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GOFFMAN IN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper, my aim is to call attention to Erving Goffman's contributions to feminist theory. I begin by reviewing his sociological agenda and assessments of that agenda by his critics. Next, I consider various substantive contributions of his work to our understanding of women's experiences in public places, spoken interaction between women and men, and sex and gender. I conclude with a discussion of the significance of Goffman's work for analyzing the politics of and in the personal sphere.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s and 1970s, one of the best known calls to action among U.S. feminists was the declaration that "the personal is political." Then, the slogan seemed to encompass everything from cases of sexual exploitation of women in the workplace to cases of wives' subordination to their husbands in the home. As a number of writers pointed out, this slogan made explicit the many connections between the systemic mistreatment of women in the economy, the academy, the law, medicine and politics—and the systematic abuse of women in the office, in the classroom, and in the bedroom. The popularity of the notion that "the personal is political" can, in one sense, be attributed to the interweaving of these connections and to the common interests the notion implied among women from all walks of life.

With the emergence of sustained scholarly attention to these connections (and the emergence of what is now known as feminist theory), the slogan lost a great deal of its appeal. For one thing, we began to understand that the basis of solidarity it implied was greatly oversimplified. For example, the economic interests of immigrant women who clean native-born women's houses for a living are very different from (though intertwined with) the interests of their employers (Colen 1986; Glenn 1986, 1992). Moreover, the political interests of African-American,

Native American and Puerto Rican women in questions of reproductive choice are very distinct from those of white women, who have no comparable history of forced sterilization based on race (Davis 1981). And the legal interests of lesbian mothers in legislation pertaining to definitions of the family are fundamentally different from those of heterosexual mothers (e.g., see Johnson 1994). Thus, one reason it became difficult to see the personal as political was the growing awareness that what counted as "personal" or as "private" varied considerably among women themselves.

Another reason, though, was the increasing realization that many domains of life which a woman might herself identify as "personal" were not idiosyncratic but interactional in character. We learned that experiences such as being ignored or interrupted while speaking (West and Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Zimmerman and West 1975), having one's smile and friendly disposition be commanded as a job requirement (Hochschild 1975, 1979, 1983), or being subject to evaluative commentary on the street (Gardner 1980, 1989, 1990) were profoundly social, originating in the interaction order (Goffman 1983b) rather than in characteristics of individual women. Hence, a second reason the popular slogan fell into disuse was the realization that "in front of, and defending, the political-economic structure that determines our lives and defines the context of human relationships, there is [a] micropolitical structure that helps maintain it" (Henley 1977:3).

In this paper, my purpose is to call attention to Erving Goffman's contribution to this realization and to feminist theory more generally. The task might seem an odd one: after all, Goffman's work never appeared in feminist journals (such as *SIGNS* or *Gender & Society*). Only two of his published works specifically address sex and gender (Goffman 1976, 1977), and citations to his writings are noticeably absent from many prominent volumes on feminist theory. His reliance on purportedly "generic" masculine terms throughout much of his scholarship might lead some to question whether women were even included in his formulations.[1]

But I propose that Goffman's contributions to feminist theory were far more generous than is publicly acknowledged, and that such acknowledgment is necessary to collect the further benefits of his legacy. As others have already noted (Drew and Wootton 1988:2), Goffman himself was no fan of academic efforts (such as this one) to classify portions of an author's work according to existing conceptual frameworks (Goffman 1981:61). His insistence, however, on the apprehension of his subject matter "in its own right" suggests a strategy for tracing his contributions, namely, beginning with the parameters of the task he set himself in the first instance.

GOFFMAN'S AGENDA

And, in the first instance, Goffman's purpose was not to push forward the boundaries of feminist theory but to provide a foundation for—and outline the boundaries of—the study of social interaction "as a substantive domain" of inquiry (1983b:2). He advanced this purpose through a disciplined focus on the socially situated character of human action, identifying "the social situation" as (what other kinds of analysts might call) his unit of analysis (Goffman 1983b).

Methodologically, of course, he is hard to pigeonhole (e.g., see Drew and Wootton 1988; Williams 1988; and especially, Schegloff 1988). In his Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, Goffman (1983b:1) described his "preferred method of study" as "microanalysis"—a term which itself implies that units of analytic interest are normatively larger (Schegloff 1988:100). Sometimes, he applied this method by studying the behaviors of "deviants" to uncover the routine practices of "normals" (e.g., Goffman 1956).[2] This strategy ensured analyses that were both comparative and inductive, defining the boundaries of interaction across a variety of settings and identifying oriented-to features of human conduct (Drew and Wootton 1988:8; Garfinkel 1956:190). Yet the strategy of studying "deviants" to generate analyses of "normals" has been viewed with some suspicion since Freud applied it to women (cf. Chesler 1972; Millett 1970; Weisstein 1971).

Sometimes, Goffman made comparisons to the practices of "abnormals" rather than outright deviants. Children (in most situations he describes, but especially, Goffman 1976); party hostesses (Goffman 1967:120); and women with new hairdos (Goffman 1983a:24) are among those whose special dilemmas he employed to make readers conscious of their own interactional skills and techniques. This strategy, too, had its costs and benefits. On the one hand, it demonstrated considerable ingenuity, bringing to awareness practices that are usually taken for granted (Drew and Wootton 1988:9; see also Garfinkel 1967). Advancing "perspective by incongruity" (Burke 1936, cited in Lofland 1980:25), he blurred social distinctions in levels of power and prestige that we ordinarily take for granted, and thus, he elicited a radically democratic understanding of interactional dilemmas across a wide range of situations. On the other hand, this strategy tended to involve typified versions of the dilemmas in question, and thus, it has been characterized as a kind of "sociology by epitome" (Schegloff 1988:101).

Whatever the shortcomings of his methods of data collection and analysis, even Goffman's critics agree that his results have paid off. Not only do they credit him for establishing the interaction order as a rightful domain of study, but also, for "the realization that there was a subject matter there to study" (Schegloff 1988:90). Most important, for purposes of this paper, they acknowledge him for introducing key analytical resources for understanding the organization of interaction (Collins 1988; Kendon 1988; Schegloff 1988).

It is testimony to Goffman's deep and abiding impact on feminist thinking that these key analytic resources have found their way into our writing with so little acknowledgment of their source. To be sure, tracing a legacy is difficult in the absence of an explicit will. Insofar as Goffman "eschewed the ritual apparatus of institutional continuity," such as editing collections of his students' papers, providing prefaces to endorse others' books, encouraging commentaries and secondary analyses of his work, or engaging in extensive responses to published criticisms of his work (Williams 1988:64), some might argue that he died intestate. And, insofar as many of those who have profited handsomely by his bequests are no longer aware of where these came from, it might seem pointless to inform them at this date. But I take it that tracing Goffman's legacy involves not only noting very direct and specific contributions to feminist theory, but also, noticing how elements of Goffman's work entered into the universe of feminist discourse, where we could pick it up and use it without realizing how it came to be at hand.

There are, of course, very well known feminist works that explicitly cite his schol-
arship as their point of departure. By using these as a frame of reference, I hope to
make his less obvious contributions more explicit.

GOFFMAN'S LEGACY TO FEMINIST THEORY
Involvement Obligations

Consider Goffman's (1957) distinction between the different kinds of involve-
ment obligations participants owe one another in focused and unfocused gather-
ings. *Focused* gatherings, of course, are those "characterized by a single official
focus of cognitive and visual attention that all full-fledged participants [must]
help to sustain" (1957:58). By contrast, *unfocused* gatherings are the kind "where
individuals in one another's visual and aural range go on about their respective
business" and are obliged to display themselves as doing so (1957:58). The
involvement obligations attendant to this distinction are the keys to everything
else that followed, including such important advances as the notion of civil inat-
tention (Goffman 1963a).

As Goffman (1963a:83-84) took pains to make clear, *civil inattention* is not really
"inattention" at all, but a form of courtesy:

> When persons are mutually present and not involved together in conversation
> or other focused interaction . . . one gives to the other[s] enough visual notice to
> demonstrate that one appreciates that the other[s are] present (and that one
> admits openly admits to seeing [them]), while at the next moment withdrawing
> one's attention from them so as to express that [they do] not constitute [targets]
> of special curiosity or design.

Passing on the street, for example, uninvolved persons may engage in this cour-
tesy by eyeing one another from a distance but turning their glances downward
as they come within eight or so feet of their passing point—shifting from "high
beam" to "low," as it were (p. 84). As Goffman observed, paying civil inattention
displays to others that they are not objects of undue fear, hostility or avoidance,
while simultaneously displaying oneself as open to similar treatment from them.
Thus, rights to civil inattention are intimately linked to proper behavior (p. 87):
"propriety . . . tends to ensure [one's] being accorded civil inattention; extreme
impropriety . . . is likely to result in [one's] being stared at or studiously not seen."

Street Remarks, Address Rights and the Urban Female

The most obvious payoff of this formulation for feminist theory is, of course, the
work of Carol Brooks Gardner (1980, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1995), Goff-
man's last doctoral student.[3] Drawing on Goffman's (1963a) framework for under-
standing the involvement obligations attendant to unfocused gatherings, Gardner
(1980) was the first to conduct systematic empirical research on street remarks,
that is, the "free and evaluative commentary that one individual offers to an unac-
quainted other in public places" (Gardner 1989:48). Through 18 months of partici-
pant observation in Santa Fe, she observed that women were the objects of "more,

and more vigorous markers of public passage," than men were (Gardner 1980:333). These were not women who themselves exhibited "extreme impropriety" (cf. Goffman 1963a:87). To the contrary, "comely and well groomed women" were the objects of street remarks along with "unattractive" and "sloppy" ones; mature and more "disciplined" women received such remarks along with younger and "freer" ones; and neither class nor race category protected women against violations of the right to be left alone (cf. Goffman 1963a:87-88).

Gardner (1980) notes that conventional wisdom (including some cited by Goffman [1963a:144-145]) recommends treating men's street remarks as compliments. Etiquette books and popular magazines advise women to show graciousness and appreciation for these public "noticings" of their appearance. However, Gardner (1980, 1989) pinpoints the problem with the assumption underlying such advice: that it is women's appearance which "triggers" such remarks in the first place. Her findings show that women who attempt to follow the dictates of conventional wisdom meet with multiple contradictions. Compliments can be received with a simple "thanks," insofar as they constitute the first pair-part of an adjacency pair sequence (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Pomerantz 1978). But Gardner observed that ostensibly flattering street remarks could, after receiving "thanks" in return, escalate into double entendres, abusive commentary or prolonged and detailed assessments, which made it hard to treat their evaluations as complimentary. Recipients of these "third [or fourth or *n*th] moves" found themselves having ratified the conversational openings that the initial street remarks provided (see also Goffman 1977:328).

At issue here is the character of women's life in public places. Gardner contends:

> When [street] remarks can be construed impersonally, when they do not involve vulgar language, when they are unambiguously complimentary, when the speaker makes only the first remark and does not attempt another—then a woman may feel positive about being spoken to in public by an unknown man. Her positive feeling presumes that she is willing to overlook the asymmetry of public life . . . (1980:337).

The "asymmetry" she talks about here is further documented in her studies of men's "exploitative touch" (Gardner 1994b), women's concerns about revealing "access information" (Gardner 1988), and women's fears of crime in public places (Gardner 1989). Throughout these detailed investigations, she demonstrates that life in public is a phenomenally different proposition for women than it is for men: fraught with endless opportunities for the exploitation of breaches of civil inattention and infinite opportunities for the invasion of one's personal sphere (as well as one's person). Small wonder, then, that many of the women she talked to saw public places as "sites of sexual harassment in everyday life" (Gardner 1989:54).[4]

Spoken Interaction

Consider next the arena of spoken interaction. It was Goffman who laid out the ground rules for a sociological understanding of this arena back in 1955, with observations like the following:

In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages. An understanding will prevail as to when and where it will be permissible to initiate talk, among whom, and by means of what topics of conversation. A set of significant gestures is employed to initiate a spate of communication and as a means for the persons concerned to accredit each other as legitimate participants... A set of significant gestures is also employed by which one or more new participants can officially join the talk, by which one or more accredited participants can officially withdraw, and by which the state of talk can be terminated ... An understanding will prevail as to how long and how frequently each participant is to hold the floor. The recipients convey to the speaker, by appropriate gestures, that they are according him their attention... Interruptions and lulls are regulated so as not to disrupt the flow of messages... A polite accord is typically maintained, and participants who may be in real disagreement with one another give temporary lip service to views that bring them into agreement on matters of fact and principle. Rules are followed for smoothing out the transition, if any, from one topic of conversation to another (Goffman 1955:226).

By emphasizing the observable character of spoken interaction as a socially situated phenomenon, he not only set the stage for what is now known as conversation analysis,[5] but also for the substantial body of feminist work that focuses on the relationship between gender and spoken interaction (e.g., see Henley and Kramarae 1991; Lakoff 1975; McConnell-Ginet, Borker, and Furman 1980; Miller and Swift 1976; Spender 1980; Thorne and Henley 1975; Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley 1983).

Gender and Spoken Interaction

Though few feminists acknowledge it as explicitly as Nancy Henley (1977:4), most work on this topic rests on a general principle of interaction which Goffman identified in 1956: the principle of symmetrical relations between equals and asymmetrical relations between those who are not. Goffman devised the principle from watching and listening to interactions between patients and staff members in a mental hospital. Feminist research has employed it to radically transform our understanding of what goes on between "the sexes" in everyday talk.[6]

For example, Pamela Fishman (1977, 1978a, 1978b), who coined the term "support work" to describe what women do in their conversations with men, relied implicitly on this principle in order to identify the phenomenon of "support work" in the first instance. By carefully listening to (and looking at detailed transcripts of) casual conversations among white, middle-class heterosexual couples relaxing at home, she found an asymmetrical relationship between women and men, namely, that women did far more work to generate a flow of messages than the men they talked to.[7] For example, women demonstrated their ongoing attention as listeners through precisely timed monitoring responses (e.g., "yeah," "um-hmm," and "uh-huh") and displays of appreciation (e.g., "You're kidding!") virtually between breaths in men's unfolding utterances. In Goffman's (1955) terms,

they conveyed to men, by appropriate gestures, that they were according men their attention (see also his [1971:63] discussion of the "dialogistic character" of support-ive interchanges). By contrast, men's monitoring responses tended to come after the fact: either following the completion of a woman's lengthy remark (Fishman 1977) or following a substantial silence (Zimmerman and West 1975). In Goffman's (1955) terms, men did *not* convey to women that they were according women their attention, but rather, implied a lack of interest in what women had to say (see also his [1971:68] discussion of the withholding of ritual ratificatory supports, and his [1974] discussion of the accommodative function of the ritual order).

Fishman's work illustrates how particular characteristics of "women's conver-sational style" (cf. Tannen 1990) may in fact be solutions to problems women face when talking with men. For instance, by virtue of their lesser likelihood of engag-ing men's attention when they speak, women may use more questions to ensure their getting listened to (Fishman 1978a). Conversely, men's greater reliance on statements to open up topical talk (Fishman 1978a) may stem from their own greater likelihood of being listened to—regardless of what they might say. And, like women's household labor, their support work is made to seem invisible: "Since interactional work is related to what constitutes being a woman, with what a woman is, the idea that it is work is obscured. The work is not seen as what women do, but as part of what they are" (Fishman 1978a:405).[8]

My work with Don Zimmerman on interruptions (West and Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Zimmerman and West 1975) also rests implicitly on Goffman's (1956) princi-ple of "symmetrical relations among equals." For example, in our earliest study of casual conversations between white, middle-class women and men who knew one another (Zimmerman and West 1975), we found that men initiated 96% of all interruptions, and that men interrupted more in every exchange we analyzed. When we later compared these conversations to a set of parent-child conversa-tions recorded in a doctor's office (West and Zimmerman 1977),[9] we found that women and children received similar treatment in conversations with men and adults: both were interrupted much more often, and interrupted in ways that destroyed the topical coherence of their contributions (cf. Goffman's [1976:4-5] analysis of the parent-child complex, and of what it means to act like a parent in relation to a child). Our laboratory study (West and Zimmerman 1983) yielded the same pattern of gendered asymmetries, even in conversations between strangers who were meeting for the first time. Thus, we concluded that repeated interruption by a conversational partner could not only be a consequence of one's lesser status, but also, a means of establishing that status differential. We saw it, in other words, as a way of "doing" power in face-to-face interactions—and insofar as power is implicated in what it means to *be* a man vis-á-vis a woman—we saw it as a way of "doing" gender as well.

Goffman (1955, 1956) also provided the conceptual grounding for my work with Angela Garcia (West and Garcia 1988; see also West 1992) on the organiza-tion of topical transitions in conversations between women and men. There, we found an asymmetrical distribution of the work involved in effecting possible topic changes, one in which men initiated the majority of changes that occurred. However, most topic changes were preceded by conversationalists' collaborative efforts to close down prior topics—or, by prior topics' "death." So most of the changes we observed were, in effect, warranted by speakers' joint activity or inac-

tivity. And, of those that were warranted, women were as likely to initiate them as men were.

It was the production of *unwarranted* topic changes that resulted in men's disproportionate initiation of topic changes overall: men initiated all of the seemingly unilateral changes we observed. They initiated unilateral changes in the wake of women's "passed turns" (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), and they initiated them in the middle of women's turns-in-progress; they initiated them in the course of ongoing topic development, and they initiated them in ways that cut short such development. Perhaps most important, men initiated unilateral topic changes that allowed them to *refrain from other activities*, such as asking about women's potential "tellables" or disagreeing with women's self-deprecations.

What men achieved through these unilateral topic changes was a then-and-there determination of activities that would not be pursued and tellables that would not be told (West and Garcia 1988:570). In the process of those determinations, conversationalists demonstrated their accountability to normative conceptions of gender. For example, a woman's explanation of the relationship between her major and her plans for law school (perhaps an unwomanly aspiration) was cut off mid sentence; a woman's discussion of her feelings about being "too close" to her family (arguably, an "unmanly" topic) never transpired; and a woman's assessment of herself as "really an irrational person sometimes" met with no disagreement.

Our point was not simply that women pursued certain conversational tangents (such as descriptions of their personal feelings) that men preferred to avoid. Rather, we concluded that women's pursuit of those tangents—and men's curtailment of them—both drew on and exhibited what it is to be a woman—or a man— in these contexts (see West and Zimmerman 1987:144).

By now, a devil's advocate might be prompted to ask, what are the implications of these findings for Goffman's (1955) initial description of the ground rules for conversation? If men do *not* convey to women, by appropriate gestures, that they are according women their attention; if men do *not* regulate interruptions so as to avoid disrupting the flow of women's messages; and if men don't always follow the rules for smoothing out transitions between one conversational topic and another, does that mean Goffman was wrong? To the contrary. His conceptual model is not that of a "closed natural system" or a "zero-sum" game. It is a much more inclusive model, in which "the set of norms does not specify the objectives the participants are to seek, nor the pattern formed by and through the coordination or integration of these ends, but merely the modes of seeking them" (1963a:8). In a nutshell, exploitations of the rules are always possible within his model, but the model itself provides for how they will be seen and interpreted (cf. his analysis of violations of rules of conduct by "somewhat disturbed" patients in a mental hospital [1956]). As he put it, "The human tendency to use signs and symbols means that evidence of social worth and of mutual evaluations will be conveyed by very minor things, and these things will be witnessed, as will the fact that they have been witnessed" (Goffman 1955: 225-226).

Goffman's legacy to this field, then, is twofold: an appreciation of how power works in spoken interaction between women and men, and an appreciation of mundane conversation as the means of discovering this. He deserves much of the credit for our realization that the exercise of power is perhaps most effective

when it is muted, if not euphemized (West and Zimmerman 1983:102; Henley 1977:13-21). And he deserves at least partial credit for the observations that have been inspired by this understanding.

Theorizing Sex and Gender[10]

In the space remaining to me here, I want to focus on those of Goffman's works (1976, 1977) that explicitly focus on how we might conceptualize sex and gender. Although both are nearly 20 years old, I propose that these works have been badly neglected in feminist scholarship (as well as sociological scholarship more generally, see Smith 1996)—and that we have yet to appreciate their full implications. For example, take one of the best books on feminist theory published in the past 10 years (Connell 1987), which contains a 23-page bibliography at the end. Goffman's (1976) *Gender Advertisements* appears here, between Godelier's (1981) "The Origins of Male Domination" and Goldberg's (1973) "The Inevitability of Patriarchy." But of *Gender Advertisements* itself, the author writes:

> Texts on sex roles almost always contain a party-piece on sex-typed adornment—make-up, clothing, hair-style and accessories. Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* adds positioning and posture to the catalogue. In the additive framework of sex role theory this is interpreted as a social marking of the natural difference: we put girls in frilly dresses, boys in running shorts and so on. But there is something odd about this. If the difference is natural why does it need to be marked so heavily? (Connell 1987:79-80).

This, I think, reflects a common misunderstanding of Goffman's (1976) purpose (albeit by a colleague whom I respect and admire). First, he did not, as the quote implies, merely "add positioning and posture to the catalogue" of sex-typed adornments. It was Goffman who gave us the first sociological understanding of demeanor back in 1956,[11] and who thereby provided for the possibility of studying adornment, "sex-typed" or not (e.g., see Henley 1977:82-93). Second, even the photographic essay in *Gender Advertisements* (1976:24-82) was not simply about cataloging women's and men's positionings and postures. Rather, it was about advertisers' observable *use of these as a resource* for expressing something fundamental about relations between the sexes, for example, women's need for manly help and assistance with minor tasks (pp. 32-36). Third, by positioning Goffman (1976) within "the additive framework of sex role theory," the quote, in effect, collapses the views of Erving Goffman (1976) and Talcott Parsons (1951; Parsons and Bales 1955).[12] There is a clear and present difference between the two, not least of which is the distinction between Parson's model of "a closed natural system" and Goffman's model of "a social order" (Goffman 1963a:7-8). Fourth, and most important, there is the question that appears at the end of the quote, "If the difference is natural, why does it need to be marked so heavily?" (a query posed by many others besides Connell).

Goffman himself posed the question in the first 9 pages of *Gender Advertisements* (1976:1-9) and took a first step toward answering it:

> There is a wide agreement that fishes live in the sea because they cannot breathe on land, and that we live on land because we cannot breathe in the sea. This

> proximate, everyday account can be spelled out in ever increasing physiological detail, and exceptional cases and circumstances uncovered, but the general answer will ordinarily suffice, namely, an appeal to the nature of the beast, to the givens and conditions of his existence, and a guileless use of the term "because." Note, in this happy bit of folk wisdom—as sound and scientific surely as it needs to be—the land and sea can be taken as there prior to fishes and men, and not—contrary to genesis—put there so that fishes and men, when they arrived, would find a suitable place awaiting them (p. 6).

The moral of this little story was, he said, its lesson about our most fundamental way of thinking about ourselves: "an accounting of what occurs by an appeal to our 'natures,' an appeal to the very conditions of our being" (p. 6).[13] The *doctrine of natural expression* allows us to read the signs given off by objects in our environment—including ourselves—as expressions of their fundamental natures. Through use of this doctrine, we seek information about what is momentarily true of the objects and persons we encounter (e.g., whether someone is happy or sad, intending to snub us or not) as well as *what is overall and structurally basic to them.*

Insofar as we believe gender to be one of the most enduring and deeply seated of human traits, we learn to produce and read expressions of gender as indicative of a structurally basic state of affairs. As (Goffman 1976:8) put it:

> What the human nature of males and females really consists of . . . is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or males.

This, I suggest, was his answer to the question, "If the difference is natural, why does it need to be marked so heavily?"—namely, that there is *nothing* natural about manly and womanly "natures," save for our capacity to depict them that way. The object of the heavy markings in his 60 pages of advertisements (as he took pains to specify) was to provide scenes *that could be read at a glance*, "intentionally choreographed to be unambiguous about matters that uncontrived scenes might well be uninforming about" (Goffman 1976:23).

In "The Arrangement between the Sexes," Goffman (1977) moved beyond contrived scenes and ventured the next step: reconceptualizing gender from the angle of the public order and the social situations that sustain it. If nothing else, his introduction to this paper is something we should all be grateful for (and use as a preface to any *Introduction to Feminism*):

> Women do and men don't gestate, breast-feed infants, and menstruate as part of their biological character. So, too, women on the whole are smaller and lighter boned and muscled than are men. For these physical facts of life to have no appreciable social consequence would take a little organizing, but, at least by modern standards, not much (p. 301).

Here, Goffman's exquisite literary style is at its best: in three sentences, he dispenses with entire libraries' worth of justifications for women's oppression.[14]

Apart from his style, though, recall his argument in this paper:

> It is not... the social consequences of innate sex differences that must be explained, but [how] these differences were (and are) put forward as a warrant for our social arrangements, and, most important... [how] the institutional workings of society ensured that this accounting would seem sound (Goffman 1977:302).

Here, he explained the "heavy markings" (Connell 1987:80) of sex difference in public life *as a consequence of* the institutional arrangements they sustain.

Look, he said, at the variety of institutionalized frameworks we've created for enacting our "natural, normal sexedness" (Goffman 1977; West and Zimmerman 1987:137-138). For example, the physical features of social settings provide an obvious resource for the expression of "essential" differences between the sexes.[15] Throughout North America, we segregate "ladies'" from "men's" rooms as if these were the sites for radically different biological processes—despite the fact that females and males are more similar than different when it comes to "waste products and their elimination" (Goffman 1977:315). We lavishly adorn such settings with dimorphic equipment (like vanities and urinals), despite the fact that both sexes achieve the same ends through the same means in the privacy of their own homes. As Goffman (1977:316) emphasized:

> The *functioning* of sex differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that biologically recommends segregation; *that* arrangement is a totally cultural matter... toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of [sex difference] when in fact it is a matter of honoring, if not producing, this difference.

He went on to point to our use of standardized social occasions as further stages for evoking our "essentially different natures." For instance, he noted that organized sports offer a prototypical framework for the expression of "essential" manliness. On the field or on the court, the so-called natural characteristics of men (e.g., strength, endurance, and combat potential) are feted by all involved: the players, who can be seen as displaying such characteristics, and the fans, who applaud their demonstrations from the sidelines.

And he cited assortative mating practices, which virtually guarantee that, in heterosexual pairings, men will be bigger and stronger (as well as older and, presumably, wiser) than the women with whom they are paired. Thus, when greater size, strength, or experience is called for (e.g., in the vicinity of heavy packages, cumbersome objects, or flat tires), men will "naturally" be ready to demonstrate it, and women, "naturally" in need of such demonstrations.

Finally, the heart of the matter: these many institutionalized frameworks for displaying "essential" differences might suggest an environment that's somehow designed for the purpose of such displays. This, in fact, is what Goffman contends (1977). But he also contends that we need not wait for the environment to summon up just those conditions under which a display of manly or womanly "nature" would be the appropriate response. Rather, *any* situation affords the

wherewithal for the expression of our fundamentally different womanly and manly characters. Thus, heavy, messy, or dangerous concerns can be generated anywhere and anytime, "even though by standards set in other settings, this may involve something that is light, clean, and safe" (Goffman 1977:324). The consequence, of course, is the extreme vulnerability of women to men *throughout* the public order and the social situations it contains.

To be sure, there are others who have moved on from the point at which "The Arrangement between the Sexes" left off. There are, for example, Spencer Cahill's (1986a, 1986b) studies of children's recruitment to gender identities, Scott Coltrane's (1989) analysis of the routine production of gender through child care, Sarah Fenstermaker's (Fenstermaker Berk 1985) investigation of "the gender factory" within the household division of labor, and my own studies with Don Zimmerman (West and Zimmerman 1987) and Sarah Fenstermaker (Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman 1991; West and Fenstermaker 1993, 1995) of "doing gender" and "doing difference." Each of us has poked and prodded things in a different direction and, in some cases, we've amended or revised pieces of "The Arrangement."[16] But I think I can safely speak for all of us in acknowledging our considerable theoretical debt to his argument.

CONCLUSIONS

In closing, I should note that this was not meant to be an "even-handed" presentation. To be perfectly candid, my aim here was to praise Goffman, not to bury him. Feminist criticism of his work abounds, some of it written by authors I cite in this paper. Readers who are interested will not have to exert themselves overly in tracking it down.

My aim, though, was to put Goffman into feminist perspective—to call attention to his contributions to our understanding of "the micropolitical structure," as Henley (1977) calls it, and to feminist theory more generally. First among these, I have argued, is the conceptual basis for our understanding of women's experiences in public places, including street remarks (Gardner 1980), sexual harassment and "sexual terrorism" (Scheffield's [1989] terminology for a system through which men frighten women, and thereby, control and dominate them) more generally. Second, I have contended, is an appreciation of how power works in spoken interaction between women and men (e.g., through asymmetrical patterns of listening [Fishman 1978a], interruption [Zimmerman and West 1975; West and Zimmerman 1977, 1983] and topical "shift work" [West and Garcia 1988]). Third, as I have proposed, are his (1976, 1977) contributions to the study of sex and gender per se: (a) showing how we produce and read gender displays as reflecting the "essential natures" of women and men, (b) explicating how innate sex differences are advanced to justify existing institutional arrangements, and (c) demonstrating how existing institutional arrangements ensure that the justifications make sense.

Across these substantive contributions, Goffman's greatest gift to feminist theory is baldly apparent: opening up the possibility of studying the "personal"— even as we find it on the streets, in talk, in public and private places—as a sociological topic. What was so distinctive, so dramatic about his incursion was the

notion that you could "go look" at this sphere, in the fundamentally ordinary sense of watching and listening to people (Dorothy Smith, personal communication). Herein lay the possibility of analyzing the politics in and of the personal sphere: of observing how men respond to women when they pass on the street; of listening to how men talk to women (and how parents talk to children) in mundane conversation; and of looking at how we mark sex differences in virtually every social surround. And herein lay the profoundly revolutionary understanding of the significance of these doings. For however trivial some of them might appear, as Goffman (1976) himself put it (and it is only fair to allow him the last word):

> ...routinely the question [at issue in this sphere] is...whose opinion is voiced most frequently and most forcibly, who makes the minor ongoing decisions apparently required for the coordination of any joint activity, and whose passing concerns are given the most weight. And however trivial some of these little gains and losses may appear to be, by summing them all up across all the social situations in which they occur, one can see that their total effect is enormous. The expression of subordination and domination through this swarm of situational means is more than a mere tracing or symbol or ritualistic affirmation of the social hierarchy. These expressions considerably constitute the hierarchy; they are the shadow *and* the substance (p. 6).

NOTES

1. Goffman expressed self-consciousness (a concept he did much to illuminate) about this publicly in 1977, noting that:

   > the layman may be willing to grant Margaret Mead's famous argument about temperament being culturally, not biologically, determined, and moreover that women can quite competently function as dentists, even as firemen, and still further that (in English) literary bias...allows "man" to stand for humankind, and employs "his" as the proper relative pronoun for semi-indefinite terms such as "individual," male designations clearly being the "unmarked" form; but in making these concessions, he, like Margaret Mead (and myself apparently), sees no reason to deny that the terms "he" and "she" are still entirely adequate as designations of the individuals under discussion (p. 303; brackets replaced with parentheses to clarify the verbatim quote).

   However, just one year earlier, his use of this language betrayed him: "Here let me restate the notion that one of the most deeply seated traits of man, it is felt, is gender" (Goffman 1976:7).
   And, following our private communication about this seeming contradiction, I did not see him employ "generic" masculine terms again (cf. Goffman 1983a, 1983b).
2. I use quotation marks here in recognition of Goffman's (1963b:138) own unhappiness with these terms. In his view, "normals" and "deviants" were not persons, but perspectives.
3. Among other feminist scholars who were his doctoral students are Arlene Kaplan Daniels, Joan Emerson, Lyn Lofland and Dorothy Smith—a very rich legacy indeed.
4. Small wonder, too, that women constitute the overwhelming majority of those who suffer from agoraphobia (Gardner 1994c).
5. Harvey Sacks and Emanuel A. Schegloff were also students of Goffman's.
6. I use quotation marks here to emphasize my ironic use of this term. Later, I will identify Goffman's (1977) contribution to reconceptualizing "the sexes" as well.
7. To be sure, Fishman's work is based on the conversations of only three couples and a selective sample of couples at that. There are grounds for questioning the validity of her argument as well as the contribution of her work to conversation analysis per se (Schegloff personal communication). That, however, is not the

point for the purpose of this paper, which is to note the grounding of her work in Goffman's ideas, and the subsequent visibility of her work in feminist theorizing (cf. Spender 1980:48-51).

8. Goffman (1955), of course, was the one who conceived of interaction as "work" in the first place. Feminist theory has borrowed liberally from this conceptualization in describing "emotion work" (Hochschild 1979, 1983); "caring work" (DeVault 1991, Graham 1983); conversational "shift work" (Garcia and West 1988), and the work involved in sustaining a medical definition of the situation in gynecological examinations (Emerson 1970).

9. These were also white middle-class persons, although it would be awkward to break into my sentence to say so. So too were the conversationalists whose interruptions we studied in the laboratory setting (West and Zimmerman 1983) and whose topic changes we pursued there (West and Garcia 1988). The white and middle-class bias in these studies is clearly a marked limitation of them, but it is also consistent with Goffman's own (e.g., see Goffman 1963a:5).

10. For the subtitle, I am indebted to R.W. Connell (1985).

11. "By demeanor I shall refer to that element of . . . individual[s'] ceremonial behavior typically conveyed through deportment, dress, and bearing, which serves to express to those in their immediate presence that [they are persons] of certain desirable or undesirable qualities" (Goffman 1956:489).

12. Goffman, however, made an effort to publicly distinguish his approach from "the additive framework of sex role theory" (Connell 1987:79) and "[t]he traditional sociological position that sex is "learned, diffuse, role behavior" (Goffman 1977:301).

13. Here, Goffman's relationship to Harold Garfinkel and ethnomethodology begins to show (see especially Garfinkel's [1967:118-140] case study of Agnes, a transsexual person who was raised as a boy, identified herself as a girl at 17 years of age, and underwent sex reassignment surgery several years later). There are some (e.g., Emanuel Schegloff, personal communication) who would argue that Goffman was expressing lines of work that were precipitated by his knowledge of Garfinkel. There are others (e.g., Dorothy Smith, personal communication) who would argue that Garfinkel's work and ethnomethodology could not have come into being as they did before Goffman. The mutually enriching (if sometimes contentious) relationship between Goffman and Garfinkel is undeniable, but, as Dorothy Smith (personal communication) points out, "the revolutionary character of Goffman's work" is only clear when we look at what existed prior to it: the work of Talcott Parsons, Robert Bales "and the symbolic interactionists who themselves did not know how to 'look' as Goffman taught us."

14. As he notes, our society can put up with infinite *other* embarrassments to social order, including the immigration of people from other cultures, overwhelming differences in the educational levels of its members, and massive upheavals in business and employment cycles—what are sex differences by comparison to these?

15. As promised (in note 8), I now return to explain Goffman's use of "the sexes." He acknowledges the danger of this economy (1977:305), namely, its ready-made fit with our cultural preconceptions. Properly speaking, he recommends a distinction between *sex:* a biological classification that is made with the help of chromosomal, gonadal, and hormonal evidence, and *sex-classes:* the two mutually exclusive groups (cf. p. 330, n. 1) that we place people in at birth, but then, go on to elaborate for the rest of their lives (p. 303). For Goffman, then, sex-class is a *social* classification through and through, and he uses "the sexes" as (an admittedly dangerous) convenience.

16. For instance, Zimmerman and I (West and Zimmerman 1987:127) found Goffman's distinction between sex and sex classes insufficient and went on to differentiate among *sex* (a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males), *sex category* (initially achieved through application of the sex criteria, but established and maintained in everyday life through socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category), and *gender* (the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category).

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