

CHAPTER I

The Problem

IN DIAGNOSING mental disorder and following its hospital course, psychiatrists typically cite aspects of the patient's behavior that are "inappropriate in the situation." Since this special kind of misconduct is believed to provide one obvious sign of "mental sickness," psychiatrists have given much time to these improprieties, developing the orientation and observational skills needed to study them, describing them in detail, seeking to understand their meaning for the patient, and obtaining a mandate to discuss them in the academic press—a mandate required because many of these delicts are petty, embarrassing, or messy. We sociologists should be grateful for this harvest, all the more so because it has been brought in by delicate hands. We can express our gratitude by trying to appropriate the yield for our own market, offering in exchange some observations about social situations that we appropriated long ago from anthropology.

By and large, the psychiatric study of situational improprieties has led to studying the offender rather than the rules and social circles that are offended. Through such studies, however, psychiatrists have inadvertently made us more aware of an important area of social life—that of behavior in public and semipublic places. Although this area has not been recognized as a special domain for sociological inquiry, it perhaps should be, for rules

of conduct in streets, parks, restaurants, theaters, shops, dance floors, meeting halls, and other gathering places of any community tell us a great deal about its most diffuse forms of social organization.

Sociology does not provide a ready framework that can order these data, let alone show comparisons and continuities with behavior in private gathering places such as offices, factory floors, living rooms, and kitchens. To be sure, one part of "collective behavior"—riots, crowds, panics—has been established as something to study. But the remaining part of the area, the study of ordinary human traffic and the patterning of ordinary social contacts, has been little considered. It is well recognized, for instance, that mobs can suddenly emerge from the peaceful flow of human traffic, if conditions are right. But little concern seems to have been given to the question of what structure this peaceful intercourse possesses when mob formation is not an issue. It is the object of this report to try to develop such a framework. Some data have been drawn from a study of a mental hospital¹ (hereafter called Central Hospital), some from a study of a Shetland Island community² (hereafter called Shetland Isle), some from manuals of etiquette, and some from a file where I keep quotations that have struck me as interesting. Obviously, many of these data are of doubtful worth, and my interpretations—especially of some of them—may certainly be questionable, but I assume that a loose speculative approach to a fundamental area of conduct is better than a rigorous blindness to it.

I will rely on the familiar distinction between acts that are approved and acts that are felt to be improper. This simple dichotomy makes for economy of presentation, allowing me to bypass unresolved issues and to proceed to ones that might be resolved. Before taking this license, however, some matters it covers should be mentioned.

1. Saint Elizabeths Hospital, Washington, D.C. This is a 7000-bed Federal hospital, which functions chiefly as the public mental hospital for the District of Columbia.

2. A community of 300 with a subsistence farming economy studied for a year in 1949-51, reported in part in E. Goffman, "Communication Conduct in an Island Community" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1953).

Although some specific illustrations used in this report are taken from sources dealing with non-Western society, my own experience has been mainly with middle-class conduct in a few regions of America, and it is to this that most of my comments apply. An act can, of course, be proper or improper only according to the judgment of a specific social group, and even within the confines of the smallest and warmest of groups there is likely to be some dissensus and doubt. The degree of dissensus or consensus in a group concerning the propriety of an act—and even the boundaries of the group itself—cannot be established by my assertions but only by systematic empirical research. This report, however, is full of such unverified assertions. Yet this avowed weakness should not be confused with one that is disavowed: nowhere in this report do I mean to convey that I personally hold some act to be proper or improper, although the method of presentation may occasionally give this impression.

It is in the context of this middle-class point of reference that I want to explain my use of quotations from etiquette manuals. When Mrs. Emily Post makes a pronouncement as to how persons of cultivation act, and how other persons ought therefore to act, sociologists often become offended. Their good reason for snubbing Mrs. Post is that she provides little evidence that the circle about which she speaks has any numerical or social significance, that its members do in fact conduct themselves as she says they do, or even that these persons—or any others—consider that one *ought* so to conduct oneself.

These doubts impute much more creativity to etiquette writers than they possess. Although these writers do not empirically test their claims as to what is regarded as proper, it seems to me they are still describing some of the norms that *influence* the conduct of our middle classes, even though on many occasions other factors will predominate. Moreover, these books are one of the few sources of suggestions about the structure of public conduct in America. It is my feeling that the main drawback to using these books as data for social science is not the unvalidated nature of the statements they contain—for statements can always be checked by research—but rather that these books tend to

provide a mere catalogue of proprieties instead of an analysis of the system of norms underlying those proprieties.

In America only a few sociologists, such as W. Lloyd Warner, and a few historians, such as Arthur M. Schlesinger,³ have given attention to etiquette manuals; I know of even fewer psychiatrists who consider that they are dealing with the same issues as do these books. Yet it might be argued that one of the best guides to a systematic understanding of the observable conduct of mental patients in and out of hospitals, and of others' response to this conduct, is to be found in etiquette manuals.

In addition to the question of evidence, there is another problem in using the naive distinction between approved and disapproved behavior; namely, that the concept of approval itself is by no means innocent, covering an array of ill-explored variables.

One variable has to do with the strength of approval for upholding the rule. Some approved acts receive applause upon performance, as when heroism or very great skill is displayed. Some pass quite unnoticed and do not constitute a felt event, as when an American high-school girl refrains from wearing nylon hose with her saddle shoes but wears bobby socks instead.⁴

A second variable has to do with the consequence of failing to uphold the rule. At one extreme are acts, neither demanded nor expected, that are rarely performed. Some of these are recorded in etiquette books as exemplary instances of meticulous courtesy, more to illustrate the ideal forces that it is felt should be at work in society than to provide a recipe for daily living. At the other extreme are mandatory acts such as the paying of fines, where failure to comply may lead to jail. Between these extremes are "tolerated" acts, which are specifically noted with only an inhibited frown, constituting offenses that the offended person, given the setting, is obliged to let pass.

Nor do these two variables, a type of approval and a type of

3. Specifically in his *Learning How to Behave* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946).

4. C. W. Gordon, *The Social System of the High School* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1957), p. 118.

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disapproval, in their various combinations, complete the picture. The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that these two variables often refer not to concrete kinds of acts, such as the raising of one's hat to a lady, but to classes of acts, the members of which are phenomenally different but normatively equivalent and substitutable in the setting. And even these classes are themselves of various sizes. For example, the requirement of "formal dress" may oblige a woman to wear her only evening dress, whereas the requirement "afternoon dress," equally a normative stipulation, is one the individual may satisfy through what she feels is freedom to choose among her three afternoon ensembles. Freedom of choice within a class of required conduct may blind the individual to constraint regarding the class as a whole.

It can be seen, then, how much mischief may be done by equating two situations because the same act is "approved" in each, since approval itself can mean significantly different things. I can only note that in this report one type of approved act will be of central importance—the "negatively eventful" kind, which gives rise to specific negative sanctions if not performed, but which, if it is performed, passes unperceived as an event.

A prefatory conceptual note must be added here. A conceptual model frequently employed these days in the social sciences is the "closed natural system." Such a system of concrete behavior involves a differentiation of activities whose integration, one with another, allows for the emergence of over-all functions maintained through an equilibrium of interaction of the component activities. Presumably, the equilibrium can be of different kinds—self-corrective, moving, and the like.

A less complicated conceptual model is the "game." In the standard "zero-sum" type there is an orderly exchange of moves among a small number of teams, the moves being made in accordance with restricting rules. The moves made by one team add up to a single line of effort directed toward frustrating the design of the other teams' action, the whole game engendering

a single unfolding history of mutually oriented, antagonistic lines of action.⁵

In this report I propose to employ a framework that is much simpler than that of the natural system or the game, but more inclusive: the model of "social order." Briefly, a social order may be defined as the consequence of any set of moral norms that regulates the way in which persons pursue objectives. 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. Traffic rules and the consequent traffic order provide an obvious example. Any social system or any game may be viewed quite properly as an instance of social order, although the perspective of social order does not allow us to get at what is characteristically systemic about systems or what is gamelike about games.

There appear to be many types of social order, of which the legal order and the economic order are important examples. Within each such order, mere behavior is transformed into a corresponding type of conduct. Particular concrete acts, of course, are likely to be performed in accordance with the regulations of more than one of these orders.

In this study I shall try to be concerned with one type of regulation only, the kind that governs a person's handling of himself and others during, and by virtue of, his immediate physical presence among them; what is called face-to-face or immediate interaction will be involved.

Here a note should be added about the term "public." The norms supporting public order, as public order is traditionally defined, regulate not only face-to-face interaction but also matters that need not entail immediate contact between persons: for example, during medieval times, the obligation (often ill-sustained) to keep one's pigs out of the streets, even though

5. There are "non-zero-sum" games of coordination and collaboration, but the analysis of these games seems to start with zero-sum games.

there was much available there for pigs to eat,⁶ and the obligation to extinguish lights and fires by a given hour lest the town be endangered by fire.⁷ Nowadays, a householder is obliged to maintain his walks and roads in good repair and to keep his town land free of noxious refuse. In addition, public order traditionally refers more to the regulation of face-to-face interaction among those members of a community who are not well acquainted than it does to interaction occurring in private walled-in places where only familiars meet. Traditionally, "public places" refer to any regions in a community freely accessible to members of that community; "private places" refer to soundproof regions where only members or invitees gather—the traditional concern for public order beginning only at the point where a private gathering begins to obtrude upon the neighbors. Although I will use these terms in these traditional ways, it should be appreciated that no analytical significance is implied. In the study of *groups*, the distinction between primary and secondary and between private and public meeting places may indeed be significant, but in the study of *gatherings*, all occasions when two or more persons are present to one another can be fruitfully treated initially as a single class.

We will deal, then, with the component of behavior that plays a role in the physical traffic among people. Although it may be felt that this involves conduct of little weight, a matter merely of etiquette and manners, there have always been writers, such as Della Casa, who have provided hints that it is important, and why:

For though generosity, loyalty, and moral courage are without doubt nobler and more praiseworthy qualities than charm and courtesy, nevertheless polite habits and a correct manner of speech and behaviour may benefit those who possess them no less than a noble spirit and a stout heart benefit others. For since each one of us is daily obliged to meet other people and converse with them, we

6. G. T. Salusbury, *Street Life in Medieval England* (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand, 1948), pp. 65-69.

7. "Curfew," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th ed., 1947), 6, 873-874.

need to use our manners many times each day. But justice, fortitude, and the other virtues of the higher and nobler sort are needed less frequently. We are not required to practise generosity or mercy at all hours, nor could any man do so very often. Similarly, those who are endowed with courage and strength are seldom called upon to show their valour by their deeds.⁸

Before proceeding, there are some ready answers to the question of proper public conduct that should be mentioned.

There are many social settings that persons of certain status are forbidden to enter. Here an effort to prevent penetration of ego-boundaries, contamination by undesirables, and physical assault seems to be involved.

Rules of trespass, for example, prevent unauthorized individuals from entering a private dwelling place at any time, and a semiprivate one during off hours. Less familiar are the many rulings that restrict the right to be present in open, unwallled public places: in nineteenth-century London, for example, the exclusion of certain categories from some parks, and the informal exclusion of common people from riding promenades such as Rotten Row; in Islamic cities built on a *quartier* basis, the restriction of persons to their own neighborhood after dark; the temporary prohibitions, during periods of martial law, upon being about after dark; evening curfews making it illegal for youths below a certain age to be about without the company of an adult; boarding-school rulings about late-hour presence on town streets; military rulings placing certain areas out of bounds or off limits for categories of personnel; informal police rulings requiring night-time racial segregation on public streets in designated areas of the city.

Where these rules of exclusion exist, it is plain that the individual's mere presence, regardless of his conduct while present, communicates either that he possesses the entrance qualifications or that he is behaving improperly. Here we find one motive for either wanting to enter a particular place or wanting not to be seen in it.

8. G. Della Casa, *Galateo*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 21-22.

I have suggested that in many situations certain categories of persons may not be authorized to be present, and that should they be present, this in itself will constitute an improper act. Common sense, however, also has something to say about those who are authorized to be present. The rule of behavior that seems to be common to all situations and exclusive to them is the rule obliging participants to "fit in." The words one applies to a child on his first trip to a restaurant presumably hold for everyone all the time: the individual must be "good" and not cause a scene or a disturbance; he must not attract undue attention to himself, either by thrusting himself on the assembled company or by attempting to withdraw too much from their presence. He must keep within the spirit or ethos of the situation; he must not be *de trop* or out of place. Occasions may even arise when the individual will be called upon to act as if he fitted into the situation when in fact he and some of the others present know this is not the case; out of regard for harmony in the scene he is required to compromise and endanger himself further by putting on an air of one who belongs when it can be shown that he doesn't. A brave instance may be cited from an early American etiquette book:

If you should happen to be paying an evening visit at a house, where, unknown to you, there is a small party assembled, you should enter and present yourself precisely as you would have done had you been invited. To retire *precipitately* with an apology for the intrusion would create a *scene*, and be extremely awkward. Go in, therefore, converse with ease for a few moments, and then retire. Take care to let it be known the next day, in such a way as that the family shall hear of it, that you were not aware that there was any company there.⁹

No doubt different social groupings vary in the explicitness with which their members think in such terms, as well as in the phrases selected for doing so, but all groupings presumably have some concern for such "fitting in."

9. *The Laws of Etiquette*, by "A Gentleman" (Philadelphia: Carey, Lee and Blanchard, 1836), pp. 77-78.

The notion of "fitting in" relates to another bit of common sense: what is proper in one situation may certainly not be proper in another. The underlying general sentiment possessed by the individual—where in fact he has one—may have to give way to the requirements of the situation. This theme appears in social science literature in the form of "situational determinism," for example, in race relations studies, where it is pointed out that castelike taboos in one sphere of life can exist alongside equalitarianism in other spheres, although the same set of persons is involved.¹⁰

But here surely is the beginning of inquiry, not the end. Although an individual may conduct himself in a particular way solely because of the felt pressure of propriety, this merely tells us about one possible motive for conforming. We still do not know *why* this particular form of conduct is the one here approved—namely, how the ruling arose historically, and what its current social function is. To approach these issues, I must turn to a more roundabout analysis.

10. See, for example, J. Lohman and D. Reitzes, "Note on Race Relations in Mass Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, 58 (1952), 240-246; C. Rogler, "Some Situational Aspects of Race Relations in Puerto Rico," *Social Forces*, 27 (1949), 72-77.

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CHAPTER 2

Introductory

Definitions

THE exchange of words and glances between individuals in each other's presence is a very common social arrangement, yet it is one whose distinctive communication properties are difficult to disentangle. Pedantic definitions seem to be required.

An individual may give information through the linguistic means formally established in society for this purpose, namely, speech or recognized speech substitutes such as writing and pictorial signs or gestures. One speaks here of an individual sending messages to someone who receives them. But the individual may also give information expressively, through the incidental symptomatic significance of events associated with him. In this case one might say that he emits, exudes, or gives off information to someone who gleans it. Linguistic messages can be "about" anything in the world, the sender and the subject matter having no necessary connection, coinciding only when autobiographical statements are being made. Expressive messages are necessarily "about" the same causal physical complex of which the transmitting agency is an intrinsic part. Consensus as to the meaning of linguistic messages seems more firmly established than it is in regard to that of expressive messages. Linguistic messages can be translated, stored, and held up as legal evidence; expressive messages tend to be ones for which the giver cannot

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be made legally responsible, it being usually possible for him to deny that he meant quite what others claim he meant. Linguistic messages are felt to be voluntary and intended; expressive messages, on the other hand, must often preserve the fiction that they are uncalculated, spontaneous, and involuntary, as in some cases they are.¹ Every linguistic message carries some expressive information, namely, that the sender is sending messages. In any case, most concrete messages combine linguistic and expressive components, the proportion of each differing widely from message to message.

The information that an individual provides, whether he sends it or exudes it, may be *embodied* or *disembodied*.² A frown, a spoken word, or a kick is a message that a sender conveys by means of his own *current* bodily activity, the transmission occurring only during the time that his body is present to sustain this activity. Disembodied messages, such as the ones we receive from letters and mailed gifts, or the ones hunters receive from the spoor of a now distant animal, require that the organism do something that traps and holds information long after the organism has stopped informing. This study will be concerned only with embodied information.

No ordinary English verb seems to cover all the senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—that restrict the media and provide the receiving equipment through which an individual is able to obtain information. Terms such as “perceive,” which have a special visual reference, have had to be used in a wider way, while terms such as “experience” have had to be used more narrowly. Some terms, such as “audit” or “monitor,” have had to be manufactured.

In everyday thinking about the receiving senses, it is felt that ordinarily they are used in a “naked” or “direct” way. This apparently implies a restriction on boosting devices—mechanical,

1. The dichotomy “voluntary-involuntary” is one of the least innocent in our trade. Later in this report an effort will be made to suggest some of the problems it raises.

2. Compare the usage by T. S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1961), p. 116 ff.

chemical, or electrical—except as these raise the faulty senses of a particular individual to average unassisted strength: glasses, for example, but not binoculars; hearing aids but not microphones. Electric lighting would have to be allowed as merely raising a room to day-time standards.

When one speaks of experiencing someone else with one's naked senses, one usually implies the reception of embodied messages. This linkage of naked senses on one side and embodied transmission on the other provides one of the crucial communication conditions of face-to-face interaction. Under this condition any message that an individual sends is likely to be qualified and modified by much additional information that others glean from him simultaneously, often unbeknownst to him; further, a very large number of brief messages may be sent.

Now the individual can, of course, receive embodied messages by means of his naked senses without much chance of these communication roles being reversed, as when he spies on persons through a crack in the wall or overhears them through a thin partition.³ Such asymmetrical arrangements may even be established as part of an occupational setting, as in the procedure by which psychoanalysts or priests observe their clients without being as easily observed in return. Ordinarily, however, in using the naked senses to receive embodied messages from others, the individual also makes himself available as a source of embodied information for them (although there is always likely to be some differential exploitation of these monitoring possibilities). Here, then, is a second crucial communication condition of face-to-face interaction: not only are the receiving and conveying of

3. An asymmetrical communication relation of this kind, Polonius notwithstanding, is of course more practical when boosting devices, such as concealed microphones, are employed. In Shetland Isle pocket telescopes were commonly used for the purpose of observing one's neighbors without being observed in the act of observing. In this way it was possible to check constantly what phase of the annual cycle of work one's neighbors were engaged in, and who was visiting whom. This use of the telescope was apparently related to the physical distance between crofts, the absence of trees and other blocks to long-distance perception, and the strong maritime tradition of the Islands. It may be added that every community and even every work place would seem to have some special communication arrangements of its own.

the naked and embodied kind, but each giver is himself a receiver, and each receiver is a giver.

The implications of this second feature are fundamental. First, sight begins to take on an added and special role. Each individual can *see* that he is being experienced in some way, and he will guide at least some of his conduct according to the perceived identity and initial response of his audience.⁴ Further, he can be seen to be seeing this, and can see that he has been seen seeing this. Ordinarily, then, to use our naked senses is to use them nakedly and to be made naked by their use. We are clearly seen as the agents of our acts, there being very little chance of disavowing having committed them; neither having given nor having received messages can be easily denied, at least among those immediately involved.⁵

The factor emerges, then, that was much considered by Adam Smith, Charles Cooley, and G. H. Mead; namely, the special mutuality of immediate social interaction. That is, when two persons are together, at least some of their world will be made up out of the fact (and consideration for the fact) that an adaptive line of action attempted by one will be either insightfully facilitated by the other or insightfully countered, or both, and that such a line of action must always be pursued in this intelligently helpful and hindering world. Individuals sympathetically take the attitude of others present, regardless of the end to which they put the information thus acquired.⁶

4. In the asymmetrical case, where a person is being spied upon by direct or indirect means, he may greatly modify his conduct if he suspects he is being observed, even though he does not know the identity of the particular audience that might be observing him. This is one of the possibilities celebrated in Orwell's *1984*, and its possibility is one of the forces operative in socially controlling persons who are alone.

5. When two-way television is added to telephones, the unique contingencies of direct interaction will finally be available for those who are widely separated. In any case these mediated "point-to-point" forms of communication can be characterized by the degree to which they restrict or attenuate the communicative possibilities discussed here.

6. As R. E. Park suggested in "Human Nature and Collective Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1927), 738:

In human society every act of every individual tends to become a gesture, since what one does is always an indication of what one intends to do. The conse-

I have cited two distinctive features of face-to-face interaction: richness of information flow and facilitation of feedback. I suggest that these features have enough structuring significance to provide one analytical rationale for the separate treatment this report gives to the social norms regulating behavior of persons immediately present to one another.

The physical distance over which one person can experience another with the naked senses—thereby finding that the other is “within range”—varies according to many factors: the sense medium involved, the presence of obstructions, even the temperature of the air. On Shetland Isle, during cold nights, mainland visitors walking together along the bay in apparent isolation who laughed loudly by the strict local standards could cause Shetlanders an eighth of a mile away to raise their eyebrows. Conversely, when an individual whispers or uses eye expressions, his body acts as a focusing barrier, effectively restricting the usual sphere of propagation of sense stimuli, so that reception is limited to those very close to him or directly in front of him.

The full conditions of *copresence*, however, are found in less variable circumstances: persons must sense that they are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived. In our walled-in Western society, these conditions are ordinarily expected to obtain throughout the space contained in a room, and to obtain for any and all persons present in the room. On public streets (and in other relatively unobstructed places) the region of space in which mutual presence can be said to prevail cannot be clearly drawn, since persons who are present at different points along the street may be able to observe, and be observed by, a slightly

quence is that the individual in society lives a more or less public existence, in which all his acts are anticipated, checked, inhibited, or modified by the gestures and the intentions of his fellows. It is in this social conflict, in which every individual lives more or less in the mind of every other individual, that human nature and the individual may acquire their most characteristic and human traits.

different set of others. This qualification aside, I shall use the term *gathering* to refer to any set of two or more individuals whose members include all and only those who are at the moment in one another's immediate presence. By the term *situation* I shall refer to the full spatial environment anywhere within which an entering person becomes a member of the gathering that is (or does then become) present. Situations begin when mutual monitoring occurs, and lapse when the second-last person has left. In order to stress the full extent of any such unit, I will sometimes employ the term *situation at large*.

Along with "gathering" and "situation," another basic concept must be tentatively defined. When persons come into each other's immediate presence they tend to do so as participants of what I shall call a *social occasion*. This is a wider social affair, undertaking, or event, bounded in regard to place and time and typically facilitated by fixed equipment; a social occasion provides the structuring social context in which many situations and their gatherings are likely to form, dissolve, and re-form, while a pattern of conduct tends to be recognized as the appropriate and (often) official or intended one—a "standing behavior pattern," to use Barker's term.⁷ Examples of social occasions are a social party, a workday in an office, a picnic, or a night at the opera.

For the course of a social occasion, one or more participants may be defined as responsible for getting the affair under way, guiding the main activity, terminating the event, and sustaining order. Also, a differentiation is sometimes found among full-fledged participants and various grades of onlookers. Further, between beginning and end there is often an "involvement contour," a line tracing the rise and fall of general engrossment in the occasion's main activity.⁸

Some social occasions, a funeral, for example, have a fairly sharp beginning and end, and fairly strict limits on attendance

7. R. Barker and H. Wright, *Midwest and Its Children* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, n.d.), p. 7 and pp. 45-46.

8. An illustration of social occasion analysis may be found in D. Riesman, R. Potter, and J. Watson, "The Vanishing Host," *Human Organization*, 19 (1960), 17-27.

and tolerated activities. Each class of such occasions possesses a distinctive ethos, a spirit, an emotional structure, that must be properly created, sustained, and laid to rest, the participant finding that he is obliged to become caught up in the occasion, whatever his personal feelings. These occasions, which are commonly programmed in advance, possess an agenda of activity, an allocation of management function, a specification of negative sanctions for improper conduct, and a preestablished unfolding of phases and a highpoint. Other occasions, like Tuesday afternoon downtown, are very diffuse indeed, and may not be seen by participants as entities with any appreciable development and structure of their own that can be looked forward to and looked back upon as a whole. (Here the individual may see a line of development in his own period of participation but not in the occasion as a whole.) In these cases the very useful term employed by Barker and his associates, *behavior setting*, might be sufficient.⁹ Diffuse social occasions can, of course, develop a structure and direction as they go along.

Some social occasions, often called "unserious" or "recreational," are felt to be ends in themselves, and the individual avowedly participates for the consummate pleasure of doing so. Other occasions, called "serious," are officially seen as merely means to other ends. Finally, some occasions are seen as "regular" ones—instances that form part of a series of like occasions, the series being seen as a unit, and developing as such, in terms of a daily, weekly, or annual cycle, often with the same participants. Other occasions, such as spur-of-the-moment parties, are one-shot affairs, or their series-like character is not perceived as such.

There are many complications associated with the concept of social occasion,¹⁰ but some such term must be used, for when a gathering occurs it does so under the auspices of a wider entity

9. Barker and Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-10 and 45-50. The authors provide a very useful review of the conceptual problems involved in the use of such a term.

10. A description of the general characteristics of social occasions is attempted in "Communication Conduct," Chap. 9. A very good presentation of the complexities involved can be found in K. L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (Glendale, California: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954), Part 1.

of this kind. I hope it will become apparent that the regulations of conduct characteristic in situations and their gatherings are largely traceable to the social occasion in which they occur.

Since different participants in a social occasion may perform quite different roles, it might be argued that what is an occasion of play for one individual may be an occasion of work for another, as in the case of the guest and the servant at a party. Nevertheless, too much relativity is not justified. However differently participants may feel about a past social occasion, they can presumably agree as to which occasion they are talking about. Further, he who must work during and at an occasion defined for play still knows that his job locates him in a play occasion, not in a serious one, the fact that it does being an important job-contingency for him.

There is another sense, however, in which multiple social realities can occur in the same place. Once a social situation is referred back to the social occasion that sets the tone for the gathering in it, we must admit the possibility that the same physical space may be caught within the domain of two different social occasions. The social situation then may be the scene of potential or actual conflict between the sets of regulations that ought to govern. Note the famous conflict of definitions in the situation between summer tourists, who would like to extend summer-resort informality to the stores in the local town, and the natives, who would like to preserve proper business decorum in such places. Even within the same social establishment it is possible to find these overlapping definitions in the situation. Thus, in an office building or library where a rather strict decorum may obtain, the maintenance crews may see the occasion quite differently: they may work in profane clothing, run down the hallway when a quick repair is required, enter rooms at will, shout easily down the hall, plug a portable radio into the outlet nearest to their work, and maintain a level of conversational loudness quite prohibited to the office staff. Here we find something more than different roles in the same occasion, for no single main activity may be accorded precedence, at least in the

short run. The social situations that occur in these overlapping behavior settings support gatherings that possess a special type of normative disorganization.

The possibility that the same physical space can come to be used as a setting for more than one social occasion, and hence as a locus for more than one set of expectations, is regularly recognized in society and typically restricted. Thus, in the important case of public streets, there is a tendency in Western society to define these places as the scene of an overriding social occasion to which other occasions ought to be subordinated. Potentially competing definitions in the situation then give way to a kind of public decorum. This decorum itself, of course, is typically subverted momentarily by parades, convention antics, marriage and funeral processions, ambulances, and fire trucks, all of which impress their special tone upon the public ear for a brief time.

It is situations and their gatherings, not social occasions, that we will mainly consider here, but for this a few terms must be introduced to help us distinguish between what is and what is not relevant in situations.

The term *situated* may be used to refer to any event occurring within the physical boundaries of a situation. Accordingly, the second person upon a scene transforms everything done by himself and by the one already there into situated activity, even though there may be no apparent change in the way the person already present continues with what he had been doing. The newcomer, in effect, transforms a solitary individual and himself into a gathering.

When we look at situated activity we often find that one component of it could just as well have occurred outside of situations, with no persons, or only one person, present. Thus, *some* of the loss an individual sustains when he is robbed at gunpoint in his house he could lose if his house were ransacked while he was away on vacation. Likewise, some of what is conveyed in a conversation could be conveyed through correspondence. Work tasks that an individual performs while others are present he can sometimes perform equally well when alone. This aspect of ac-

tivity may occur *in* situations but is not *of* situations, characteristically occurring at other times outside situations. This unblushing part of reality I will refer to as the *merely-situated* aspect of situated activity. This component of activity comes under normative regulation, allowing us to speak of obligations and offenses that are merely-situated. But my only interest in such matters will be to be able to segregate them analytically from the component of situated activity that will concern us here; namely, the part that could not occur outside situations, being intrinsically dependent on the conditions that prevail therein. This part will be referred to as the *situational* aspect of situated activity. The risk to one's body when one is being robbed at gunpoint of household effects is situational; the loss of effects, as was previously suggested, is merely-situated. Some of the meaning of words conveyed in conversation is merely-situated; the coloration given these words by bodily expressed emotion, however, is distinctly situational. Similarly, for example, a member of the public in a reference library is expected to draw out and use a book, and not to spend his time in other pursuits, as adolescents learn from the librarian if they noisily employ the library as a place of assignation. Here we have the situational aspect of conduct. Within certain limits, however, the individual's choice of particular books to read, his skill at reading, and the profit to which he puts what he has learned from reading are his own business, or that of the persons who may have assigned him a reading task. This is the merely-situated aspect of his library activity.

Once we distinguish clearly between the merely-situated and the situational, we can return to consider the idea of public order. Copresence renders persons uniquely accessible, available, and subject to one another. Public order, in its face-to-face aspects, has to do with the normative regulation of this accessibility.

Perhaps the best explored face-to-face aspect of public order as traditionally defined is what is sometimes called "public safety." Its basic rules are few and clear, and, in Western society

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today, heavily reinforced by police authority. Here the focus of regulation is upon the use that an individual can make of his body as a physical object or of instruments he can manipulate with his body. In going about their separate businesses, individuals—especially strangers—are not allowed to do any physical injury to one another, to block the way of one another, to assault one another sexually, or to constitute a source of disease contagion. While this kind of "King's Peace" currently prevails at most hours in most of our streets in most of our cities and towns, there are still neighborhoods where this order is not well guaranteed, and certainly in our past there have been times and places where such a guarantee was the exception rather than the rule.¹¹ A version of this safety problem can be found today on back wards of mental hospitals, where some patients understandably acquire the reputation of being "food throwers," bringing to ward mealtime a special kind of disorder. And, of course, in the lay notion that mental patients cannot be trusted not to strike out at others unexpectedly, there is an active reminder of ingredients of public order that might otherwise be taken for granted.

The harm produced by physical interference in any of its forms is partly due to the social humiliation of being seen as helpless by the offender and possibly by others, and so has distinctly social-psychological components. Other important ways in which the regulations ensuring physical safety impinge upon nonphysical matters will be considered later.

For our present purposes, the aspect of public order having to do with personal safety will be passed by. I will be concerned with the fact that when persons are present to one another they can function not merely as physical instruments but also as communicative ones. This possibility, no less than the physical one, is fateful for everyone concerned and in every society ap-

11. For medieval England see, for example, L. O. Pike, *A History of Crime in England* (2 vols.; London: Smith, Elder, 1873), esp. 1, 242-254. A view of public order in the East End of London near the turn of the century may be found in Arthur Morrison's novel *A Child of the Jago* (first published 1896; London: Penguin Books, 1946).

pears to come under strict normative regulation, giving rise to a kind of communication traffic order. It is this aspect of order that is mainly to be considered in this report. (Incidentally, it is in this aspect of public order that most symptoms of mental disorder seem to make themselves felt initially.) The rules pertaining to this area of conduct I shall call *situational proprieties*. The code derived therefrom is to be distinguished from other moral codes regulating other aspects of life (even if these sometimes apply at the same time as the situational code): for example, codes of honor, regulating relationships; codes of law, regulating economic and political matters; and codes of ethics, regulating professional life.¹²

The communicative behavior of those immediately present to one another can be considered in two steps. The first deals with *unfocused interaction*, that is, the kind of communication that occurs when one gleans information about another person present by glancing at him, if only momentarily, as he passes into and then out of one's view. Unfocused interaction has to do largely with the management of sheer and mere copresence. The second step deals with *focused interaction*, the kind of interaction that occurs when persons gather close together and openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention, typically by taking turns at talking. Where no focused interaction occurs, the term *unfocused gathering* can be used. Where focused interaction occurs, clumsier terms will be needed.

Given the definitions at which we have now arrived, it is possible to take another tentative step in the analysis of situational proprieties and to suggest one general element of proper conduct. In American society, it appears that the individual is expected to exert a kind of discipline or tension in regard to his body, showing that he has his faculties in readiness for any face-to-face interaction that might come his way in the situation. Often this kind of controlled alertness in the situation will

12. See the interesting comments by G. Simmel, "Morality, Honor and Law," from his *Soziologie* (3rd. ed.; Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1923), pp. 403-405, trans. E. C. Hughes (mimeographed, University of Chicago).

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mean suppressing or concealing many of the capacities and roles the individual might be expected to display in other settings. Whatever his other concerns, then, whatever his merely-situated interests, the individual is obliged to "come into play" upon entering the situation and to stay "in play" while in the situation, sustaining this diffuse orientation at least until he can officially take himself beyond range of the situation. In short, a kind of "interaction tonus" must be maintained. I would like to add that in considering the conduct through which this aliveness to the situation is demonstrated it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that an attachment to, and respectful regard for, the situation's participants and the encompassing social occasion is being avowed. And in considering the marked infractions of these rules in mental hospital wards, it is difficult to escape the conclusion, as we shall see later, that failure to exhibit "presence" is a normal, understandable expression of alienation from, and hostility to, the gathering itself and the officials in it.

One of the most evident means by which the individual shows himself to be situationally present is through the disciplined management of personal appearance or "personal front," that is, the complex of clothing, make-up, hairdo, and other surface decorations he carries about on his person. In public places in Western society, the male of certain classes is expected to present himself in the situation neatly attired, shaven, his hair combed, hands and face clean; female adults have similar and further obligations. It should be noted that with these matters of personal appearance the obligation is not merely to possess the equipment but also to exert the kind of sustained control that will keep it properly arranged. (And yet, in spite of these rulings, we may expect to find, in such places as the New York subway during the evening rush hour, that some persons, between scenes, as it were, may let expression fall from their faces in a kind of temporary uncaring and righteous exhaustion, even while being clothed and made up to fit a much more disciplined stance.)

I have already suggested that a failure to present oneself to a

gathering in situational harness is likely to be taken as a sign of some kind of disregard for the setting and its participants; gross cultural distance from the social world of those present may also be expressed. These expressive implications of well or badly ordered personal appearance are often discussed in etiquette books, sometimes quite aptly:

But even in a casual encounter, and upon occasions when your habit can have no connexion with the feelings and sentiments which you have towards those whom you meet, neat and careful dressing will bring great advantage to you. A negligent guise shows a man to be satisfied with his own resources, engrossed with his own notions and schemes, indifferent to the opinion of others, and not looking abroad for entertainment: to such a man no one feels encouraged to make any advances. A finished dress indicates a man of the world, one who looks for and habitually finds, pleasure in society and conversation, and who is at all times ready to mingle in intercourse with those whom he meets with; it is a kind of general offer of acquaintance, and provides a willingness to be spoken to.¹³

An interesting expression of the kind of interaction tonus that lies behind the proper management of personal appearance is found in the constant care exerted by men in our society to see that their trousers are buttoned and that an erection bulge is not showing.¹⁴ Before entering a social situation, they often run through a quick visual inspection of the relevant parts of their personal front, and once in the situation they may take the extra precaution of employing a protective cover, by either crossing the legs or covering the crotch with a newspaper or book, especially if self-control is to be relaxed through comfortable sitting. A parallel to this concern is found in the care that women take to

13. Anon., *The Canons of Good Breeding* (Philadelphia: Lee and Blanchard, 1839), pp. 14-15.

14. The difficulty of engaging in this kind of protective concealment is one of the contingencies apparently faced by men with leg paralysis. See E. Henrich and L. Kriegel, eds., *Experiments in Survival* (New York: Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, 1961), p. 192.

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see that their legs are not apart, exposing their upper thighs and underclothing. The universality in our society of this kind of limb discipline can be deeply appreciated on a chronic female ward where, for whatever reason, women indulge in zestful scratching of their private parts and in sitting with legs quite spread, causing the student to become conscious of the vast amount of limb discipline that is ordinarily taken for granted. A similar reminder of one's expectations concerning limb discipline can be obtained from the limb movements required of elderly obese women in getting out of the front seat of a car. Just as a Balinese would seem ever to be concerned about the direction and height of his seat, so the individual in our society, while "in situation," is constantly oriented to keeping "physical" signs of sexual capacities concealed. And it is suggested here that these parts of the body when exposed are not a symbol of sexuality merely, but of a laxity of control over the self—evidence of an insufficient harnessing of the self for the gathering.

As has been suggested, the importance of a disciplined management of personal front is demonstrated in many ways by the mentally sick. A typical sign of an oncoming psychosis is the individual's "neglect" of his appearance and personal hygiene. The classic home for these improprieties is "regressed" wards in mental hospitals, where those with a tendency in this direction are collected, at the very same time that conditions remarkably facilitate this sort of disorientation. (Here, dropping of personal front will be tolerated, and sometimes even subtly approved, because it can reduce problems of ward management.) Similarly, when a mental patient starts "taking an interest in his appearance," and makes an effort at personal grooming, he is often credited with having somehow given up his fight against society and having begun his way back to "reality."

One of the most delicate components of personal appearance seems to be the composition of the face. A very evident means by which the individual shows himself to be situationally present is by appropriately controlling through facial muscles the shape and expression of the various parts of this instrument.

Although this control may not be conscious to any extent, it is none the less exerted. We have party faces, funeral faces, and various kinds of institutional faces, as the following comments on life in prison suggest:

Every new inmate learns to dog-face, that is to assume an apathetic, *characterless* facial expression and posture when viewed by authority. The dog-face is acquired easily when everyone freezes or relaxes into immobility. The face is that typical of streets, of social occasions, of all concealment. Relaxation comes when inmates are alone: there is an exaggeration of the smiling effervescence of the "friendly" party. The face that is protective by day is aggressively hardened and hate-filled by night, against the stationed or pacing guard. Tensity and dislike follow assumption of the face, guards react with scrupulous relaxedness, holding the face "soft" with an effort often accompanied by slight trembling of hands.¹⁵

An interesting fact about proper composition of the face is that the ease of maintaining it in our society would seem to decline with age, so that, especially in the social class groupings whose women long retain an accent on sexual attractiveness, there comes to be an increasingly long period of time after awakening that is required to get the face into shape, during which the individual in her own eyes is not "presentable." A point in age is also reached when, given these youthful standards of what a face in play should look like, there will be viewing angles from which an otherwise properly composed face looks to have insufficient tonus.

The disciplined ordering of personal front is one way, then, in which the individual is obliged to express his aliveness to those about him. Another means is the readiness with which he attends to new stimuli in the situation and the alacrity with which he responds to them with body movements. I think that the individual so generally maintains a proper motor level in

15. B. Phillips, "Notes on the Prison Community," in H. Cantine and D. Rainer, eds., *Prison Etiquette* (Bearsville, New York: Retort Press, 1950), pp. 105-106.

situations that this is one type of propriety that is very difficult indeed to become aware of. Here again mental wards help us. For example, a common symptom displayed by persons diagnosed as schizophrenic consists of very slow body movements as shown, say, during hallway pacing. While thus engaged, the patient may respond to a question from an attendant by turning his head slowly in the direction of the voice, and this only by moving his whole trunk, as if his neck were completely stiff, while keeping his face immobile. (This kind of conduct is somewhat similar to the kind that is popularly thought to occur in sleepwalking, and calls forth a similar response; namely, the feeling of someone being in the situation physically but not fully present for purposes of interaction.) Bleuler has given us fine descriptions of the extremes of this deadness to the situation, as he has with so many schizophrenic symptoms, pointing to the inward emigration that presumably occurs at these times:

Autism is also manifested by many patients externally. (Naturally, this is, as a rule, unintentional.) Not only do they not concern themselves with anything around them, but they sit around with faces constantly averted, looking at a blank wall; or they shut off their sensory portals by drawing a skirt or bed clothes over their heads. Indeed, formerly, when the patients were mostly abandoned to their own devices, they could often be found in bent-over, squatting positions, an indication that they were trying to restrict as much as possible of the sensory surface area of their skin.¹⁶

It should be added that this lack of presence may be nicely demonstrated in establishments that are not medical but are none the less similar in many ways to mental hospitals:

About the prison yard and the shops one sees inmates for whom smiles, small talk, alertness, and attention to the environment come easily. One also sees about half as many men who seldom smile, who seldom talk, who stumble as they walk in lines, whose errors in

16. E. Bleuler, *Dementia Praecox or the Group of Schizophrenias*, trans. J. Zinkin (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), pp. 65-66.

their tasks cause small concern, and who respond normally to social stimuli only when a stimulus is strong or different. Status or social approbation is as nothing. It is reverie-plus that controls them.¹⁷

In general, then, if the individual is to be in the situation in full social capacity, he will be required to maintain a certain level of alertness as evidence of his availability for potential stimuli, and some orderliness and organization of his personal appearance as evidence that he is alive to the gathering he is in. A problem for analysis, of course, is to go on to isolate analytically the various ways in which insufficient presence may be manifested.

17. D. Clemmer, *The Prison Community* (reissue; New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1958), p. 244.

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PART TWO

**Unfocused
Interaction**

Rinehart,

CHAPTER 3

Involvement

1. Body Idiom

AS ALREADY suggested, when individuals come into one another's immediate presence in circumstances where no spoken communication is called for, they none the less inevitably engage one another in communication of a sort, for in all situations, significance is ascribed to certain matters that are not necessarily connected with particular verbal communications. These comprise bodily appearance and personal acts: dress, bearing, movement and position, sound level, physical gestures such as waving or saluting, facial decorations, and broad emotional expression.

In every society these communication possibilities are institutionalized. While many such usable events may be neglected, at least some are likely to be regularized and accorded a common meaning. Half-aware that a certain aspect of his activity is available for all present to perceive, the individual tends to modify this activity, employing it with its public character in mind. Sometimes, in fact, he may employ these signs solely because they can be witnessed. And even if those in his presence are not quite conscious of the communication they are receiving, they will none the less sense something sharply amiss should the uncustomary be conveyed. There is, then, a body symbolism, an idiom of individual appearances and gestures that tends to call forth in the actor what it calls forth in the others, the others

drawn from those, and only those, who are immediately present.¹

Now these embodied expressive signs can function to qualify whatever an individual may mean by a statement he makes to others and thus play a role in the focused interaction of, say, a conversational gathering. However, it is the special character of many of these events, when seen as communications, that they cannot be easily focused or shielded, tending, in the extreme, to be accessible to everyone in the situation at large. Further, while these signs seem ill suited for extended discursive messages, in contrast to speech, they do seem well designed to convey information about the actor's social attributes and about his conception of himself, of the others present, and of the setting. These signs, then, form the basis of unfocused interaction, even though they can also play a role in the focused kind.

In this realm of unfocused interaction, no one participant can be officially "given the floor"; there is no official center of attention. Although the individual may exert special care over this kind of conduct in order to make a good impression on a particular person in the setting—as when a girl wears a perfume she knows her boyfriend likes—such a performance tends to be presented as if it were primarily for the benefit of everyone in the vicinity.

Body idiom, then, is a conventionalized discourse.² We must

1. Bodily action as a basis for social interaction is touched on in social science literature under the heading "nonverbal communication." The postural aspects of this behavior have been systematically diagrammed by G. W. Hewes, "World Distribution of Certain Postural Habits," *American Anthropologist*, 57 (1955), 231-244. A very acute general treatment may be found in R. Birdwhistell, *Introduction to Kinesics* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, Foreign Service Institute, 1952). See also J. Ruesch and W. Kees, *Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956); T. S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Hoeber-Harper, 1961); S. Feldman, *Mannerisms of Speech and Gestures in Everyday Life* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959), Part 2; D. Efron, *Gesture and Environment* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1941); M. Critchley, *The Language of Gesture* (London: Edward Arnold, 1939); and E. T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

2. G. H. Mead's distinction between "significant" and "nonsignificant" gestures is not entirely satisfactory here. Body idiom involves something more than a nonsignificant "conversation of gestures," because this idiom tends to evoke the same meaning for the actor as for the witness, and tends to be employed by the actor

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see that it is, in addition, a normative one. That is, there is typically an obligation to convey certain information when in the presence of others and an obligation not to convey other impressions, just as there is an expectation that others will present themselves in certain ways. There tends to be agreement not only about the meaning of the behaviors that are seen but also about the behaviors that ought to be shown.

Although an individual can stop talking, he cannot stop communicating through body idiom; he must say either the right thing or the wrong thing. He cannot say nothing. Paradoxically, the way in which he can give the least amount of information about himself—although this is still appreciable—is to fit in and act as persons of his kind are expected to act. (The fact that information about self can be held back in this way is one motive for maintaining the proprieties.) Finally, it should be noted that while no one in a society is likely to be in a position to employ the whole expressive idiom, or even a major part of it, nevertheless everyone will possess some knowledge of the same vocabulary of body symbols. Indeed, the understanding of a common body idiom is one reason for calling an aggregate of individuals a society.

2. *Involvement*

Granted that the individual makes information available through body idiom, the question then arises as to what this information is about. We can begin to answer this question by looking at one of the most obvious types of propriety—"occasioned activity."

During any social occasion we can expect to find some activities that are intrinsically part of the occasion in the sense, for

because of its meaning for the witness. Something less than significant symbolism seems to be involved, however: an extended exchange of meaningful acts is not characteristic; an impression must be maintained that a margin of uncalculating spontaneous involvement has been retained in the act; the actor will usually be in a position to deny the meaning of his act if he is challenged for performing it.

example, that a political speech is an expected part of a political rally. Such "occasioned activity" is likely to be legitimated as appropriate in social situations that form under the aegis of the corresponding social occasion, providing one basis for the common-sense notion that "there is a time and place for everything." But we must then ask why a particular activity is defined as appropriate for the social occasion in the first place. More important, the display of properly occasioned activity seems to be only one of the general forms of propriety, only one of the ways of fitting in.

There is, however, one promising point about these considerations. To be engaged in an occasioned activity means to sustain some kind of cognitive and affective engrossment in it, some mobilization of one's psychobiological resources; in short, it means to be *involved* in it.³ Further, by asking of any piece of obligatory situational behavior what it conveys about the allocation of involvement of the actor, we find that a limited number of themes occurs, and that each theme is expressed through many different aspects of behavior. In brief, by translating concrete obligatory acts into terms of expressed involvement, we have a way of showing the functional equivalence of aspects of such diverse phenomena as dress, stance, facial expression, and task activity. Underneath apparent differences, we shall be able to glimpse a common structure. To analyze situational proprieties, then, it will be necessary to turn to an analysis of the social regulations that determine the individual's conceptions and allocations of involvement.⁴

The first thing to be noted about "involvement in situations"

3. The term "involved" is used in two other additional senses in everyday speech: that of "commitment," in the sense of having made oneself liable and responsible for certain actions; and that of "attachment," in the sense of vesting one's feelings and identification in something. Because of this ambiguity I have elsewhere used the term "engagement" as I shall in this book use "involvement." See "Role Distance," *Encounters* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961).

4. Involvement as a variable is considered in E. F. Borgatta and L. S. Cottrell, Jr., "On the Classification of Groups," *Sociometry*, 18 (1955), 416-417. One aspect of involvement, that of intensity, has been considered by T. R. Sarbin in "Role Theory," section "Organismic Dimension," pp. 233-235 in G. Lindzey, ed., *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954). My own orientation to involvement derives from G. Bateson and M. Mead, *Balinese Character* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942).

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is the terminological ambiguity of this phrase. I mean to speak now only of situated involvements, those sustained *within* the situation, whereas the phrase "involvement in the situation" has this meaning and also a more circumscribed one, referring to ways in which the individual may have somehow given himself up to the situation as a whole and its gathering, possessing thus a *situational* involvement. I propose to use the term "involvement *within* the situation" to refer to the way the individual handles his situated activities, and will refrain for the moment from using the phrase "involvement *in* the situation" at all.

The involvement that an individual sustains within a particular situation is a matter of inward feeling. Assessment of involvement must and does rely on some kind of outward expression. It is here that we can begin to analyze the effect of the body idiom, for it is an interesting fact that just as bodily activities seem to be particularly well designed to spread their information throughout a whole social situation, so also these signs seem well designed to provide information about the individual's involvement. Just as the individual finds that he must convey something through body idiom, and is required to convey the right thing, so also he finds that while present to others he will inevitably convey information about the allocation of his involvement, and that expression of a particular allocation is obligatory. Instead of speaking of a body idiom, we can now be a little more specific and speak instead of an "involvement idiom" and of rules regarding the allocation of involvement.

Since the involvement idiom of a group appears to be a learned conventional thing, we must anticipate one real difficulty in cross-cultural or even cross-subcultural studies. The same general type of gathering in different cultures may be organized on the basis of different involvement obligations. The audience of a dramatic production in many Far Eastern societies, for example, is required to exhibit less sustained attentiveness and single-mindedness than the audience of many dramatic productions in American society. But entirely apart from this kind of difference, it is the case that the same behavioral cue in one

society may by convention carry different involvement implications in another. Thus the members of one religious group may show reverent orientation to the House of the Lord by baring the head and the members of another by taking care to cover it. When a difference in situational conduct is found between two cultures, or in the same culture over time, it becomes a complicated matter to determine what part of this discrepancy reflects a difference in the conventional idiom for expressing the underlying involvement, and what part reflects a difference in this involvement itself.

3. Involvement Shields

Since involvement is not directly visible but can only be inferred through its conventional signs, actual involvement may be of little significance. What we want to know about is "effective" involvement, that is, the involvement that the actor and the others sense he is maintaining, or sense he is (or might be) sensed to be maintaining.

A demand regarding engrossment is a demand on the inner spirit of the engrossed person. Naturally, at times his heart may not lie where the social occasion requires it to. In such cases a solution is to conceal improper involvement and to affect appropriate involvement. Another solution, of course, is for the disaffected individual to realize in advance that he will not be able or willing to comply with the involvement rulings and to refrain from entering the situation in the first place. A similar separation from the situation is sometimes provided by sympathetic others. Thus, if an individual must be given bad news that is likely to "break him up," the giver may wait for a suitable moment when the recipient is off by himself, and there is not likely to be an immediate call for his situational presence.⁵ The

5. An extreme example of how sympathetic others can help shelter an individual is found in the protective patterns of the male lower class, where someone who has become drunk, evincing in every inch of his manner that he is incapable of appropriate involvement, may be concealed bodily from the authorities by his friends and "buddies."

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recipient can then respond emotionally to the news he receives without doing damage in a wider social situation, where his plight might be appreciated but his response hardly permitted to everyone present.

Given the fact that involvement signs must be signified and witnessed before the appropriateness of involvement allocation can be inferred, we may expect to find a variety of barriers to perception used as *involvement shields*, behind which individuals can safely do the kind of things that ordinarily result in negative sanctions. Because one perceives the individual's involvement in reference to the whole context of his activity, involvement can be shielded by blocking perception of either bodily signs of involvement or objects of involvement, or both. Bedrooms and bathrooms are perhaps the main shielding places in Anglo-American society,⁶ bathrooms having special interest here because in many households these are the only rooms in which the solitary person can properly lock himself. And it may be only under these guaranteed conditions that some individuals will feel safe in manifesting certain situationally improper involvements.⁷

Every social establishment, in fact, has some crevices that provide this kind of shelter. At Central Hospital, for example, it was considered "unprofessional" for nurses to smoke outdoors on the grounds, for it seemed that smoking was felt to portray a self that was somehow insufficiently dedicated to the needy world of the patients. Student nurses walking through the tunnel that joined the two halves of the grounds would sometimes slow up and spitefully light a cigarette during their very brief

6. These places and other "backstage" regions are considered at length in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), Chap. 3.

7. Situational proprieties have, of course, pursued some categories of persons even here. There are convents where modesty is said to be maintained even when alone in the bathtub, apparently on the assumption that a deity is present. And during the sixteenth century, when travelers were obliged to share inn beds with strangers of the same sex, it was hoped, in theory at least, that the sleeper would conduct himself decorously during the night so as not unduly to disturb others in the situation. See H. Nicolson, *Good Behaviour* (London: Constable, 1955), p. 154, and N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (2 vols.; Basel: Falken, 1939), "Über das Verhalten im Schlafräum," I, 219-230.

period of low visibility. The horseplay they engaged in at this time was a further expression of "breaking role," of enjoying what Everett C. Hughes has called "role release."

There are involvement shields that have the useful attribute of being portable. Thus, while women in European society no longer employ fans, let alone masks, to conceal a blush or a failure to blush,⁸ hands are now used to cover closed eyes that are obliged to be open,⁹ and newspapers to cover mouths that should not be open in a yawn. Similarly, in coercive institutions such as prisons, involvement in smoking may be concealed by cupping the cigarette in one's hand.¹⁰

A question to ask about involvement shields is whether or not it is really felt to be legitimate to employ them, whether—to take the extreme case—it is permissible to go "out of play" when entirely alone. Thus, when a fully relaxed person is unexpectedly intruded upon by a visitor, both are likely to feel embarrassment. The discovered person does not quite have the right, apparently, to have been undressed interactionally, and the intruder does not quite have the right to have caught the other in his impropriety. The exception here, it should be added, has its own significance for us: given the status of the discovered person, there may be categories of discoverers, such as servants, courtiers, and young children, who do not have the social power to cause merely-situated acts to be performed with much of a situational covering. As a functional concomitant of this incapacity, these "nonpersons" often have the privilege of entering a room unannounced, without the preliminary warnings, such as a telephone call or a knock, that full persons are

8. E. S. Turner, *A History of Courting* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), p. 73.

9. Closed eyes, of course, do not always express the fact that the individual has departed from the gathering by dozing off. There are moments of love-making or chamber music listening when closed eyes may be a respectful sign of deep emotional involvement in the proceedings. In these cases, however, the eyes are shut in a special way to show that the person behind the eyelids is still present in a properly occasioned capacity.

10. See, for example, G. Dendrickson and F. Thomas, *The Truth About Dartmoor* (London: Gollancz, 1954), p. 171.

Involvement

often obliged to give.¹¹ Incidentally, it is just when an individual feels he is sheltered from others' view, and suddenly discovers he is not, that we obtain the clearest picture of what he owes to the gathering, for at such moments of discovery the discovered individual is likely to assemble himself hurriedly, inadvertently demonstrating what he lays aside and what he puts on solely by virtue of the mere presence of others. In order to guard against these embarrassments, and in order to generate within himself other persons' view of him, the individual may maintain presentability even when alone—thus forcing us to allow that situational behavior may occur even in the absence of an actual social situation.

Ordinarily we think of involvement shields as one means by which the individual can maintain the impression of proper involvement while he is actually delinquent in his situational obligations. Interestingly enough, while the quite extensive forms of situational withdrawal that a psychotic patient sometimes employs may provide him with a needed way of defending himself against the past or the present, the consistent maintenance of this withdrawal may become at times a taxing necessity and a discipline all of its own. Hence some of these patients can be observed using involvement shields to conceal not a momentary lack of orientation in the situation but a momentary occurrence of it. The television screen, the Sunday funnies, and new visitors to the ward seem to provide special temptations, leading patients to show a lively interest when they think no one is observing them. The following modes of conduct have been recorded:

the patient reveals that she is able to focus on others when she is not involved herself and when she feels unobserved in the process. In situations in which this occurs and she discovers she is being observed, she quickly turns her attention inward.¹²

11. See "Communication Conduct," Chap. 16, and *The Presentation of Self*, pp. 151-155.

12. M. Schwartz, "Social Interaction of a Disturbed Ward of a Hospital" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1951), p. 94.

Even in the more usual case, however, where the shelter is employed to conceal withdrawal in the situation, we must not misunderstand the significance of using these devices. The use of a shelter says just as much for the power of situational obligations as it does for the tendency of persons to seek some means of squirming out of them. It is only when it is glaringly apparent that a shield is being used for such concealment, or when a shield could easily be used and is not, that instances of situational insolence occur. An example may be cited from my hospital field notes:

Crowded ward for regressed females. A patient notices that her sanitary napkin is askew. She gets up from the bench and in an open methodical way starts fishing for the napkin by running her hand up her leg and under her skirt. However, even when she bends down, her hand cannot quite reach far enough. She stands up and nonchalantly drops her dress down off her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor. She then calmly fixes the napkin in place, and afterward pulls the dress back up again, all the while showing not unawareness but regal unconcern for the need of guile or subterfuge. The manner of her action, not the aim of the action itself, expresses contempt for the situation.

The idea of involvement shields has been stressed because it points out a very characteristic attribute of situated conduct. Since the domain of situational proprieties is wholly made up of what individuals can experience of each other while mutually present, and since channels of experience can be interfered with in so many ways, we deal not so much with a network of rules that must be followed as with rules that must be taken into consideration, whether as something to follow or carefully to circumvent.

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CHAPTER 4

Some Rules About the Allocation of Involvement

INVOLVEMENT refers to the capacity of an individual to give, or withhold from giving, his concerted attention to some activity at hand—a solitary task, a conversation, a collaborative work effort. It implies a certain admitted closeness between the individual and the object of involvement, a certain overt engrossment on the part of the one who is involved. Involvement in an activity is taken to express the purpose or aim of the actor. To discuss involvement, we can begin with common-sense distinctions institutionalized in our American society and presumably in others.

Men and animals have a capacity to divide their attention into *main* and *side* involvements. A main involvement is one that absorbs the major part of an individual's attention and interest, visibly forming the principal current determinant of his actions. A side involvement is an activity that an individual can carry on in an abstracted fashion without threatening or confusing simultaneous maintenance of a main involvement. Whether momentary or continuous, simple or complicated, these side activities appear to constitute a kind of fuguelike dissociation of minor muscular activity from the main line of an individual's action. Humming while working and knitting while listening are examples.

Along with the distinction between main and side involvements, we must make another that can easily be confused with the first. We must distinguish between *dominant* and *subordinate* involvements. A dominating involvement is one whose claims upon an individual the social occasion obliges him to be ready to recognize; a subordinate involvement is one he is allowed to sustain only to the degree, and during the time, that his attention is patently not required by the involvement that dominates him. Subordinate involvements are sustained in a muted, modulated, and intermittent fashion, expressing in their style a continuous regard and deference for the official, dominating activity at hand. Thus, while waiting to see an official, an individual may converse with a friend, read a magazine, or doodle with a pencil, sustaining these engrossing claims on attention only until his turn is called, when he is obliged to put aside his time-passing activity even though it is unfinished.

Typically, it is expected that a main involvement will be a dominating one and a side involvement a subordinate one, as when a worker smokes a cigarette unthinkingly but only when and where the job allows. This relationship, however, is by no means invariable. Many dominating involvements, such as work tasks, can be sustained automatically and unthinkingly for long periods, allowing the individual to devote his main focus of attention to pursuits such as idle gossip, which, however involving, will be put aside when the task requires attention. A telegrapher, for example, can tap out messages while sustaining a conversational byplay with a fellow worker.

Once we see that an undemanding but socially dominating activity can be sustained while the individual's main focus of attention is temporarily drawn to another issue, we can go on to see that while thus engaged he can sustain additional side involvements, like smoking, which are themselves subordinated to the temporary and unofficial main involvement. We should also see that claims upon the individual can suddenly change, and that what had been a dominant involvement can suddenly be demoted in status and become subordinated to a new source of

involvement now considered properly to be the one of first priority.

In our society, it is recognized that certain activities are to be carried on only as main and dominating involvements; many social ceremonies are instances. It is also recognized that certain other activities are to be carried on only as side involvements and subordinate ones, as, for example, chewing gum. (These slight involvements are not to be accorded main attention even when no main involvement is required.) Within these limits, however, what is defined as a dominating involvement at one time be defined as subordinate at another. Thus, on the job, the drinking of a cup of coffee may be a subordinate involvement; during official coffee breaks, it may be the dominating activity.

1. The Management of Subordinate Involvements

I have suggested that subordinate involvements—side and main—express, by definition, at least a surface respect for what is agreed should be the controlling business at hand, however demanding they may be in fact. It is implied that such subordinate involvements ought to catch only the individual's lesser and unimportant self. It is understandable, then, that when an individual wishes to give weight to these subordinate activities he will conceal and cover them with a show of their being merely distractions. It is also understandable that these involvements will be a constant threat to obligatory behavior, ever ready to absorb more of the individual's concern that is felt proper. This is especially the case with involvements well established as subordinate side ones, since these involvements, defined and described as "minor" in everyday terms, will never be entirely prohibited in the situation, and hence a few will always be available as beginning points for defection.

The idiom of subordinate involvements differs widely from one cultural group to another. Even between the English and

American pattern we find a difference, as Dickens reminds us in his British response to an American custom:

As Washington may be called the headquarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva, the time is come when I must confess, without any disguise, that the prevalence of those two odious practices of chewing and expectorating began about this time to be anything but agreeable, and soon became most offensive and sickening. In all the public places of America this filthy custom is recognized. In the courts of law the judge has his spittoon, the crier his, the witness his, and the prisoner his; while the jurymen and spectators are provided for, as so many men who in the course of nature must desire to spit incessantly. In the hospitals the students of medicine are requested, by notices upon the wall, to eject their tobacco juice into the boxes provided for that purpose, and not to discolor the stairs. In public buildings visitors are implored, through the same agency, to squirt the essence of their quids, or "plugs," as I have heard them called by gentlemen learned in this kind of sweetmeat, into the national spittoons, and not about the bases of the marble columns. But in some parts this custom is inseparably mixed up with every meal and morning call, and with all the transactions of social life.¹

Dickens said in 1842, of course, what many Americans would say now, so it should be apparent that involvement idiom can change through time within the same nation. Thus, some signs, such as whittling, taking snuff, or toying with one's key chain, are largely passing out of currency as part of the available vocabulary; others, such as spinning, have disappeared altogether in our American society; others, such as keeping an ear cocked to the radio or phonograph, have come into being within living memory; still others, such as smoking, have changed their meaning and have ceased to connote the degree of situational license they once did.

Different social groupings, too, will have different subordinate involvements available to them. At Central Hospital, for example, during breaks in the rehearsal for the patient stage

1. Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (Greenwich, Conn.: Premier Americana, Fawcett Publications, 1961), pp. 134-135.

production, a few of the middle-class female patients would "doodle" with the entire body by means of practice ballet movements; this idiom was not available to the lower-class females present. In our society, knitting is a subordinate involvement ordinarily prohibited to men, just as pipe smoking is to women. And, as in all matters of involvement allocation, age-grade differences in permissible subordinate involvements are very marked. In many American movie houses, for example, there is a daily and weekly cycle of civic order, the day, and especially Saturday and Sunday afternoons, being defined as a time when a wide range of subordinate involvement is tolerated, while the other times are defined as occasions when few subordinate involvements are allowed. In Chicago, there are, in fact, movie houses that specialize in the kind of social order maintained by children:

The theater is characterized as showing old films. Only little kids can be enthralled by dated pictures. Therefore the theater is classified as for little kids. Since it is not a place to be taken seriously, it can serve as a kind of indoor recreation hall for the older children, a place where they can devote more attention to each other than to the screen.²

Similarly, it may be permissible for a child on the street to suck his thumb, or lick a sucker, or inflate chewing-gum bubbles until they burst, or draw a stick along a fence, or fully interrupt his main line of activity to take a stone from his shoe. But the adult mental patients in Central Hospital who were observed conducting themselves in some of these ways were felt by staff to be acting "symptomatically."

For any specific class of social gatherings, we may expect to find regulations concerning the kinds of subordinate involvement that will be tolerated. As has been suggested, this selection seems to be based on an assessment of the amount of one's attention and self that would be absorbed through these activities and the amount, therefore, that would be left over for the domi-

2. E. Freidson, "An Audience and Its Taste" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1952), p. 216.

nating involvement. For example, it is reported that, during a group therapy session conducted by and for the staff of a child residential treatment center, it was considered acceptable for a participating member of the staff to hold a cat on her lap; to give the animal more than occasional pats, however, was felt to be a sign of withdrawal from the session.⁸

As with other aspects of involvement structure, there is an ecology regarding subordinate involvement. It has been said, for example, that between the wars in London there were districts such as Bond Street where a lady did not walk while holding anything more than gloves, a leash, or a walking umbrella, and where similar restrictions applied to gentlemen. A small parcel carried under the arm was not *comme il faut*, for such an involvement in visible muscular activity apparently implied a threat to the kind of finished poised appearance deemed proper. From this extreme, a continuum could be traced in the same city to places where people properly went about struggling under shoulder harnesses or heavy objects such as boxes or large tools.⁴

Prohibitory rules about subordinate involvements, unlike many other kinds of involvement regulation, are frequently made quite explicit. The settings of many gatherings present posted rules, for example, about not smoking or not chewing gum. In disciplinary settings such as jails, these rules can extend to the prohibition of talk during meals. In some convents these rules may even govern the "conduct of the eyes" during meditation and prayers, so that the act of merely looking around the

3. Hannah Meara, "The Group Therapy Session as a Social Situation," unpublished paper.

4. In those peasant societies where persons are used to working all through the waking hours, instead of during a special time of day as in our society, a very great amount of side involvement seems to be tolerated and even enjoined, at least from the point of view of our own involvement idiom. For example, we are told of South American Indians:

It is held to be typical of Indian women to be occupied with spinning while walking along the road, while selling in the market, and while gossiping with each other, and men are similarly seen engaged in some braiding or cording work, or even spinning, as they walk.

(B. R. Salz, "The Human Element in Industrialization," *American Anthropological Association Memoir No. 85*, 1955, p. 101.)

room may constitute an unacceptable subordinate involvement.⁶

There are interesting historical changes in regard to permissible and impermissible subordinate involvements in particular situations. In many university classrooms in the last two decades, for example, knitting and smoking have become permissible, signifying, perhaps, a downgrading of the dignity of the occasion and an upgrading of the status of the students relative to the faculty. A somewhat similar change in idiom and in involvement rulings can be found among American adolescents. This group seems to have greater license in regard to informal conduct in public places than it had a generation ago. At the same time, the vogue of the portable transistor radio has guaranteed a source of absorbing subordinate involvement that can be carried into a multitude of different situations.⁶

Given the fact that a subordinate involvement provides a diversion of self from a dominant involvement, even if this diversion is felt to be a minor kind, we may expect that when a dominant involvement seems to threaten the security of an individual and his self-control within the situation, he may initiate or affect a subordinate involvement in order to show that he is

5. Nuns are apparently trained to maintain greater withdrawal from the situation at large than laity, this being an important part of their socialization into their calling and a brake upon quick adaptation to the secular world should they leave the sisterhood. See Kathryn Hulme, *The Nun's Story* (London: Muller, 1956), p. 67, and Sister Mary Francis, *A Right to be Merry* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), p. 18:

To return to the train ride, when a cloistered nun is out of her cloister, she is still a cloistered nun. She observes the spirit of her vow of enclosure wherever she is, and as many of its practical regulations as she can when she is outside. Thus, no contemplative nun would wander about the train "making friends" or striking up chance conversations. Neither would she stare about curiously at everything and everybody within her visual or aural focus.

6. Portable radios have not come into use without resistance, at least in some countries. A Reuters news release from Dijon, France (*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 28, 1961) reports:

Canon Felix Kir, 85, left-wing mayor of Dijon, banned the playing of portable radios in public here today.

The cleric, who is also dean of the French National Assembly, where he is a deputy, issued the order after receiving dozens of complaints and after making a personal visit to the local swimming pool.

"I had to leave," he said. "I could not bear the cacophony of noise from all the radios—it was like a fairground."

in command of his circumstances. Tactful persons who are sources of threat may initiate this defense for him; their offering him a cigarette is an example.⁷

2. Obligations Regarding Main Involvements

In many social situations, a particular main involvement will be seen as an intrinsic part of the social occasion in which the situation occurs, and will be defined as preferential if not obligatory. At a card party, for example, participants may be expected to focus their attention on cards, justifying this allocation of involvement by reference to the nature of the social occasion. As suggested, we can therefore speak of occasioned main involvements.

The significance of maintaining an occasioned main involvement can be seen, in relief, by examining what happens when an individual is insufficiently knowing to "catch" the meaning of what is going on. At such times he will have great difficulty in sustaining attention and hence proper involvement within the situation. This is the problem faced by foreign students in a classroom lecture or by persons not British at a cricket match. Similarly, when an amateur examining his car engine to determine why his car has stalled feels uncomfortable under the gaze of the other passengers, this discomfort may arise not only because he has caused them an inconvenience and is demonstrating incompetence, but also because he must act involved in his task and may not know enough about motors to become sincerely caught up in examining one for failings.⁸ Interestingly

7. The easiness expressed by smoking can be balanced by the tremor an individual may display in obtaining a light and holding the cigarette. Thinking ahead, he may not know whether smoking or not smoking is the safer course.

8. Insufficient experience is not the only cause of such a predicament. When guests at a small occasion of sociability are momentarily left by their host to their own devices, a similar problem occurs: expecting to be guaranteed sociable interaction, they may find nothing available as a legitimate main involvement and hence no means of being at ease.

enough, if an individual is insufficiently schooled in a subject matter to participate in it from within, as it were, and attempts to compensate for his alienation by wearing exactly the right clothes, employing exactly the right equipment, or assuming exactly the right stance, those around him may say that he is "overinvolved in the situation." In fact, however, it might be more accurate to say that he is insufficiently involved in the occasioned main involvement and overdependent on selected signs of being at one with this activity. In this way we might try to account for the slight uneasiness caused others by a woman not closely related to the deceased who appears at the funeral in a very modish, very complete, black ensemble.

The main involvement sustained by an individual within a social situation can express his apparent purpose in being present; an obligation to have an appropriate main involvement is an obligation to have a particular purpose. As suggested, however, there are social situations in which those present do have a purpose, even an obligatory one, that does not in itself require or even allow a main involvement, for example, when an individual in a vehicle of public transportation sits or stands while awaiting his destination. At such times the individual may sustain quite absorbing main involvements which are patently subordinated to a dominant involvement that cannot yet occur.

Whether an occasioned main involvement is prescribed or not, the participant in a social gathering—at least in a middle-class gathering—may be obliged to sustain at least a certain *minimal main involvement* to avoid the appearance of being utterly disengaged. This is one reason why waiting rooms, club cars, and passenger airplanes in our society often are supplied by management with emergency supplies such as magazines and newspapers, which serve as minimal involvements that can be given weight (when there is nothing but waiting to do) yet can be immediately discarded when one's turn or destination arrives. Newspapers, in particular, play an important role here, providing a portable source of involvement, which can be brought

forth whenever an individual feels he ought to have an involvement but does not.⁹

In our society meals provide an interesting problem in involvement allocation. In public restaurants eating is defined as the dominating involvement, and yet it is also seen as something that perhaps ought not to engage very much of the individual's attention. Often, therefore, subordinate involvements will be sought out to drain off some unusable involvement capacity. Thus, when an individual finds he must eat alone without the cover of conversation with an eating partner, he may bring along a newspaper or a magazine as a substitute companion.¹⁰ And should he have nothing to read, he may elect to sit at the counter and, by having a quick and simple meal, exhibit that some of his involvement is lodged in other affairs to which he is rushing. Facing away from the gathering and toward the counter, he can correct for his exposure in the situation by being located at its edges if not outside it.¹¹

Interestingly enough, there are situations in which certain minor involvements are explicitly demanded, the implication being that the occasion is not important enough to justify a complete absorption in the occasioned main involvement. In Shetland Isle, young women participating in evening family conversation were sometimes obliged to knit at the same time, this side involvement being an important source of household income. Similarly, in one convent we learn that nuns understood that:

9. Apparently one deprivation caused by the 1954 newspaper strike in Britain was that commuters on the Underground had nothing to hide behind—nothing into which they could properly withdraw. This meant they had to appear to do nothing, and for a middle-class Briton this could have implied a slight disorientation in the situation, a kind of self-exposure and "over-presence."

10. Interestingly enough, should the individual read from a scholarly tome in these situations, he may be considered too absorbed for public propriety, too distracted from the dominating activity, and incidentally too little available in the situation at large should he suddenly be called upon to direct his attention to something. It may be added that pocket books, serious though they may be in content, tend to scout this ruling because of their appearance and cost; this may be one reason for their popularity.

11. In some European restaurants a large table is set aside for solitary arrivals who do not want to eat alone; why this is not done in America suggests interesting differences between American and Continental regulations concerning social contact and eating.

You came to the recreation with your workbag. . . . In the bag you carried the work your hands must do while you sat in the circle, for no hands might lie idly folded in the lap. The work, moreover, had to be something manual like darning or knitting. It could not be anything self-absorbing like letter-writing, sketching or reading which would take your attention from the sisters sitting around you.¹²

These illustrations of the balance required between main and side involvements may seem to touch on trivial aspects of behavior, but there are circumstances in which the seriousness of the issue becomes very evident. For example, a constant complaint of patients on the admission wards of mental hospitals is that there is literally nothing to do. Not only does the medical treatment that would seem to constitute the occasioned involvement fail to materialize, but all the usual safety devices for providing subordinate involvements, previously mentioned, may be unavailable, or, if available, may have to be relied upon for a greater period of time than they were apparently designed to manage. Here, improper management of involvement within the situation must be displayed in just those circumstances where its observation by others may be very threatening. The patient, in short, is forced to act oddly just at a time and in a place where the one thing uppermost in his mind may be to demonstrate that he is normal. Should the patient take strong exception to his circumstances, he may be shifted to a "seclusion room," where, quite literally, there may be nothing at all available to provide an acceptable main focus of attention. Alone in a stripped room, it will be nearly impossible for him to act suitably engaged and hence nearly impossible to act sane, and so the patient may try to cover up the judas-hole in the cell door in order to prevent passers-by from transforming a private predicament into a social situation.

Failure to sustain a required degree and kind of main involvement does not occur merely because of a lack of appreciative understanding of what is going on or because of an im-

12. K. Hulme, *The Nun's Story*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

poverished environment. While present in a gathering, the individual may find that his concerns and interest lie outside it, being the kind that can be satisfied within an actual social situation but not the current one.¹³ The expressed impatience that may result, the sense of straining at the situation's bonds, is something everyone has witnessed and displayed. Common, too, are those conditions that lead an individual to say he is bored and to feel too phlegmatic and affectless to engage in a suitable main involvement. It is worth commenting on another possibility, namely, that an individual can apparently feel too anxious and excited to participate properly. Whatever the acceptable main involvements available in the situation, the individual may find himself too agitated to give the required part of himself up to any of them.¹⁴ Persons who fidget and pace approach this condition; and in mental hospitals, manic patients realize it. One of the most poignant mental hospital scenes is that of a patient too excited or distraught to settle into what is available in the situation, yet desperately attempting to do so. Thus, one famous ex-patient, describing his efforts to control himself during periods of excitement, records:

I have often felt this ["unhealthy mental excitement"] and felt also that it could be often controlled by a determined exercise of the will. Often I have risen and walked firmly through the room or field, holding myself in as I would rein in a horse which was striving to break away in spite of curb-chain, bridle, or bit.¹⁵

Sometimes the patient gives the impression that he knows he cannot hope to contain himself in the situation and is now concerned merely with giving others some impression of being properly present. In Central Hospital I observed one patient who would walk from one end of the day-room to the other,

13. The parallel phenomenon in conversations is considered in E. Goffman, "Alienation from Interaction," *Human Relations*, 10 (1957), 47-60.

14. This kind of preoccupation has been memorialized for us in the expectant father cartoon.

15. *The Philosophy of Insanity*, by a Late Inmate of the Glasgow Royal Asylum for Lunatics at Gartnavel (New York: Greenberg, 1947), p. 23.

where there was a doorway leading out to the porch, bravely attempting to give the impression that there was something on the porch he had to see to, and then, without entering the porch, retrace his steps and repeat the cycle. Another patient, a young psychotic woman, with the incredibly rapid tempo of a patient with motor excitement, seemed to attempt to squeeze herself back into the situation by dumping one ashtray into another, one bowl of water into another, one plate of food into another, apparently in the vain hope that it would look as though she were doing something acceptable and meaningful. Another, in repeatedly leaving her cafeteria seat, going to the doorway, and then coming back, would try to cover this anxious action by keeping on her face the studied look of someone who had to be somewhere at a particular time.

There are many social situations where individuals can be found who affect to be caught up in the occasioned proceedings but who in fact have their own special business to pursue and hence their own allocation of involvement. The phrase "to mix with the crowd" tends to be reserved for criminals, detectives, reporters, and other heroes of dissimulation, but the process is in actuality quite a common one.¹⁶ Thus, in some urban public libraries, the staff and the local bums may reach a tacit understanding that dozing is permissible as long as the dozer first draws out a book and props it up in front of his head. In Central Hospital an interesting example of this dissimulation occurred in regard to well-liked attendants who would participate in the organized recreational activity of the parole patients and be quite fully accepted by the patients while doing so. Yet when a fight occurred among the patients at these times, or an attempted escape, the attendant often seemed to be on the scene even before some of the patients present realized anything untoward had happened. At such moments some patients became a little disillusioned, realizing that the attendant's participation was in part merely a show, that his spirit had not been caught up by the occasion, and that all along he had been alertly stand-

16. *The Presentation of Self*, pp. 145-149.

ing guard. It is in cases such as these, when the show of proper involvement is given away, that we obtain a clear outline of the constraints that are usually unfelt and invisible.

Within the walls of a social establishment, formal rules about occasioned main involvements are commonly found. Thus, an important status line in industry can be drawn at the point where employees can be explicitly enjoined to "get to work." (An extreme is seen, apparently, in some Alabama work camps, where "indifference to work" may be punished by the lash or by "cuffing up.") It is well known that "make-work" occurs in these circumstances; namely, an outward show of task activity, an affectation of occasioned main involvement performed at moments of inspection. This activity can be purely situational since it often accomplishes nothing but show.

The problem of maintaining an appropriate main involvement has special bearing on street behavior. The act of purposefully going about one's business, of looking "... as though [one] is coming from some place or going to some place,"¹⁷ involves a dominating objective that leaves the actual focus of attention free for other things; one's destination, and therefore one's dominant involvement, lie outside the situation. Where the subordinate main involvements that can result become intense, as in a heated quarrel or a warm caress, the individual may be seen by others as delinquent in the regard that he owes the gathering at large.

In addition to giving the impression of having been diverted from what ought to be the business in mind, individuals may give the impression of having no business at all to get to. Being present in a public place without an orientation to apparent goals outside the situation is sometimes called lolling, when position is fixed, and loitering, when some movement is entailed. Either can be deemed sufficiently improper to merit legal action. On many of our city streets, especially at certain hours, the police will question anyone who appears to be doing nothing and ask him to "move along." (In London, a recent

17. E. G. Love, *Subways Are for Sleeping* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957), p. 28.

court ruling established that an individual has a right to walk on the street but no legal right merely to stand on it.) In Chicago, an individual in the uniform of a hobo can loll on "the stem," but once off this preserve he is required to look as if he were intent on getting to some business destination. Similarly, some mental patients owe their commitment to the fact that the police found them wandering on the streets at off hours without any apparent destination or purpose in mind. An illustration of these street regulations is found in Samuel Beckett's description of the plight of his fictional crippled hero, Molloy, who tries to manage his bicycle, his crutches, and his tiredness all at the same time:

Thus we cleared these difficult straits, my bicycle and I, together. But a little further on I heard myself hailed. I raised my head and saw a policeman. Elliptically speaking, for it was only later, by way of induction, or deduction, I forget which, that I knew what it was. What are you doing there? he said. I'm used to that question, I understood it immediately. Resting, I said. Resting, he said. Resting, I said. Will you answer my question? he cried. So it always is when I'm reduced to confabulation, I honestly believe I have answered the question I am asked and in reality I do nothing of the kind. I won't reconstruct the conversation in all its meanderings. It ended in my understanding that my way of resting, my attitude when at rest, astride my bicycle, my arms on the handlebars, my head on my arms, was a violation of I don't know what, public order, public decency.¹⁸

[Molloy is then taken to jail, questioned, and released.]

What is certain is this, that I never rested in that way again, my feet obscenely resting on the earth, my arms on the handlebars and on my arms my head, rocking and abandoned. It is indeed a deplorable sight, a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at the end of the day, and roll on the ground.¹⁹

18. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), pp. 25-26.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

Lolling and loitering are often, but not always, prohibited. In societies in which café life is institutionalized, much permitted lolling seems to exist. Even in our own society, some toleration is given to "lolling groups," in which participants open themselves up to any passing momentary focus of attention and decline to maintain a running conversation unless disposed to do so. These clusters of persons passing the time of day may be found on slum corners, outside small-town stores and barber shops,²⁰ on the streets during clement weather in some metropolitan wholesale clothing districts, and, paradoxically, on the courthouse lawns of some small towns.²¹

The rule against "having no purpose," or being disengaged, is evident in the exploitation of untaxing involvements to rationalize or mask desired lolling—a way of covering one's physical presence in a situation with a veneer of acceptable visible activity. Thus, when individuals want a "break" in their work routine, they may remove themselves to a place where it is acceptable to smoke and there smoke in a pointed fashion. Certain minimal "recreational" activities are also used as covers for disengagement, as in the case of "fishing" off river banks where it is guaranteed that no fish will disturb one's reverie, or "getting a tan" on the beach—activity that shields reverie or sleep, although, as with hoboes' lolling, a special uniform may have to be worn, which proclaims and institutionalizes this relative inactivity. As might be expected, when the context firmly provides a dominant involvement that is outside the situation, as when riding in a train or airplane, then gazing out the window, or reverie, or sleeping may be quite permissible. In short, the more the setting guarantees that the participant has not withdrawn

20. See, for example, J. West, *Plainville, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 99-103, and H. Lewis, *Blackways of Kent* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), "The Idling Complex," pp. 68-72.

21. See the papers on "petty offenders" by I. Deutscher: "The White Petty Offender in the Small City," *Social Problems*, 1 (1953), 70-73; "The Petty Offender: A Sociological Alien," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 44 (1954), 592-595; "The Petty Offender: Society's Orphan," *Federal Probation*, 19 (1955), 12-18.

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from what he ought to be involved in, the more liberty it seems he will have to manifest what would otherwise be considered withdrawal in the situation.

Here it is useful to reintroduce a consideration of subordinate involvements such as reading newspapers and looking in shop windows. Because these involvements in our society represent legitimate momentary diversions from the legitimate object of going about one's business, they tend to be employed as covers when one's objective is not legitimate, as the arts of "tailing" suspects have made famous. When Sam Spade affects to be examining a suit in a store window, his deeper purpose is not to try to suggest that he is interested in suits but that he has the same set of purposes as a person in a public street who diverts himself for a moment in going about his business to gaze in a window. Similarly, as an ex-burn tells us, when one's appearance and real purpose put one outside of the current behavior setting, then a pointedly correct subordinate involvement may be essential to convince others that one's dominant involvement is of the kind that is associated with these subordinate involvements:

One idiosyncrasy that he [a friend] has discovered but cannot account for is the attitude of station policemen toward book readers. After seven-thirty in the evening, in order to read a book in Grand Central or Penn Station, a person either has to wear horn-rimmed glasses or look exceptionally prosperous. Anyone else is apt to come under surveillance. On the other hand, newspaper readers never seem to attract attention and even the seediest vagrant can sit in Grand Central all night without being molested if he continues to read a paper.²²

3. Margins of Disinvolvement

The deviations that have been considered all deny in some way the domination of the individual by the social occasion in

22. E. G. Love, *Subways Are for Sleeping*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

which he finds himself. From this, however, it should not be assumed that propriety in situations can be guaranteed by a complete investment of self in an occasioned main involvement. Whatever the prescribed main involvements, and whatever their approved intensity, we usually find, at least in our middle-class society, that the individual is required to give visible evidence that he has not wholly given himself up to this main focus of attention. Some slight margin of self-command and self-possession will typically be required and exhibited. This is the case even though this obligation often must be balanced against the previously mentioned obligation to maintain a minimum of an acceptable main involvement.

Ordinarily the individual can so successfully maintain an impression of due disinvolvement that we tend to overlook this requirement. When a real crisis comes, which induces his complete absorption in a situated task, the crisis itself, as a new social occasion, may conceal, exonerate, and even oblige what would otherwise be a situational delict. During minor crises, however, when the individual has cause to withdraw from general orientation to the gathering but has no license to do so, we may witness wonderfully earnest attempts to demonstrate proper disinvolvement in spite of difficulties. Thus, when a man fully invests himself in running to catch a bus, or finds himself slipping on an icy pavement, he may hold his body optimistically stiff and erect, wearing a painful little smile on his face, as if to say that he is really not much involved in his scramble and has remained in situationally appropriate possession of himself.

There are, apparently, different kinds of overinvolvement in situated activities, as when the individual loudly overinvests himself in cheering at an amateur boxing match or silently overimmerses himself in a chess problem. Again one sees how activities which differ so very much on the surface can have the same expressive significance. Interestingly enough, evidence of the quieter kind of overinvolvement often comes to us through a special class of fuguelike side involvements, these repetitive acts implying that the individual is very deeply involved in a task,

often an occasioned one.²³ There seem to be few situations defined to allow such withdrawal into an activity. Therefore, when an intensely involved individual is caught out in one of these dissociated side involvements, he typically reacts with embarrassment, hastily reallocating his involvement in a more acceptable and more accepting way. Only in those situations, such as examinations and competitive sports, where intensive situated involvement is firmly tied to the purpose of the occasion, are deep task involvements likely to be tolerated.

A very common form of involvement control occurs at mealtimes, where, in many sections of Anglo-American society, the individual is expected to eat relatively slowly, not to take food from his neighbor's plate, and in general to conduct himself as if getting his fill were not the most important thing in the world—as if, in fact, eating required very little attention itself. (In Shetland Isle, for example, a community in which most persons were always a little hungry, it was difficult to find an instance where an individual accepting a second helping of food did not first avow that he had had enough and next proclaim that he had been given too much.) In mental hospitals, staff pay tribute to these rulings by constructing social types to epitomize patients who flagrantly break them. There is, for example, the "stuffer," who presses food into his mouth until his cheeks bulge and he turns red and gasps for want of air; there is also the "food grabber," who, not being trusted to respect his neighbor's plate, will either be served alone or tied to his chair during mealtime by means of a sash looped through his shirt collar, like a dog on a leash, to keep him out of other people's territory. Other, less extreme instances found in the hospital form a bridge to behavior

23. Along with these fuguelike signs we are likely to find disarray of posture (and by implication some evidence of rules regarding posture). One of the early—and one of the few—students of ordinary social gatherings comments:

When a student in the class-room becomes really absorbed in the problem in hand, he is likely to slip down on his shoulder blades, spread his feet, ruffle his hair, and do any number of other unconventional deeds. Let the spell be broken, and up he sits, rearranges his clothes, and again becomes socially proper.

(C. H. Woolbert, "The Audience," *Psychological Monographs*, 21 [1916], 48-49.)

found in free society. At Central Hospital, for example, it was characteristic of some of the "sicker" adult patients to eat their dessert first, thus suggesting too little control of their desire for sweets and too much involvement in eating. This, of course, is a delict often found in small children, who must be taught to conceal both "overeagerness" for oral indulgences and "oversatisfaction" while consuming them.²⁴

In our society, one interesting sign that is taken as evidence of overinvolvement is perspiration; another is a "shaky" voice. More important than these is the phenomenon of shaky hands, a problem for the aged. Individuals with chronic tremors of this kind become "faulty persons," burdening all ordinary interaction with a display of what can be taken as insufficient control over the self. Certain strategies, perhaps independently hit upon, are employed to conceal this sign and to prevent it from giving the lie to the front of proper involvement maintained by the rest of the individual's body. One technique is for the individual to put his hands in his pockets; another, to hold them fast on the table; a third, to hold one shaky hand with the other, while resting one elbow on the table for support.

It may be suggested that the tendency to hold something of himself in reserve may so color an individual's activity that, in those special situations where relatively complete abandonment to a main involvement is required, he may find that he is unable to let himself go. Perhaps the incidence of middle-class frigidity can be understood partly in these terms. In any case, sexual intercourse in our society is preferably carried on under the involvement shield of darkness, for darkness can allow participants to enjoy some of the liberty of not being in a situation at all. This problem, but not this solution, is found, of course, in other settings. Thus, the sharing of an office with another often

24. Appetitive self-control and other involvement rulings are an important part of what parents must teach their children. One basis for the often-stated similarity between mental patients and children is that both groupings must be pressed into compliance with involvement rulings by those in charge. It can be claimed, then, that "regression" is not a return to an infantile state of libidinal organization but rather a manifestation of those problems of situational discipline that incidentally are found among children.

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means a limit on work, because extreme concentration and immersion in a task will become an improper handling of oneself in the situation. Some co-workers apparently resolve the issue by gradually according each other the status of nonperson, thus allowing a relaxation of situational proprieties and an increase in situated concentration. This may even be carried to the point where one individual allows himself half-audible "progress grunts" such as, "What do you know!" "Hm hm," "Let's see," without excusing himself to his co-worker.²⁵ Other dissociated side involvements such as hair twisting may also be indulged in and tolerated in such circumstances.

²⁵ Edgar Schein has suggested that if an individual feels obliged to affect deep immersion in some focus of attention, he may of course affect these expressions.