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Goffman's Self-Ethnographies*

Dmitri N. Shalin

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, August 14, 2010. I wish to express my profound gratitude to all those who helped preserve the memory of Erving Goffman by contributing a memoir to the Erving Goffman Archives. I am especially grateful to Frances Goffman Bay, Esther Besbris, and Marly Zaslov for providing family documents and invaluable recollections about Erving Goffman's formative years, as well as to EGA board members whose practical assistance and good cheer sustained me throughout this project.

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

Everything we know about Erving 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 Gary 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 averred, "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. Of particular interest for the present endeavor is a lesser known work, "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 Insanity of Place" as a study belying pigeonholing and consistent with the Chicago tradition in sociology.

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, and memoirs from 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 household. It is hard to avoid the impression that we are dealing with a "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 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 updated his account 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 as well as 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 lift himself from the anonymity of Canadian Manitoba and that his continuously evolving theoretical agenda mirrored his personal transformation and self-discovery. In conclusion, I outline the uses of the Goffman Archives and the contribution the large database assembled therein can make to biocritical hermeneutics (Shalin 2007; 2010), 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, self-serving professionals, and poorly supervised custodial personnel. 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 totalitarian states and the horrors of

World War II, and that found itself drawn into the Civil rights movement. Described in gruesome detail, the deprivations 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.

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.¹ 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 egos. 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).² Goffman's approach allows him to spot similarities in institutions as

diverse as Auschwitz, Alcatraz, Exeter, St. Benedict monasteries, and St. Elizabeth's hospital, but "the perspective by incongruity" (Burke 1984) he aptly deploys in *Asylums* and elsewhere in his works risks obscuring none too subtle and hardly inconsequential differences.

In *Behavior in Public Places* Goffman (1963:236) still bristles at the label "mental illness" and decries its power to stigmatize, explaining that "a patient classified as 'regressed' seems without fail to give the impression that he is utterly and irrevocably different from ordinary human beings – a feeling, incidentally, that sociologists are familiar with from their studies of castes and social class." A year later he published a paper "Mental Symptoms and Public Order," 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 1967:140, 147). A change of perspective can be detected in this work: *Asylums* focused on the involuntary institutionalized, whereas now his target is the odd-balls at large and the impact their "situational improprieties" have on the universe shared by convention-bound humans. "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 reassert his belief in the ordinary nature of the infractions banded together as mental health symptoms. "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, even 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 a nuisance; the reader gets an earful 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).

IP accentuates the somatic dimension of mental illness, which is singled out alongside interactional and psychogenic factors that figure in the etiology 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 starkly different light in IP where no effort is made to spot "different factors that will modify our attitude toward the performance," the factors that Goffman touted so extravagantly just a few years back. While the change in attitude is striking, it is not meant to draw attention to itself; the emphasis is on the continuity between the 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's aim is to update his thesis, foreground the 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 wide use at least a decade away. It is in this historical context that Goffman embraced a constructionist view of mental illness which gained currency through the works of scholars questioning "the myth of mental illness" (Szasz 1960). Along with his illustrious colleagues, Goffman decried the view of mental illness as a purely biological phenomenon and exposed the abuses of psychiatry in the United States (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 casts inmates as victims of circumstances sucked into the funnel of betrayal by family members colluding with medical professionals to institutionalize inconvenient individuals who were then left to cope with the degrading conditions through the secondary adjustments, the latter only serving to confirm questionable psychiatric diagnoses.

"The Insanity of Place" marked a notable shift in the perspective adopted by Goffman. He does not back off his earlier claim that mental hospitals exemplify total institutions that "function merely as storage dumps for inmates," but he no longer makes far-fetched claims that "almost anyone's life could yield up enough denigrating facts to provide grounds for the record's justification of commitment" (Goffman 1961:74; 159), nor does he valorize patients as abused human beings suffering from conspiratorial designs. The author's sympathies are now with the families forced to endure manifestly disturbed members whose antics, induced in part by an organic ailment and apt to be downplayed by the doctors, turn home interactions upside down. Situational improprieties are framed here in a starkly negative light, with no romanticizing of the rebellious tactics celebrated in *Asylums*. The scourge of the families, disruptive behavior has little to do with the quest for freedom and a good deal with insanity. The anxious tone in IP contrasts with the detached and ironic discourse of *Asylums*, and the author's take on the career of mental patients is radically altered: would-be patients are ultimately seriously impaired individuals overdue for institutionalization, sometimes indulged by their therapists, and fatefully hurtling towards 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 is unlikely, for Schuyler's financial resources would have allowed her to seek treatment in a 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 a family member in treatment. 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 second half of the 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. Schuyler did not immediately follow Erving to Berkeley when Herbert Blumer had offered him a job in 1957, 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 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 sister 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 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 harrowing 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 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 ground 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 nearly 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, eagerness to invite coworkers to family gatherings, and so on. Certain behavioral 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, at least in the early stages of their relationship. "In our encounters," recalls Charles Glock (2009), a 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 “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.” Valuable 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, still others 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 telling snippets from IP 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 diffuse the family emergency, but we can gather 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 convergent 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 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).

Whatever doubt one can entertain about a particular symptom in IP, its biographical character is unmistakable. Too many details check out – the Foundation Schuyler endowed to help disadvantaged youth (Glock 2008), her sponsoring of get-togethers at her house (Clark 2009; Room 2009), Goffman's feeling of being excluded from the communication between his wife and her psychiatrist (Piliavin 2009), Schuyler's determination to break out of the domestic sphere and complete her Ph.D. (Schuyler Goffman, Letter to David Schneider, January 7, 1963 [?]; Stark 2008; Scher 2009). These similarities call for an analysis and interpretation, and so we now turn to the interplay between Goffman's family situation and his theorizing about 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 Goffman's personal experience illuminated the social world he inhabited and how the same experience obscured its properties inconsistent with this scholar's affective needs.

We cannot be sure whether Goffman's interest in mental illness preceded his wife's treatment, but the two plainly 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 long-standing distaste for psychiatry entered the calculations. It is hard to imagine the author of *Asylums* recommending institutionalization for his wife. We also know that Schuyler did not entirely share Erving's attitudes toward psychiatry, for she credited her friends for helping her pull through the depression while subtly disparaging "one E. Goffman" whose anti-psychiatric sentiments could have led him to make light of her affliction. 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 research on mental institutions and the need to help relieve his wife's suffering 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 imagined 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 presented his theory as a straightforward update on and continuation of his earlier work. He incorporated into his paper the minute details of his wife's disease, and at the same time, glossed 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).

Goffman's theoretical argument hinges on his decision to split asunder the somatic and affective dimensions of mental illness, on postulating 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 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 off panic inside community.

The antiestablishment sentiments and reformist intentions often attributed to Goffman's treatment of mental institutions are also open to doubt. “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). This paean to privacy, as some critics surmised, conceals its author's less-than-activist agenda. I may not entirely agree with Gouldner, Sedgwick, Williams, and other scholars who contend that Goffman's theory “entails an accommodation to existent power arrangements” (Gouldner 1970: 379), but their argument cannot be dismissed offhand. The uplifting verbiage we find in *Asylums* and some other early work is politically ambiguous. “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, one can be skeptical about the melioristic 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 portrayed 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.³ 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 the established order.

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* underestimated the medical side of mental illness, "The Insanity of Place" downplayed 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 felt 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 plausible 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 mortify her husband who saw Schuyler's expensive philanthropic ventures and stabs at social reform as signs of a mind unhinged (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). In all likelihood, 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 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" (Stark 2008). Another contemporary familiar with the Goffmans paints a scenario that features a high-powered scholar obsessed with his work and indifferent to 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 (2008). "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 accounts, which tend to originate outside the Goffman'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 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 forth. Still, we can at this point formulate a few preliminary hypotheses on the crossroads between biography, theory, and history as they converge in 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 disruptive manifestations. While Goffman (1961:155) spurned the official records kept by mental institutions because they fail “to provide a rough average or sampling [and] record occasions when the patient showed capacity to cope honorably and effectively with difficult life situations,” he made no attempt to list counterexamples in IP. 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. The focus on psycho- and sociogenic factors would have required Goffman to look into the

genesis of the case under review and might have served as an occasion for self-reflection, if not self-criticism, something Sky's therapist was likely to contemplate. Rather than considering the interplay between the somatic, psychogenetic, and sociological factors in the genesis of a manic-depressive disorder, Goffman postulated a questionable dichotomy between the "medical" and "mental" phenomena, assimilating his case to the conditions injurious to decorum and considering mental symptoms in isolation from their somatic sources. One has to wince, also, at the ethical implications of Goffman's decision to use his family 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 tragic demise, we can second-guess 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 IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

David Mechanic (1988:150) brings up this intriguing piece of information 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; personal communication, October 22, 2008), but the IP narrative is not the only instance of such a revision. After studying his life and work, I believe that Goffman was prone to amending his views, that his quest for self-discovery made him engage in a tacit, and on rare occasion open, self-critique which occasioned noticeable changes in his research agenda. None of his published works matches IP in the minute details with which real life events were transcribed into a scholarly narrative, yet the self-ethnographic impulse continued to feed Goffman's sociological imagination throughout his professional career.

Given the space constraint and the vast amount of material in the EGA, I can only sketch in the barest 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 devised a conceptual framework for analyzing the presentation of self. Skipping the work on *Asylums* considered in the previous sections, I will discuss Goffman's research on stigma and stigmatizing behavior, the subject he knew from personal experience. And finally, I take up his research on gender inequality that dates back to the late 1960s and that produced pioneering work on sex typing and the arrangements between sexes.⁴

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. It is not just that the young Erving acted in high school plays, or that his sister grew to be an acclaimed theater and movie actress, or that the Averbach family produced a number of artistically gifted men and women; it is the family with its flare for the dramatic and the attention to etiquette and decorum that calls for a sociological analysis. We need to bear in mind that some of the relatives who volunteered their reminiscences have been following Goffman's lifework for decades, that their memories are colored by complicated family dynamics, and that in some cases they might have been influenced by 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 and its matriarch, Muni Averbach, who came to Canada 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 humble conditions (Zaslov 2009; Besbris 2009; Frankelson 2009). Esther Besbris recalls an expensive art book conspicuously displayed on the coffee table in a well-to-do Averbach household, a display meant to underscore the family affluence, which Esther connects with a strikingly similar example in one of Goffman's books. Averbach descendants could be reeling from embarrassment a relative dozing off at a family gathering caused in those present or react with indignation at a family member refusing to wear a hat at a social function (Marly Zaslov 2009;

Besbris, personal communication, September 4, 2010). Status anxiety, control over appearances, strenuous efforts to stem embarrassment in public were part of the Averbach family world.

By all accounts, Erving was a smart, precocious kid who sometimes got himself into trouble after stealing neighbor's apples or blowing up his basement in the course of a chemical experiment gone awry, for which he used to get a generous spanking. His sister, Frances Goffman Bay, describes him as "sensitive," "sentimental," "emotional," intimating 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 emotionally detached, developed an acerbic sense of humor, distanced himself from his family, and according to several witnesses, 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 about Erving's 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; Cf. Fox 2008). Corroborating evidence comes from the relatives who felt estranged from their well-known kin. When Goffman came to receive an honorary degree at the University of Manitoba, Erving's relatives flocked to see their relation only to be disappointed when the celebrated man declined to socialize with them after his convocation speech (Frankelson 2009; Winnipeg Free Press 1976). The evidence is sketchy on how Goffman felt about his Jewish roots, but in *Stigma* (Goffman 1963:24) we find a list of stigmatized groups featuring "the deaf, the blind, the alcoholic, and Jews, or someone from the other side . . . ex-cons and the mentally defective." Then, there is this comment that Goffman made to Dell Hymes about coming of age 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). This juxtaposition of Jewishness and homosexuality is striking; it implies that growing up Jewish was a stigmatizing experience for the man who would one day bring stigma to the center stage of sociological analysis.

In 1952 Goffman married a woman from a protestant family whose father owned a Boston newspaper, supported various philanthropies, founded the Choate prep school, and cut a major figure in local social currents. Some of his contemporaries interpreted Goffman's marriage to a person with a distinguished pedigree and vast financial resources as a sign of his upward

mobility aspirations. Saul Mendlovitz (2009) put it bluntly: “[H]e married her because, again, she was an upper class WASP” (Mendlovitz 2009). Very little is known about the courtship between Erving Goffman and Angelica Schuyler Choate, but while the two were dating, Goffman ([1952] 1997:19) wrote that “in America upper-class women who fail to make a marriage in their own circle may follow the recognized route of marrying an upper-middle class professional.” Soon after Erving and Schuyler tied the knot, he observed: “To experience a sudden change in status, as by marriage and promotion, is to acquire a self that other individuals will not fully admit because of their lingering attachment to the old self. To ask . . . a hand in marriage is to project an image of self as worthy, under conditions where the one who can discredit the assumption may have good reason to do so. To affect a style of one’s occupational or social betters is to make claim that may well be discredited by one’s lack of familiarity with the role” (1967:106-107).

Few commentators knew that Angelica Schuyler Choate was an intellectual in her own right, and none I spoke to were aware that she defended an M.A. thesis on the personality characteristics of upper class women where she quoted her future husband, a fellow U. of C. student (Goffman-Choate 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) where alongside Lloyd Warner, Robert Armstrong, and Tom Burns, Goffman credits for critical feedback “Angelica Choate.” A further clue to the intellectual kinship of Goffman and his wife is found in *Presentation of Self*. In the acknowledgement section of his celebrated treatise Goffman (1959:ix) states: “Without the collaboration of my wife, Angelica S. Goffman, this report would not have been written.” Comparing the early writings of Goffman and his wife is instructive not only because this reveals the possible indebtedness of Goffman to Schuyler’s intimate knowledge of Boston high society, the upper crust status symbols, the inflation of such symbols 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 not merely theoretical. Passing, fitting in, maintaining decorum was a practical imperative for a young Jewish man from a small Canadian town, 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. Goffman’s sister did not attend the wedding, nor did his parents, and none of Goffman’s friends recall the event, suggesting that Goffman was not eager to have his friends and relatives partake in the event and mix with his in-laws (Goffman Bay 2009; Besbris 2009; Mendlovitz 2009; Habenstein 2008).

Status consciousness, one-upmanship, and the loss of face incurred by a social climber's performance would become a master theme in Goffman's writing. In *Presentation of Self*, Goffman takes pains to emphasize that "in most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones," that "efforts to move upward and efforts to keep from moving downward are expressed in terms of sacrifices made for the maintenance of front [and mastering the techniques that] can be used to embellish and illumine one's daily performances with a favorable social style" (Goffman 1959:36). Goffman ([1951] 1997:301) knew the importance of "what is called sophistication concerning food, drink, clothes, and furnishings," and with the possible exception of clothing in which he reportedly showed little interest (Frankelson 2009, Fox 2008), he cultivated sophisticated tastes throughout his life. EGA contributors cite numerous occasions where Erving showed pride in his wine connoisseurship or fine furniture he collected for his house, poked fun at intellectual wannabes or unsophisticated home decorators, snubbed admirers 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; Turner 2010; Scheff 2006). But he knew when he met his match and was exposed for trying too hard to look superior.⁵

Goffman's professional interest in stigma also had a personal dimension. There is a telling footnote in his famous book on stigma where he observed that "low class status functioned as an important tribal stigma, the sins of the parents, or at least their milieu, being visited on the child, should the child rise improperly far above his initial status" (Goffman 1963:4-5). Max Goffman, a hard working Jewish merchant, did well selling haberdashery, but that was not the pedigree his anglophile son could be proud of.⁶ When he talks about another type of stigma implicating "blemishes of individual character," Goffman lists alongside "imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment . . . and radical political behavior" stigmatizing records close to his family – "mental disorder" and "suicidal attempts" (Goffman 1963:4). Then, there are "abominations of the body" – deformities, disabilities, and handicaps that lower self-esteem and invite derision (Goffman 1963:4). The list of qualities a "normal" American male must possess to avoid being stigmatized is instructive: "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 apply to the author. Of particular concern to Goffman must have been his height.⁷ Estimates that come up in the memoirs range between 5'1 and 5'8 (conversations with Erving's sister and an examination of available photos suggest Goffman was closer to 5'4-5'5). Erving's sister refers to him as "tiny" and does not recall him being interested in sports (Goffman-Bay 2009). Joe Gusfield (2008) mused over 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 while placing himself on a tall stool that made him hover over the visitor; she also recalls him discussing the dilemma a plain looking guy faces in a bar when he strains to make those present aware of being an accomplished fellow. Then, there is this discerning recollection from 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." Commenting on a passage from *Stigma* where Goffman cites a letter from a woman with a severely disfigured face, one of his contemporaries observed: "I think the quotes from *Miss Lonelyhearts* are 'deep Goffman'" (Manning 2007).

As someone with the first-hand experience of stigmatization, Goffman had much to say about its insidious nature and devastating consequences, but he was also known to engage in stigmatizing or "hazing" behavior (Lofland 2000:167; Scheff 2006:11). Of particular interest in this connection is Goffman's propensity to use real life occasions as a teachable moment. Erving's friends remember with delight his witty interactional gambits accompanied by trenchant observations on an ongoing professional gathering, a restaurant meal, a chance elevator encounter, or a class room interaction (Lofland 1983; Marx 1984; Irwin 2007; Cavan 2008; Wiseman 2009; Segre 2010). Sometimes such interactions had a clear pedagogical intent, as when passing through a hotel lobby Goffman casually remarked to a group of friends, "'If I can't find anybody more important to talk with, I'll come back and talk with you'" (Berger 2000:279; Cavan 2008). Students invited to Goffman's house could be left waiting at the door while their host was surreptitiously taking notes on their reaction to be shared later with the group attending the seminar (Dingwall 2008). Berkeley sociologists report Goffman's unnerving interactional strategy of standing too close during a conversation, which forced the bewildered interlocutor to back off (Smelser 2009; Glock, 2008; Stark 2008). Such life performances could also have an unintended, and sometimes intended, stigmatizing effect, all the more jarring when a

technical point or a conceptual aperçu he made in his work found its way into practice. “[I]n a polite society, a handshake that perhaps should not have been extended becomes one that cannot be declined. Thus one accounts for the *noblesse oblige* through which those in high status are expected to curb their power of embarrassing their lesser” (Goffman 1967:28). And here is what happened to an overexcited graduate student at Berkeley who barged into Goffman’s office and injudiciously stuck out his hand in the vain attempt to introduce himself: “Goffman stood up, and he looked at the hand, and very slowly the man dropped his hand [**laughing**]. Goffman just let him stand there with his hand out. Then very softly he said, ‘I am busy Mr. Jones.’ When the man left, Goffman said to me, ‘He doesn’t understand, we are students of those kinds of things’” (Turner 2010; cf. Goffman Bay 2009). A person who sold a raffle ticket to Goffman was startled when the famous scholar with deadpan seriousness accused him of shortchanging the purchaser; the leg-pulling went on until Morris Janowitz told Erving to “cut it out” (Goldfarb 2008).⁸ The Benjamin Franklin professor at the University of Pennsylvania once told his junior colleague just denied tenure, “After all, all of us aren’t good enough to teach here” (Lofland 2000:167). And what are we to make of the man who taught us about “civil inattention” humiliating his pupil after the latter got sick on a plane and had to endure his mentor lecturing everyone in earshot how embarrassing it must be to lose control over one’s bowels (Scheff 2006:10; see also Marx 1984; Turner 2010; Berger 2000)? Whatever one can say about such episodes – and they lend themselves to different interpretations – they show that Goffman intentionally blurred the lines between his scholarly and everyday identities, making it difficult to figure when he was being “himself” and when he was engaged in a sociological experiment. His willingness to break conventions in order to render explicit the assumptions behind them left many of his contemporaries befuddled and upset.

One more conclusion we can draw from the above anecdotes is how much Goffman’s behavior was grounded in a particular time and place in history, how closely his sociological imagination followed the conventions of his social strata. A model case of this tendency is Goffman’s attitude toward women in academia. His stance had undergone a remarkable transformation over time, revealing the man’s capacity for growth and self-renewal.

The language of Goffman’s early writings was unabashedly sexist. In *Encounters*, he talked 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 decades that followed, 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; see also Prather 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 comment capturing the excitement Goffman brought to the classroom but also making us painfully 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 several other theoretical commitments, Goffman's views on women in academia changed over time. The new sentiment became noticeable in the second half of the 1960s, after the death of his wife. It was around that time that he and Sherri Cavan discovered at a flea market in Alameda two boxes of women's magazines which 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) listened to Goffman expounding on gender bias in American society (Cavan 2008). "The Arrangements between Sexes" was another milestone publication where Goffman ([1977] 1997:208) denounced (renounced might be a more fitting verb) "sex-based dominance" and sketched the process of sex typing that keeps women subordinate. "Gender, not religion, is the opiate of the masses," writes Goffman ([1977] 1997:203) with his characteristic flair. "A man may spend his day suffering under those who have power over him, suffer this situation at almost any level of society, and yet on returning home each night regains a sphere in which he dominates. And wherever he goes beyond the household, women can be there to prop up his show of competence." Right there the reader is treated to a delightful vignette about siblings, a boy and a girl, growing up in a family that reinforces the gender stereotypes by assigning different chores to each, setting up disparate behavioral expectations, meting out differential punishments. . . . If you substitute "Erv" and "Fran" for "brother" and "sister" in this story," you will see the extent to which the vignette feeds on biographical realities (Goffman Bay 2009; Besbris 2009). In "Felicity's Condition" Goffman (1983) switches to the "he or she" format and takes pain to explain that the habitual reference to a doctor as "he" reflects the discrimination women have suffered in the professional world. Not surprisingly, Goffman had more female graduate students than male at the time of his research on gender bias and showed 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 to 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 striking, and for once, we have evidence that he was conscious of his earlier sexism and made deliberate efforts to show respect for and promote the work of 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 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).

Erving wearing a hairshirt – that must have been a sight to behold. Let's hope this three-page critique will surface some day, along with the recollections of those who witnessed the exchange. Meanwhile, we can sum up the evidence presented in this section that bears on the interplay between dramaturgical sociology and its progenitor's lifeworld.

Erving Goffman's work continuously fed on his personal experience just as his intellectual insights informed his everyday life. The sociological imagination of this exceptionally gifted scholar was circumscribed by specific hermeneutical horizons, which enabled him to see clearly some of the social currents swirling about him while prejudicing him against its other modalities. "In our society, to speak of a woman as one's wife is to place this person into a category [and to invoke] an array of socially standardized anticipations that we have regarding her conduct and nature as an instance of a category of 'wife,' for example, that she will look after the house, entertain our friends, and be able to bear children" (Goffman 1961:53). In America, writes Goffman (1959:193), the "sexual relation is defined as one of intimacy with the initiative allocated to the male. In fact, courting practices involve a concerted aggression against the alignment between the sexes on the part of the male, as he attempts to maneuver someone for whom he must at first show respect into a position of subordinate intimacy." There is a broad-brush quality to such generalizations which bespeak the time and place when they were conjured up but which also tell us something about the conjurer. Would "rural" residence, "unmarried" status, and the lack of "recent record in sports" make a man feel stigmatized? Does "any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways" is bound to feel inferior? Is the world "in truth [just] a

wedding"? Goffman's writings are replete with such sweeping pronouncements, which make all the more sense if placed in the biographical context. When the theorist of impression management describes marriage as a scene of "cold war" hostilities or contends that women are "unsuited to graduate school" or asserts that individuals "who are strongly upward or downward mobile accomplish this in a grand manner by making sure to leave the place of their origins" (Goffman 1959:138) he invites an inquiry into his own experience and biographical circumstances.

A son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Goffman strove to raise himself from the obscurity of Canadian Manitoba, which he succeeded in brilliantly by writing some of the best 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 a gloss on Goffman's impostor complex that he managed to parlay into a major intellectual franchise, as he lifted himself from modest conditions to a major figure in his professional field. Goffman was not content to straddle a discourse, to work within a well-established paradigm, daring instead to ride an emotion and harness his personal experience, which delighted his contemporaries immersed in the struggle for dignity and status that hitherto American society reserved for the well-heeled and fully-connected. If Goffman's work met such a welcome reception among the middle classes, the young and the rebellious, it is because post-WWII America experienced a social mobility drive which gave millions of war veterans and lower class hopefuls access to a university education and the 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 reaches of society. Not surprisingly, some of the EGA contributors fascinated with Goffman in the early stages of their careers grew more critical of his self-presentational emphasis in their later 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 self-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,

skewed his generalizations, and in some cases impinged on the privacy of his subjects.

Take a frame-breaking episode recounted by Goffman's contemporaries, and there is a chance you will find the formal properties of this kind described, classified, and explained in one of his works. Or you can start with a theoretical formulation and then discover in the Goffman archives an instance when it was enacted by the theorist of interaction order. Evidence abounds that Goffman "was intentionally unhinging the frame of ordinary events" and systematically deploying "the tricks that have been played by experimenters (Stand 'too' close in talk and see what happens)" (Goffman 1974:495). "Ironically," continued Goffman, "this application of microsociology may be among its most effective ones." There is more to microsociology than a guide to effective leg pulling, one should hope, but that is one application in which Goffman excelled. The one-upmanship he practiced in personal communications took a toll on those involved. His propensity to conflate scholarly pursuits with everyday engagements made the butts of his interactional ploys feel like he was "heating the mark up" where the situation called for "cooling the mark out." To be sure, such practices had different meaning at the time when no IRB scrutiny governed ethnographic work,⁹ 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 the middle-class America in which he lived and which he strove to understand.

THE GOFFMAN ARCHIVES AND BIOCRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

In my work on biocritical hermeneutics (Shalin 2007; 2008b, 2010b) I have been guided by many lights. 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 research on how scholarly ideas have "a passionate quality attached to them" and his belief 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 a concept built around the notion that "every theory is also a personal theory," 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." And Peirce's pragmatist maxim supplied theoretical fodder for the biocritical inquiry premised on the notion that "the ultimate meaning of any sign consists either of . . . feeling or of acting or being acted upon" (Peirce 1931-1935:5.7).

The Erving Goffman Archives (EGA 2007-2010) advances the agenda of biocritical hermeneutics by exploring the interfaces of biography, theory, and history as they transpired in Goffman's scholarship.¹⁰ Biocritique proceeds on the assumption that we cannot escape the cultural competencies acquired in our formative years and informing our ethnographic research sensibilities. Such competencies bias our inquiry, but they also serve as a vital resource for our sociological imagination. This is true of Goffman whose struggle to lift himself from the obscurity of Canadian Manitoba to international stardom nourished his sociological imagination and shaped his theoretical agenda. Much of inspired ethnography is self-ethnography, although the latter should not be conflated with auto-ethnography.

Denzin (1989:34) defines auto-ethnography as "an ethnographic statement which writes the ethnographer into the text in an autobiographic manner." Central to auto-ethnographic exploration is "the ethnographic I" permeating the ethnographic narrative (Ellis 200; see also Reed-Danahey 1997; Chang 2008). On that definition, Goffman's work is not "auto-ethnographic." As Judith Posner (2000:99-100) noted, "it seems strange when one realizes that while positing a reflective or introspective model of social behavior in his social analysis, [Goffman] has generally been so singularly non-reflective about himself. . . . While he does not 'give' many messages about himself," Posner continues, "he clearly 'gives them off'." Indeed, Goffman (1972:152) scorned the "touching tendency to keep a part of the world safe from sociology" and spent a lifetime exploring people's back stages, but he refused to write himself into his narrative, eschewing autobiography, evading self-reflection, and sealing his archives before he died. Still, as the previous discussion indicates, Goffman's writing has a strong biographical dimension. The terms "auto-ethnography" and "self-ethnography" are used more or less interchangeably today, but they can be usefully differentiated, with the former reserved for a narrative focused on the ethnographic I and the latter referring to the narrative whose author encrypts in it substantial chunks of his or her biographical experience without explicitly acknowledging this fact, or even being fully aware about the auto/biographical moorings of one's work. The extent to which Goffman incorporated his biographical circumstances into his writings varied. In the IP, he consciously drew on his family situation, even though he chose to leave his ethnographic I invisible. The authorial self is missing from his other works as well, but if the witness accounts are to be trusted, it is lurking in the background, whether he explores the dynamics of self-presentation, the management of spoiled identity, or the workings of a misogynist culture. Future biocritical research must establish the manner in which biographical circumstances are sampled in and the extent to which they are transmitted to the sociologist's work.

Grounding social knowledge in the knower's place in society is a common theme in sociological analysis (Marx [1846] 1963; Mannheim [1925] 1986; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1923; Coser 1966; Merton 1973). Specific mechanisms through which structural variables are theoretically refracted through a particular biographical prism are not yet fully understood. The large database assembled and continuously updated in the EGA can aid empirical research in the intersection between history, social structure, and sociological imagination. Scanning Goffman's life for clues to the biographical sources of his rich imagery we find not a few instances where he appears to be drawing on his experience, whether he alludes to the disparate treatment the siblings of the opposite sex receive at home, cites the parent struggling to fend off the impact the hippie movement has on his child, or describes in unusually precise and idiosyncratic details "a patient I observed, a young woman of thirty-two" who "enjoyed shopping trips with a friendly nurse" and showed her undiminished ability "to handle her dress and deportment with all the structural modesty that is required of her sex, while at the same time her language was foul" (Goffman 1963:103). These ethnographic descriptions, as the EGA data suggests, might have been limned from live models (the patient's age in the last chronicle correlates with the time when Schuyler experienced her first major depressive episode, possibly induced by postpartum blues). Such findings are likely to be a boon to conventional biographers more than to sociologists, however, unless the latter investigate a more subtle isomorphism binding Goffman's conceptual forays to his status as a middle-class North American male who came of age in the mid-20th century, traveled widely in academic circles, soaked in wisdom from his day's heady intellectual currents, and changed noticeably under the influence of momentous social movements of his time. The emphasis on class symbols and self-presentation in Goffman's early work is better understood when placed in the historical context of the post war society whose members experienced sustained upward social mobility and the status anxieties accompanying this massive social transformation. The sexist language, the stereotypical beliefs about woman's place in society, and the misogynist advice Goffman offered to female students striving for academic careers reflected the gender bias permeating American culture in the 1950s and 1960s, just as his pioneering work on gender inequality echoed the momentous changes embodied in and effected by the feminist movement. Understanding the sociologically meaningful congruities between Goffman's biography and research corpus, the specific ways in which his lifeworld horizons were transposed into his theoretical formulas, is one among biocritical hermeneutics' urgent tasks.

Critics are known to plow biographies for clues to the writer's literary imagination, and it will be instructive to compare the manner in which literary

scholars interface life and literature with biocritical inquiry into the biographical sources of scholarly creativity. The wisdom of linking biography to artistic vision has been debated for some time (Veselovsky [1859] 1940: 383-385; Shklovsky 1924-1931; Eikhenbaum [1926] 1987). According to the founder of the Russian literary formalism school, "The writer is only a locus where various forces intersect. It is not he who is writing but his epoch. The (literary) fate always remains obscure if you approach it from the vantage point of his personal life" (Shklovsky 1924-1931:281).¹¹ "In our student years, the academic literary history confined itself chiefly to the biographical and psychological studies of certain (naturally 'great') writers," observed another luminary in the formalist-structuralist movement (Boris Eikhenbaum ([1926] 1987:402, 405). "We choose to leave out the questions of biography and the psychological sources of creativity, assuming that such matters, important as they are, belong to other sciences. . . . For us, the central problem in literary history is the problem of evolution outside of personality." Today's literary scholars have shown willingness to take a second look at the biosocial underpinnings of artist's handiwork (see Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 2005, especially chs. 6, 9, 10). The question is how to join an inquiry into the genesis and biographical moorings of creative products with the analysis of their internal structure and place in a particular school or disciplinary canon. Goffman was well aware of the Russian formalists, whose work he cites and whose views he clearly echoed when he stated that we "learn about the *writer* from gossip [and] about the *author* from his books" (Goffman 1974:298). It is imperative to draw a systematic comparison between the Russian formalists' structuralist paradigm and Goffman's programmatic commitment to "formal sociological analysis" that is "concerned only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before others" and leaves out "[t]he specific content of any activity presented by the individual" (Goffman 1959:15). The critique leveled against formalism in literary criticism – that it draws too sharp a line between morphology and exegesis – has traction in Goffman's case insofar as he severs the substantive/instrumental content of interaction from its expressive/ritualistic form. Consigning the writer and the author to separate analytical domains, legitimate and fruitful as it is, risks depriving researchers of a valuable interpretive resource. Documents of the bygone era communicate culturally-approved meanings, but they also function as monuments testifying about the historical agents quite apart from what they meant to communicate or what their creations were taken to mean by lay and professional audiences at the time. The Goffman archives can stimulate a biocritical inquiry into authorial voice in its relationship to the age-specific stocks of meanings from which writers borrow and to which they contribute according to their biographically-conditioned and personally-inflected sensibilities.

The EGA materials offer an opportunity to study the effects of social structure and inequality in down-to-earth interactional settings by examining how Goffman's behavior, as well as that of his colleagues, encoded disparities of status and authority. The impression one gleans from numerous episodes described by contemporaries is that Goffman freely exercised the ample power he accumulated in the academe, that the victims of his pranks and instructional performances were often (not always) people of inferior status. There was also a cultural side to his disregard for conventions. As Miller (2010) points out, Goffman "was far from being the only impolite or impolitic person in Berkeley. Indeed there was a lively tradition of such impoliteness," exemplified by Aaron Wildavsky, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, Jerry Skolnik and other Berkeley faculty whose studied incivility reflected their roots in the east coast Jewish culture with its no-nonsense attitudes, contentious manners, and eagerness to challenge established orthodoxies (Miller 2010; Gusfield 2008). Other scholars detected similar dynamics: "[W]hen ghetto walls crumble and the *shtetlach* begin to dissolve, Jewry – like some wide-eyed anthropologist – enters upon a strange world. . . . They examine this world with dismay, with wonder, with anger, and punitive objectivity" (Cuddihy 1974:68). Examining the cultural roots of interactional strategies deployed by Goffman and his colleagues is a promising avenue for biocritical research.

The EGA data invites a second look at what social scientists subsume under the heading "personality." This construct is based on the assumption that our feelings, actions, and thoughts encompass relatively stable, predictable patterns persisting over time and across situations, with the instruments measuring personality traits devised to enhance emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consistency. This assumption is hard to square off with the EGA data which furnish ample evidence that the same person could make an insulting remark to a colleague denied tenure and offer great solace to another scholar facing a similar plight (Berger 1973; Piliavin 2010), treat in a humane fashion a graduate student overwhelmed with work and leave on the verge of a nervous breakdown another one struggling to follow his directives (Gardner 2008; Zerubavel 2008), make a spectacle of himself at a social gathering while tactfully rearranging social settings in a tight situation (Bershady 2009; MacCannell 2009). The wide range of behavioral and emotional enselments documented in the Goffman Archives suggests that selfhood is a nonclassically propertied object, that human agency is a stochastic, highly situational phenomenon marked by inconsistency and self-contradiction. We can perform a figure-background reversal when postulating consistency or indeterminacy as a default personality mode. The challenge facing biocritical research is to lay bare the structures of indeterminacy and patterns of uncertainty that humans exhibit in everyday life.

Alongside symbolic-discursive and behavioral-performative signifying media, pragmatist hermeneutics zeroes in on somatic-affective indexes as a vital resource in understanding the historical word-body-action nexus (Shalin 2007; 2010b). Passion, as Polanyi (1952) argued, is an indispensable part of scientific inquiry. An affective disposition drives scholarly imagination, inclining researchers to pursue a particular line of inquiry and impute validity to certain kinds of insights. A passionate man, Goffman showed throughout his career predilection for very specific emotional phenomena. He was partial to affective states bespeaking self-control – “poise,” “coolness,” “confidence,” willingness to “take chances” and embrace “fatefulness” (Goffman 1967). We find in his publications occasional references to “excitement” and “thrill” embedded in risk taking and defying odds. By far the most common in his writings, however, are references to “shame,” “anxiety,” “dread,” “anger,” “frustration,” and kindred sentiments that he saw as germane to the entire field of social interaction. One emotion template that leaps off the Goffman’s pages more than any other is “embarrassment,” which could have been a master affect in Goffman’s affective palette. Most everybody is prone to anxiety about losing one’s face and evinces “a capacity for deeply felt shame” (Goffman 1969:253), yet there is something intensely personal about Goffman’s take on this emotional indicator. It is hard to avoid the impression that Goffman speaks from the heart when he tells us that “[w]hether the character that is being performed is sober or carefree, of high station or low, the individual who performs the character will be seen for what he largely is, a solitary player involved in a harried concern for his production. Behind many masks and many characters, each performer tends to wear a single look, a naked unsocialized look, a look of concentration, a look of one who is privately engaged in a difficult, treacherous task” (Goffman 1959:235). Examining the “lyrical” dimension of Goffman’s prose (Abbott 2007), studying the distribution of affective markers in his work and cross-referencing them with his correspondence and witness accounts is a promising avenue for biocritical inquiry.

Biocritical hermeneutics draws on the long-standing tradition of biographical research in social science (Denzin 1989; Petrovskaya 2003; Roth 2005; Goodly, Lawthom, Clough and Moore 2004; Shanahan and Macmillan 2008). The Goffman archives spotlight how real life events are transmuted into bio narratives, how the same incidents are reflected in diverse accounts, and how everyday and scholarly consciousness reconstruct the life course. With over 100 bio entrees in the EGA database, each one featuring numerous episodes, we are in a position to identify the narrative units in which bio information is stored. Thus, we can distinguish between (1) *hearsay* – tales about the person floating around without clear attribution; (2) *anecdotes* – stories traced to a particular source but not necessarily witnessed by the narrator; (3) *episodes* – single events witnessed by a

narrator who did not play a major part in the encounter; (4) *encounters* – an interaction in which the narrator engaged in a focused interchange with the person in question; (5) *transactions* – a series of direct and indirect encounters stretching over a course of time and hinting at a pattern; (6) *reputations* – opinions about the person’s agency formed by specific narrators on the basis of personal observations, second hand accounts, and partial record; (7) *evaluations* – considered biocritical judgments about an embodied historical agent based on personal accounts, institutional records, and other traces that the agent or a group of agents left behind; and finally (8) *biographical repertories* describing a range of bio blueprints that gain currency in a historical group, strata, society, or era. A specific tale may not fall squarely into either category, spanning several framing models, but the above schema might help describe its generic features and illuminate the characteristics of each informational tidbit. It can also reveal their distribution in the sum total of available bio narratives and help understand the distortions that self-sampling is susceptible to in the course of biographical reconstruction.

The EGA provides an opportunity to examine the nature of scholarly reputation and to take stock of narrative devices used to emplot and metaphorize a life. Bio narratives are notable not only because of their power to enlighten us about their object, but also because of what they tell us about an interpreter’s agenda and framing conventions of the time. Some interpreters found the key to Goffman’s sociological imagination in his cultural roots, others tied his theoretical concerns to Goffman’s somatic-affective proclivities, still others took Goffman’s political leanings and existential sensibilities for the touchstone of his personal and scholarly creativity. According to John Irwin, “being a short Jew in worlds dominated by tall ‘goyem’ – he was pissed off and this shaded all of his perceptions and analysis” (Irwin 2007). Dell Hymes ([1984] 2000:56) invokes the stigmatizing experience Goffman faced as a child to explain his gift for naturalistic observation and hardboiled self-presentation: “I imagined his rudeness, his game-playing, his invention of inviolable rules of which one had not hitherto heard, as having this source: a mind gifted for the dissection and creation of culture in a way analogous to the gifts for physics, mathematics and music that we more readily recognize and marvel at, born short and Jewish in a small Canadian town. . . . A mind able not only to perceive behavioral norms of which others were unaware and christen practices that had no name, but also to imagine alternatives that had as yet no culture to inhabit. He made of this gift a life in which joy and anger were inseparable.” Paul Greelan frames Goffman as “an exemplary moralist [who] responds to and articulates the central moral issues that appear in the biblical moral drama, the *Book of Job*,” which, this interpreter insists, “may have exerted a profound influence on Goffman” whose evolution mirrors Job’s moral growth from innocence to wisdom (Greelan 2000:122-123; 126). John Murray

Cuddihy (1974:157) ties Goffman's concerns with civility and interaction order to the Jewish struggle for emancipation: "The obsessive theme of Diaspora intellectuality – morals versus manner, the hypocrisy of civility, the triviality of etiquette – surfaced once more, and once again, became the target, both as fact and as symbol, for that *ressentiment* harbored by emancipating Jewry against the complex code of interaction ritual which governs 'relations in public' (as Erving Goffman calls it) of the members of Western bourgeois society." Tom Scheff pinpoints the "cult of masculinity" that Goffman deftly analyzed in his work, arguing that "this idea might help to understand some of his personal life. Goffman seems to have treated his contacts with me and others as 'action.' His persona in these encounters maintaining 'composure, poise, and control of his emotions,' was not just masculine but hypermasculine" (Scheff 2006:13). According to Alvin Gouldner (1973:382, 379), Goffman is fascinated with the "new bourgeois world of 'impression management' [which] is inhabited by anxious other-directed men with sweaty palms, who live in constant fear of exposure by others and of inadvertent self-betrayal. . . . They are seen less as products of the system, than as individuals 'working the system' for the enhancement of the self. Although disengaged or partly alienated from them system, they are not, however, rebels against the system." Randall Collins ([1986] 2000:74-75) puts an interesting gloss on Goffman's political agenda: "I am making Goffman seem as if he were a defender of the status quo, if not perhaps a reactionary, at least a believer in the external social order of the center. And so he was. But it might have been no accident that so many people thought he was radical. . . . Goffman was an individualist in an era when individualism was an ideal, when avant-garde went to all sorts of extremes. . . . When everyone else was being a critic and a radical, he set himself up intellectually as a Durkheimian conservative – and yet managed to appear nevertheless as a more radical exposé-artist than almost anyone else." And Dean MacCannell ([1983] 2000:13) reads Goffman's life as a sustained assault on bad faith that Sartre decried in his existentialist philosophy: "If we list the various claims (both substantiated and the other kind) that have been made against Goffman – cynical, ironical, duplicitous, deceptive, unserious, nonresponsive – we find they are also the key terms in Sartre's analysis of 'bad faith'. It seems that Goffman took Sartre so much to heart that he assembled a persona for himself exactly on the model of 'Sartrean bad faith', perhaps in the belief that a double negative makes a positive, that is, if he could only mock up bad faith maybe he, at least, could escape the determinism he describes so well." Goffman left enough clues to lend credence to these and many other interpretations. Once he discovered the con artistry at the heart of human condition, he had to grapple with this predicament: How to expose the contingent, ceremonial, and potentially phony side of impression management while continue donning the masks he was furnished by history. The EGA allows us to collate various

emplotments of Goffman's life, examine what a given framing tells us about the framed, the framer, and the framer's historical milieu, track the changes in Goffman's reputation over time, and figure out what accounts for the place a scholar is accorded in the scientific pantheon.

Finally, we should bear in mind that many EGA contributors are themselves master ethnographers and accomplished scholars who reflect on their teachers, training, and careers in sociology. What they tell us about their formative years and pathways in social science is valuable in and of itself. Most have been affiliated in one way or another with the University of Chicago, Berkley, or Penn and have much to say about academia in general and the field of sociology in particular. The EGA offers fresh perspective on our discipline; it promises to be a history and a study of society that blurs the line between the subject and object of research, where we can do justice to our teachers, colleagues, and friends, as well as settle some old accounts in the spirit of charity and exorcise the ghosts of academic years past.

CONCLUSION

This study sets out to demonstrate that much of Erving Goffman's writing was crypto-biographical and that key junctures in his intellectual career followed his life trajectory and jibed with his efforts at self-renewal. To make my case, I systematically cross-referenced memoirs, historical documents, and scholarly works assembled in the Erving Goffman Archives. The investigation showed that in his signature piece, "The Insanity of Place," Goffman extensively relied on self-ethnography, enciphered minute details of his own family situation, and substantially revised his earlier formulations developed in *Asylums* and kindred works written before his wife's suicide. While the familiarity with his wife's conditions enabled Goffman to write a compelling account of a family with a manic-depressive member, it also biased his conceptualization, limited the range of psychiatric disorders encompassed by his theory, obscured the socio-psychological roots of mental illness, and raised ethical issues regarding the propriety of ethnographic research on family members. Based on the data assembled in the EGA, I have generalized this case study to reach a broader conclusion about the key role that personal experience played in shaping Goffman's research agenda and theoretical commitments. Finally, I outlined the program of biocritical hermeneutics and the specific ways in which the Goffman archives can advance our understanding of the intersection between biography, theory, and history.

While this study's aim was to situate Goffman's lifework in a particular cultural niche, it was in no way meant to deny his singularity as a scholar and a human being. Erving had to contend with the socio-historical opportunities and

psycho-somatic resources that providence had furnished him, but what he made out of this capital was inimitable. A man of prodigious talents, astounding work ethics, and fierce sociological imagination, Goffman left behind a wealth of theoretical insight and ethnographic data that will continue to nourish scholars hailing from different parts of academia for years to come. His quest for knowledge animated his scholarly pursuits, enabling him to establish a new subfield in sociology, but his outlook on life remained intensely personal, his quest for enlightenment is still poorly understood, his philosophical ambitions barely touched upon in professional literature. “[I]f the individual compares the very considerable time allowed him to strut and fret in this world, he might well find reason for viewing all of his life as very fateful play of very short span, every second of which should fill him with anxiety about what is being used up. And in truth, our rather brief time *is* ticking away, but we seem only to hold our breath for seconds and minutes of it” (Goffman 1967:261n). Much work is to be done if we are to fathom what Erving Goffman was holding his breath for, what he wanted from life, and what he got out of it in the short span of 60 years that fate had in store for him.

This paper’s main conclusion – that sociological imagination is inexorably biographical – implicates its author and calls for self-reflexivity. Without going into details, I wish to acknowledge that as a Russian immigrant, I feel a special affinity with Erving Goffman, the Averbach family, and their Jewish roots. Having discovered Goffman’s work while still in Russia, I was immediately struck by its relevance to the culture where dissidents were committed to mental institutions, forced intellectual labor used to extract ideological surplus meaning, and the state conspired to turn face into a means of production of social reality as objective and meaningful. With its show trials, mandatory self-criticism, and coerced display of sanctioned affect, Soviet Russia in particular resembled a total institution, although the nation’s imperial tradition was implicated as well through its venerable custom of erecting Potemkin portable villages, which seemed to have seamlessly migrated from Russian lore to the pages of Goffman’s books: “It is a melancholy human fact that after a time all three parties – inmate, visitor, and staff – realize that the visiting room presents a dressed up view, realize that the other parties realize this, too, and yet all tacitly agree to continue the fiction” (Goffman 1961:102).¹² I even found a literary prototype for *Asylums* in Anton Chekhov’s novel *Ward No. 6*, featuring an assortment of oddballs, truth seekers, and callous wardens. My cultural sensibilities are apt to lead astray, but they can also sensitize one to less obvious dimensions of Goffman’s dramaturgy, as well as illuminate the fact that we are all vital links in long semiotic chains of history through which cultural memories are passed from one generation to another.

It is my hope that the Erving Goffman Archives will prove to be a useful tool in the arsenal of sociologists exploring the interfaces of biography, theory, and history.

Appendix

Goffman's Narrative and Witness Accounts

Symptoms Cited in "The Insanity of Place"	Witness Accounts of Angelica Schuyler Goffman
<p>"[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."</p>	<p>"Her family owned a newspaper. . . They were Boston Brahmins." (Lang, 2009)</p> <p>"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)</p>
<p>"Critical national events such as elections, war policy statements, and assassinations are taken very seriously"</p>	<p>"[S]he 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 with a number of us (myself included), launch into some kind of world-saving enterprise." (Smelser 2009)</p>
<p>"[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."</p>	<p>"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)</p>
<p>Assistance is volunteered to persons and organizations undesirous of receiving it from this quarter – the patient appreciating that</p>	<p>"She was into a variety of charitable activities and would like to talk with me about them. . . . I must have offered a</p>

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.”

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]he 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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ENDNOTES

1. Goffman's attitude is already evident in his 1957 review of Belknap's book about mental hospitals where he wryly refers to psychiatrists who "outwardly maintain the fiction that they are running a 'hospital' for the benefit of 'patients' who have come for 'treatment'" (Goffman 1957:121).
2. Cf. Sedgwick (1982:194-195), "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 inbred behaviors in a setting where other people's sense of etiquette is outraged."
3. Goffman anticipates some of this criticism: "In the last few years the non-psychiatric character of considerable symptomlike behavior has become much easier to appreciate because situational improprieties of the most flagrant kind have become widely used as a tactic by hippies, the New Left, and black militants, and although these persons have been accused of immaturity, they seem too numerous, too able to sustain collective rapport, and too facile at switching into conventional behavior to be accused of insanity" (IP:355-356). This argument does not account for the medicalization of protest movements throughout history and the widespread use of psychiatry to silence political dissent. Also, Goffman misses an opportunity to compare situational improprieties as political tactics and as psychiatric symptoms. Throwing feces at the attendants described in *Asylums* refers to behavior known to occur in other institutions (e.g., Guantanamo Bay), but if the inmate starts defiling his cell companions, his behavior will be harder to classify as protest, and by the time he begins to smear himself with feces, put it into his mouth, and display similarly outlandish conduct, the store of conventional explanations for such unconventional behavior will be quickly exhausted. Goffman misses the pervasive and mutually-reinforcing nature of psychiatric symptoms when he insists that each psychotic episode can "be matched precisely in everyday life" (IP:147).
4. One other research interest with a rich biographical subtext crying for an in-depth analysis is Goffman's study of casino culture. Goffman worked for years on this topic, mentioning his research in various publications and giving a foretaste of things to come in the essay "Where the Action Is" (Goffman 1967). There are strong indications that he wrote a manuscript or at least left copious notes on the subject, but he chose not to make those public. We can surmise about the reasons from various accounts suggesting that he (and his wife) ran afoul of the gambling establishment after being apprehended counting cards, which made him a persona non grata in Nevada casinos (see Clark 2009; Frankelson 2009).
5. 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 kind 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).
6. As Goffman observed in the same footnote, the "management of class stigma is of course a central theme in the English novel" (Goffman 1963:45).
7. Analyzing symbols of class status, Goffman (1951:301) makes the following observation: "In Britain, for example, conditions of hands and height in men, and secondary sex characteristics in women, are symbols of status based on ultimately on the long-range physical effects of diet, work, and environment."
8. Les Kurtz, the victim of Goffman's give-me-my-money prank, later found the way to turn the tables on his tormentor. Once he spotted Goffman wolfing down a sandwich near a convention ballroom and, pretending to be a hotel employee, explained to the conventioneer that this was against hotel rules, which elicited an angry outburst from Goffman (Goldfarb 2008). In another episode, Goffman found himself on

the defensive when a Berkeley student responding to Goffman's stand-too-close shtick refused to budge and surprised the professor with "Shall we dance?" (Stark 2008).

9. Goffman described participant observation as a way of "getting data . . . by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. . . . That 'tunes your body up' and with your 'tuned-up body' and with the ecological right to be close to them (which you obtained by one sneaky means or another), you are in a position to note their gestural, visual, bodily response to what's going on about them and you are empathetic enough because you have been taking the same crap they were taking – to sense what it is that they're responding to" (Goffman 2002:125-126).

10. 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 reminiscences about Erving the scholar, the teacher, and the man. Frances Goffman Bay (Erving's sister) and Esther Besbris (Erving's cousin) are project consultants who supplied rare photos, matchless recollections, and trenchant insights into Erving's Russian-Canadian-Jewish roots. The project co-directors are Sherri Cavan and Dmitri Shalin.

11 As cruel fate would have it, Shklofsky discovered firsthand the radical manner in which the writer's biography and social situation can alter his perspective. In the 1930s, facing attacks from orthodox soviet Marxists, he increasingly distanced himself from, and eventually renounced, the formalist tenets that called for grasping artistic products solely in terms of their internal structure. He insisted on being sincere about his about-face and embracement of class analysis that he had earlier ridiculed as hopelessly reductionist even during the Khrushchev's Thaw when his colleagues began to reclaim the formalist tenets.

12 I did not realize that Goffman actually used the Potemkin village metaphor in his writing (see Goffman 1961:103). I am grateful to Michael Delaney for bringing this fact to my attention.