of sociological imagination are autobiographic, including my research presented in this in this paper.

As a Russian immigrant, I feel a special affinity with the Averbach family and Erving Goffman. Having discovered the latter's work in Russia, I was struck by its relevance to Russian culture, with its phenomenon of Potemkin portable villages, forced face labor, dissidents committed to mental institutions, and many a ways to evade state control over the face as a means of production of reality as objective and meaningful. I even found a literary prototype for *Asylums* in Chekhov's novel "Ward No. 6" featuring an assortment of oddballs, truth seekers, raging lunatics, and violent wardens. My cultural experiences could lead me astray in this search for parallels, but this undertaking may help track Goffman's ancestors and explore cultural memory passed on through generations.

It is the task of biocritical hermeneutic to flesh out such insights. The Erving Goffman Archives is an instrument that makes this exploration possible.

Appendix Goffman's Narrative and Witness Accounts	
Symptoms Cited in "The Insanity of Place"	**Witness Accounts of Angelica Schuyler Goffman**
"[The manic] moves backward to the grandiose statements of the high rank and quality of his forebears and forward to an exalted view of what he proposes soon to accomplish. He begins to sprinkle his speech with unassimilated technical vocabularies. He talks loudly and constantly, arrogating to himself the place at the center of things this role assumes. The great events and personages of the day uncharacteristically evoke from him a considered and definitive opinion."	"Her family owned a newspaper. . . They were Boston Brahmins." (Lang, 2009) "The Choate [Sky's maiden name was Angelica Schuyler Choate] were vastly more upper class than the Kennedys. They were part of the old New England Protestant establishment, real close in status to the Lodges and the Adamses and the Cabots. Kennedys were late comers, the Irish trash that made money." (Stark 2008)
"Critical national events such as elections, war policy statements, and assassinations	"[S]he went into some kind of psychological tailspin after the assassination of John

are taken very seriously"	Kennedy in November of 1963. That in turn drifted into a kind of hyper-manic stage, in which she developed a fix on the idea that she, using the money in her family, could, with the help with a number of us (myself included), launch into some kind of world-saving enterprise." (Smelser 2009)
"[The manic entertains] an exalted view of what he proposes soon to accomplish. . . . He finds he no longer has time to do his accustomed share of family chores. He increasingly orders other members around, displays anger and impatience, makes promises he thinks he can break, encroaches on the equipment and space allocated to other members, only fitfully displays affection and respect, and finds he cannot bother adhering to the family schedules for meals, for going to bed and rising."	"As of today I am resigning from my job – on good terms with my boss, Genevieve Knupfer – so I can get down to work on going back to graduate school and can help get what's left of my family over the various humps that always follow a death in the family. So at last I can relax and get around to doing what I want. . . ." (Angelica Schuyler Goffman, Letter to D. Schneider, January 7, 1964)
Assistance is volunteered to persons and organizations undesirous of receiving it from this quarter – the patient appreciating that an offer is an unwarrantable means of making contact with the recipient. Public life is entered through its least guarded portals: participation in voluntary work; letters to politicians, editors, and big corporations; celebrity hunting; litigation. Critical national events such as elections, war policy statements, and assassinations, are taken quite personally."	"She was into a variety of charitable activities and would like to talk with me about them. . . . I must have offered a sympathetic ear because soon she began to seek me out not only at parties but by phone or at an arranged luncheon meeting to ask my counsel on what she was about. . . . In her will, Skye made provision for the establishment of a small Berkeley based foundation whose principal purpose was to afford support to community efforts to advance the education of economically dis-privileged youth." (Glock 2009)
"Associating is intensified. Neighbors are dropped in on at unsuitable hours. Parties are arrived at first and left last. There may be a search of home entertainment that is unstabilizing; properly related friends attend until other commitments cause them to defect; newly formed friends are substituted, but each set wears out more quickly than the last, requiring recruitment from the less and less suitable sources; ultimately gathering become socially bizarre. . . . He promotes get-togethers of work personnel, and embarrasses status divisions, by trying to bring together for conviviality everyone at work who is remotely within his social rank."	"At times she would drive you crazy with all kinds of social invitations. We would go to her house, sometimes almost under duress – you had to accept the invitation and drop by her place to have a drink, because she was going nuts for lack of company or some such. Sometimes there would be 20 or 30 people when you showed up. Erving was not happy with this." (Clark 2009) "She was quite vivacious, took to urging us to come up to their house for drinks on Friday afternoons, and so forth. Of course, Erving himself was . . . not a very sociable person. This clearly was rubbing him the wrong way, from what I could see as a young innocent. And eventually people would say Sky was bipolar, a manic-depressive. At some point, I remember, Erving came to us on one Friday occasion

	and sort of saying urgently, 'Can't you see my wife is a sick woman? Will you please leave?'" (Room 2009)
"If the patient is single, unsuitable mating may threaten to occur across age, race, or class lines. If married, then unsuitable re-mating. And some sexual promiscuity may occur of the kind that can be easily realized at will because it trades on marked status differences. In all of this, the patient either takes advantage of others or places others in a position to take advantage of him, in either case to the deep embarrassment of the family."	"She wasn't flirting, you know. But she was an attractive person." (Room 2009) "Sky was a damn good looking woman. . . . When she was normal, she was a charming person, she was fun to talk to . . . small talk, semi-flirting. . . . I certainly have no evidence or reason to believe that she slept around or anything. But as a lot of pretty women at the time, her style with certain kinds of men was a little bit flirtatious. That wasn't unusual." (Stark 2008)
"Family secrets are confidentially divulged at informal gatherings to persons who are merely acquaintances. Newly formed friends are enthusiastically praised to the family, giving the impression that the patient's capacity for deep involvement is being exercised capriciously."	"At one point, she told me, and I hope I have this correct, that her father had died and she had to leave for Boston, and handle the inheritance. She said, 'We are going to see how much we can give to charity in order to cut the tax consequences.'" (Wiseman 2009)
"The manic begins by promoting himself in the family hierarchy [and] no longer has time to do his accustomed share of family chores . . . . [T]the concern of the family is not simply that a members has crazy notions, but that he is not keeping his place in relationship. The manic is someone who does not refrain from intruding where he is not wanted or where he is accepted but at a loss to what we see as his value and status. He does not contain himself in the spheres and territories allotted to him. He overreaches. He does not keep his place"	"The great part of her problem was that she felt that she had the right to her world and her life, that she was not just to be a devoted, totally subservient wife to Erving. Erving was so self-absorbed, self-centered, and what not. Although she worked with him and helped him as much as she could, I think it rankled her to be not just second but maybe the third, or fifth, fiddle in his orchestra." (Scher 2009) "What happened, I think, was that she began her dissertation, and then Goffman got his NIMH grant supporting his work at St. Elizabeth's after the graduate school. She went along with him and got dislocated. . . . I got to know her and started to worry if I could help her get her damned dissertation done." (Stark 2008)

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