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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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A Romeo Club in a Donut Shop

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Scott Patrick Murphy

December 2009

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Scott N. Brooks, Chairperson

Dr. Scott Coltrane

Dr. Adalberto Aguirre, Jr.

Dr. Katja Guenther

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The Dissertation of Scott Patrick Murphy is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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For George, Ginny, “Navy” Don, and Wanda

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Romeo Club in a Donut Shop

by

Scott Patrick Murphy

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, December 2009
Dr. Scott N. Brooks, Chairperson

This dissertation is an ethnography explaining how old White straight middle-class men in quasi-suburbia work on a day-to-day basis to meet the demand of becoming visible to themselves and others as “good men.” While much of my nearly four years of fieldwork was conducted amongst a group of morning regulars at a corner donut shop, I also spent considerable hours with the morning regulars in other settings. We attended varied social events together – from birthday parties to garage sales to memorial services. Within the constellation of privilege their social categorizations accord, I came to understand how these men grappled with the marginalizing forces associated with old age. In the absence of widespread, coercive cultural scripts

outlining what constitutes “acceptable” manhood in old age, the morning regulars at the donut shop have constructed their own conception of what constitutes “good manhood.” As a moral identity for the morning regulars, to be known as a “good man” means (1) to be seen by others as having overcome hardship in meritocratic ways and hence having “earned” the right to the relative comfort their retirement affords and (2) to be seen by others as engaging in everyday conduct that is morally and ethically “right.” For these men, a “good man” “keeps busy” and “helps out.”

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Introduction

Worldwide, people are living longer. That's no real newsflash. But the extent to which Americans are living longer and the effects this has had (and will continue to have) on the American demographic landscape is perhaps more newsflash-worthy. Here's some food for thought: In 2006, more than 12% of the US population was aged 65 years or more – about 37 million people. By 2030, nearly 20% of those in the US will be aged 65 years or more. And where the 65 and over population in the US grew from around 3 million people in 1900 to 37 million in 2006, the “oldest-old” – those aged 85 years or more – skyrocketed from over 100,000 in 1900 to around 5.3 million in 2006. The US Census Bureau projects the “oldest-old” population in the US could grow to almost 21 million by 2050¹. Perhaps Generation X has hit the longevity jackpot. It's not at all outlandish to think that domestic policy issues will become increasingly focused on the socio-political “problems” of old age.

But this dissertation isn't about Generation X and isn't about demographic trends. It's about the everyday lives of one subset of the “oldest-old” – an extraordinarily stereotyped group. There are many caricatured stereotypes of old² and “oldest-old” people living in America today. There's the impotent (or conversely vain and drug-thankfully-virile) old man, or the disinterested and

¹ Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics (2008).

² Following Calasanti and Slevin (2001: p. 10), I use the word “old” with the explicit intention of bringing positive connotations back to its use.

dispassionate (or conversely vain and insatiable) old woman. There's the infirm, senile old person. There's the solitary, alienated old curmudgeon, or the poor, diminished failure. And there's the wise sage or the nurturing, sociable old soul. Of course, there are other caricatures of the old too³. But what these stereotyped caricatures have in common is an assumption that old people simply *are*. These stereotyped caricatures assume some essential fixity to being old – that to be old means to be set in this or that way – that old people, by nature, cease to change and no longer work at being this or that kind of person. Most sociologists, myself included, would consider this an essentialist understanding of old people. This is due in part to a generally youth-obsessed American cultural milieu. Late capitalist consumption coupled with scientific technology has brought us Botox, Viagra and a host of other “treatments” to “fix” the aging bodies of those old persons negatively stereotyped as idle, genderless, and asexual⁴. These stereotypes tend to apply to old people of all sorts – cutting across races, social classes, genders, and sexual orientations. Ageism is in this sense unique: “Unlike racism and sexism ... ageism is something that we will all encounter, should we live long enough⁵.”

³ See Thompson (2006) for an elaborate list of stereotypes of the old. See also Calasanti (2004a).

⁴ See Loe (2004) in Viagra and the reduction of manhood to penile performance, Holliday and Cairnie (2007) on male consumption of aesthetic surgery as “body capital,” and Calasanti (2007) on anti-aging advertisements as reinforcing unequal age and gender relations.

⁵ Laws (1995: 113).

It has been asserted, convincingly, that both old men and old women live “invisible lives⁶.” With regard to gender and aging, sociologists have argued that previous scholarship on old men has rendered them “invisible” *as men*⁷. Although these studies do not define “invisibility” outright, they suggest that gender scholars have largely ignored age, and aging scholars have largely ignored gender. And the meanings of “invisibility” and “visibility,” naturally, are varied. Visibility has been understood as “a complex system of permission and prohibition, or presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness⁸.” Ralph Ellison wisely reminds that, in terms of race, visibility is a “double-dealing” term describing how Blacks glow “within the American conscience with such intensity that most whites feigned moral blindness toward his predicament; and these included the waves of late arrivals who refused to recognize the vast extent to which they too benefited from [Blacks’] second-class status⁹.” Most importantly, and perhaps most counter-intuitively, studies concerning old men and visibility imply that men – despite their socially empowered and privileged gender – are pushed towards the margins of society in old age. The structured social locations of straight, middle-class, White men are status locations characterized by enduring

⁶ See Unruh (1983).

⁷ See Calasanti (2004b), Calasanti and Bowen (2006), Fleming (1999), Kaye, Crittenden and Charland (2008), and Thompson (1994).

⁸ Kipness in Gordon (1997: 15).

⁹ Ellison (1952: xv).

forms of power and unearned privilege¹⁰. As people in these social locations grow into old age, however, they too find themselves faced with forms of oppression and marginalizing forces that create distinct challenges in meeting the demands of everyday life. This dissertation keeps such forces in mind in explaining how old White straight middle-class quasi-suburban men meet the demands of everyday life. Perhaps the men I've studied are coming to understand what Toni Morrison does: that "invisible things are not necessarily 'not there'¹¹."

*

For nearly four years, mostly when I was in my late 20's, I sat in a corner donut shop with a group of old (mostly "oldest-old") White straight middle-class men – "the morning regulars." We hung out, drank coffee, ate donuts, and shot the everyday breeze – city politics, the weather, *Jeopardy!*, old cars and, yes, baseball and apple pie.... After earning a spot at "their table," and in coming to understand the sets of nuanced meanings that build up the local code of conduct, I began to learn how these men *worked*, in and through interaction, on a day-to-day basis to sense themselves as being regarded by others as "good men."

In the absence of cultural guidelines outlining what constitutes being both a "real" man *and* an old man at once, old men live in a unique context where they

¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins (1990) provides a convincing theory of structured privilege whereby overlapping and intertwining systems of oppression, based upon both ascribed traits and socially constructed categories, both enable and constrain activity and experience at the level of the individual.

¹¹ Morrison (1989: 110).

“struggle to build acceptable identities¹².” To become visible to others as a “good man” has become a primary concern in the everyday lives of the old men I studied. Where the phrase “good man” is commonplace, the meanings the label carries varies greatly across contexts. In the donut shop and in the neighborhood, “good manhood” is a moral identity, for these men, involving a complex of agreed-upon senses of trustworthiness, busyness, altruism, and storybook careers of meritocratic achievement – all of which are social constructions: sets of meanings built up in interaction that tend to hang together but are also perpetually renegotiated in interaction¹³. “Good manhood” is also a status category whose occupation is not fixed and hence must be perpetually “earned” in and through social interaction with others. And the donut shop provides a crucial setting where peers can report personal stories about past, present, and future on-goings demonstrative of “good manhood.” To be known as a “good man” in the donut shop means to be seen by others as having overcome hardship in meritocratic ways and hence having “earned” the relative comfort retirement affords; to be seen by others as trustworthy; and to be seen by others as engaging in conduct that is morally (usually in the form of “keepin’ busy”) and ethically (usually in the form of “helpin’ out”) “right.”

¹² Spector-Mersel (2006: 68).

¹³ See Ginn and Arber (1995), C. Russell (2007), Smith et al (2007), Thompson and Whearty (2004) and Thompson (2006) for conclusions *that* men renegotiate previously held conceptions of masculinities in old age. A gap in this literature addressed herein is an explanation of *how* these conceptions are renegotiated.

This dissertation explains how these old White straight men in a quasi-suburban neighborhood work to construct a local conception of “good manhood” and explains how they work to impress each other and community members at large in a manner that commands being regarded by others as “good men.”

Given the focus of the endeavor, the explanations herein are primarily oriented toward the social psychology of social organization. The focus is on what these men see as primary demands in everyday life and how members of this social world go about meeting such demands. And so my work also necessarily goes beyond the donut shop and delves into the minutia of their personal lives – their 60-plus year long marriages, the on-goings in their homes and at church, children and grandchildren, health issues associated with old age, and their personal biographies.

My approach (elaborated upon in the methodological appendix) is indebted to differing but commensurable traditions. I’m particularly indebted to a lineage of Chicago School ethnography (from Everett C. Hughes to Howard Becker to Elijah Anderson to Scott N. Brooks) that sees ethnography as the systematic study of culture whose task is to represent that culture in a thoughtful and critical manner. But I’m also indebted to the canon of Erving Goffman whose wit and consummate insights into the unnoticed both inspire and illuminate. My attention to routine, the meanings in and of routine, and what lies underneath everyday average ordinariness is inspired by Alfred Schutz’s phenomenology and Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology. And my commitment to reflexive social science is inspired by

Shulamit Reinharz, who once astutely remarked that she needed the rest of her life to finish her socialization¹⁴.

In this dissertation, I've tried to write in plain talk wherever possible and have tried to relegate relevant and meaningful jargon to footnotes. The goal with this is to write in a manner that is true to the way those under study actually talk. It is an explicit attempt to take the role of the other and provide these men with a "voice" so as to represent this culture on its own terms¹⁵. Whether or not they agree or disagree with my analysis is up to them, and as such, I've used pseudonyms for people and places so as to protect anonymity insofar as possible¹⁶. In later manifestations of this research, I hope to regain a satisfaction in the integrity of the work by using real names of people and places¹⁷.

*

In Chapter 1, I provide a description of the setting – the donut shop, the shopping center, and the neighborhood. I also introduce the employees and the morning regulars. In Chapter 2, I focus on the importance of routine in taking the reader

¹⁴ Reinharz (1979: 382).

¹⁵ See Gubrium and Holstein (1999) for a discussion on the challenges associated with balancing narrative analysis and ethnography – namely, "the recognition of the need to curb ethnography's own representational excesses by letting indigenous voices have their own say" (p. 569).

¹⁶ Pseudonymizing is a remarkably difficult and ethically ambiguous act. See (Guenther 2009) for an analysis of the politics of naming.

¹⁷ See Duneier (1999: 47-352) on publishing ethnography in the absence of pseudonyms.

through the typical days of two of the morning regulars – it’s a day in the lives of two old White straight middle-class men in quasi-suburbia. I show how routines provide these men with reportable accounts demonstrative of “keepin’ busy,” and explain how this relates to “good manhood.” In Chapter 3, I analyze everyday breeze-shooting in the donut shop in terms of what I call *vocabularies of capability* – forms of talk aimed at preemptively quelling potential accusations of failing to adequately “keep busy” and “help out.” I outline how breeze-shooting can illuminate the relationships between talk, activity, and talking-about-activity. In Chapter 4, I explain how the regulars at the donut shop engage in a particular insult ritual, a “humor orgy,” and explain how engaging in this ritual provides regulars with a sense of solidarity. In Chapter 5, I explain how regulars build up a sense of community through unsolicited sociable encounters where “bullshitting” with both strangers and acquaintances in the donut shop is a central organizing activity. In Chapter 6, I dive more deeply into the personal lives of two of the morning regulars in analyzing how their in-home caregiving duties provides these men with opportunities to not so much appropriate aspects of hegemonic masculinity to maintain a sense of “good manhood” in and through provisions of care for their ailing wives, but to engage in instru-expressive tasks that help them see themselves as “good men.” In Chapter 7, I explain how some of the morning regulars used one member’s weekend garage sale as a site to not only reproduce traditional gender norms, but to also construct a quintessentially White middle-class sensibility in the context of the temporary bargain economy of the garage sale where neighborhood

residents negotiate the value of excess consumer goods. In Chapter 8, I provide a life-course analysis of Robert. I tell his harrowing tale of being an escaped Prisoner of War in the Philippines during World War II and explain how he sees the lessons he learned in *becoming Other* during this period as providing “the secret” that enabled him to successfully cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after the war and throughout his life. Lastly, I provide a methodological appendix where I lay out in detail how I conducted the research: I tell stories of coming to earn the trust of the morning regulars at the donut shop; I explain how and why my moving in to the home of one of the morning regulars came about; and I discuss the ethically ambiguous enterprise of pseudonymizing.

Chapter 1: The Setting

Donut shops, like public parks and golf courses, restaurants, Lion's Clubs, VFW's and other such establishments, with their adjacent parking lots and shopping centers, serve as important gathering places for men living in the suburbs. Such establishments provide settings for gatherings – impromptu, planned, routine, or otherwise – where suburban old men can enjoy an ongoing stream of sociable occasions with other neighborhood residents and members of the community at large. These are places where people can work be seen by others as, on one hand, “somebody,” and on the other hand as an equal. Settings that these men associate with wider society (from behemoth shopping malls and health clubs to urban street corners and taverns to facebook pages and blogs), with its seemingly foreign and at times incomprehensible codes of 21st century conduct, aren't as important to such men for gaining a sense of moral worth and enduring relevance as are those settings attended by friends and neighborhood acquaintances.

I wrote the preceding paragraph to match, as closely as possible, the one Elijah Anderson opened his classic ethnography, *A Place on the Corner*. While his study and my own have important similarities, no similarity could be more salient than the fact that they are both studies of how neighborhood men work in a particular public setting to “be somebody.” On the other hand, where Anderson studied Black working-class men in the inner city, I've studied old White straight middle-class men in the quasi-suburbs. Where it is at times the case that those in

different demographics and settings engage in similar social activity, it is also the case that different demographics engage in quite different social activity. Moreover, even those with strikingly similar demographic qualities find themselves embedded in very different cultural milieu. Perhaps, then, it isn't so remarkable how rarely (if ever) sociologists can convincingly theorize about how and why social events occur in a way that is generalizable across time, space, and context. My ambitions, regardless of such a possibility, are not so grand.

This is to say that "being somebody" means something different to the men Elijah Anderson studied than it does to the men I've studied. But perhaps there are enough similarities across contexts to garner an understanding of as-general-as-possible processes of becoming "somebody." The point is that while settings, participants, and activities-in-settings may differ, perhaps there are some roughly common processes of meaning making and culture constructing. Whether or not support can be found in other settings for the propositions I later propose in this dissertation will be a task for others. And such settings are not difficult to find: I came to admire a group of old Polish-American men that meet in the mornings at McCarren Park in Brooklyn, New York; have gained wind of my own step-grandfather's participation in an old boys club of White straight political news junkies that meets in a Hot Springs, Arkansas grocery store coffee shop; and I've briefly enjoyed the old Latino men that take their morning coffee at a Loaf 'n Jug gas

station in Raton, New Mexico¹⁸. To be sure, such non-kin friendship groups of old men, who to passersby often appear to be engaged in “nothing more” than mere bullshitting (more on this later), can be found with little difficulty. This dissertation, while concerned with the broader social world of old men in Sunny¹⁹, California, is primarily focused at one setting: a corner donut shop.

Steve’s Donut Shop

For nearly four years, I took my morning coffee with a group of old White straight middle-class men at a corner donut shop in Sunny, California. About sixty

¹⁸ See Walsh (2004) for an analysis of how people draw upon identities to make sense of politics through informal political conversation.

¹⁹ I’ve used pseudonyms for people and places so as to protect anonymity insofar as possible. Regulars often refer to the donut shop by the owner’s name. The owner, a Chinese-Thai immigrant aged in the 60’s, “goes by” what he refers to as his “White name,” and he is known throughout the neighborhood by his “White name.” Although I’ve changed this name, I’ve attempted to keep it a “White name” so as to accurately convey the degree to which the setting is White dominated in the mornings. I’ve also used White names for the White study participants that are typical of their age cohort (see, e.g. Lieberman and Bell 1992). Another regular to the setting, who I’ll call “John,” is a Latino man who in the donut shop, and in other settings in the neighborhood, also goes by his self-appointed “White name” (which is to his given name what “John” is to “Juan”). There are inherent ethical and political implications in assigning pseudonyms to individuals at least in as far as assigned pseudonyms ascribe or deny such and such identity. I’ve used “White” pseudonyms for these two persons of color in the setting because they use White names themselves and are known by others in the setting by their White names. Naming is a political act and an exertion of power (Guenther 2009), and as such I recognize the use of White pseudonyms and the writing of this very explanation may increase the potential for identifying participants. Nevertheless, I’ve opted to report the findings as such so as to provide an as-accurate-as-possible account of the setting. I will examine the ethical dilemmas in the politics of pseudonyms and the naming of ethnographic subjects in greater detail in a future report.

miles east of Los Angeles, Sunny boasts a small downtown that for a city its size – with a population of over 300,000 – seems quiet. Corporatized shopping malls and strip malls, like much of the US and certainly southern California, seem omnipresent. By and large, it's a freeway city that with a neighboring city shares the lodestone of air pollution in southern California. In fact, Santa Ana winds notwithstanding; Sunny is plagued with some of the worst overall air pollution in the country and some of the worst particulate air pollution on the planet.

On one hand, Steve's Donut Shop might seem ignorable in its average ordinariness; on the other hand, the incongruity of the space is remarkable. Upon entry, one notices the basketball-sized, portly and jovial Chinese Buddha that faces the entryway. The red-lettered, backlit donut menu (akin to the menus at some little-league baseball snack shacks) includes sugary fare such as French Curlers for sixty cents, Crème Horns for seventy, and Apple Fritters for eighty-five. But there are also offerings for the salt enthusiast – including house-made eggrolls, ham and cheese croissants, and Nissan brand Cup 'O Noodles. A small collection of police-officer business cards (thirty-eight of them, to be exact) are proudly on display, neatly arranged atop a refrigerator behind the front counter that cools canned and bottled sodas, milk, and variety of hyper-caFFEinated energy drinks. A loaf of bread sized Harley-Davidson motorcycle replica sits atop another refrigerator.

The walls are lined with an assortment of faded California Lottery posters, a few advertisements featuring the iconic Marlboro Man, and a few posters of assorted breadbaskets and all butter croissants. Where the "Cash Only" sign was

created by stickering the individual letters onto a piece of notebook-sized white plastic, the “No Free Refills” sign is handwritten. Two dubious-looking security video cameras are mounted on separate ends of the ceiling – it seems unlikely that they are operational, if they are even real cameras at all. And toward the end of my study, Steve, the owner of the donut shop, had mounted a small television above Buddha. Aesthetically, Steve’s Donut Shop is a hodgepodge of things all mundanely outdated – nothing quite kitschy and nothing close to antique.

The layout of the space is perhaps also remarkable in its average ordinariness. Four tables (three four-seaters and one two-seater) sit next to the large, sun-drenched windows atop a well-soiled black and white checkered tile floor. Steve, occasionally referred to as “Stevie” (meant in a more affectionate way than in an infantilizing one) by regulars, has remedied peels and cracks in the pink laminated table-tops with duct tape in some places and with deep-set nails in others. And Tom, a retired old White straight working-class handy-man who is a morning regular, has welded broken tables and seats back together on at least two occasions.

All kinds of people frequent the donut shop, although not all who visit frequently are known as regulars. Some of those non-regulars who frequent the donut shop are neighborhood residents. Some live in other parts of the city and stop by before or after work at their day-jobs in a business park a half-mile to the north. Some are students. Some are retired or do not work. And people who spend their time driving during the work day – plumbers, real estate agents, delivery

drivers, postal workers, and yes, police officers – often swing in for a coffee to-go. On any given day, at almost any given time (I also spent many hours in the donut shop at times of the day or night when the men I regularly sat with were not present), one might encounter power-suited Black businesswomen, Latino migrant workers, methamphetamine-addicted “tweakers,” same-sex couples clandestinely holding hands, “university types,” or a group of old White straight middle-class men sitting down together and shooting the breeze. Carrie Yodanis studied how women “do class” in a coffee shop she described as “Joe’s Bar for women²⁰,” outlining how social-class categorizations are performatively emergent features of that space. And though all sorts of people frequent the donut shop, particularly when the morning regulars are present from around nine a.m. to around ten a.m., the morning regulars see themselves and are seen by others as fixtures of this place. The omnipresence and the activities of these men, fixtures of this public space, help to define the space as “Steve’s Donut Shop for old White straight middle-class men.”

Amy and Steve

Steve has owned and operated the donut shop since the early 1990’s. He’s a widowed Chinese-Thai immigrant, and a very proud small-businessman aged in the sixties. He says “Steve” is his, self-appointed, “White name.” And he’s a mover and a shaker. A loud-talker. He bustles. His children have reached adulthood and he is proud to be reminded, particularly by the morning regulars, of how “good they

²⁰ Yodanis (2006).

turned out to be” and how “successful they are.” Steve is also known as a bit of a joker. When being humorous, his impromptu improvisational banter often revolves around money – most typically his lack of enough of it: “That’s a why I’m heeere [at work],” he’ll tell me, smiling and chuckling, with choppy diction and a heavy accent, “don’t have enough moneeeeeeey! I got to pay billlllllls!” He’s also known by regulars to be “tight” with his money and thrifty – perhaps excessively.

And maybe he is. One of the tables where the morning regulars typically sit – one of “our” tables – went missing for a couple of days. A seat had snapped off of the base (it happened at a time when neither I nor any of the morning regulars were present, and luckily no one was hurt). We adjusted easily, sitting at the adjacent tables, and Steve told us he was having the table and seat repaired. Tom, an early morning regular, had been recruited for the job.

Tom spent at least a few mornings on the project – driving his small red 2-wheel drive pickup truck to the donut shop, loading up the broken table and seat into the bed, taking it home to unload it again, fabricating a new piece and welding it onto the base so that the old seat could be refastened, loading it back into the pickup bed, driving it back to the donut shop, unloading it again, and moving it back inside to remount the seat.

On a chance encounter in November of 2008 around noon, I saw Tom’s pickup truck parked outside the donut shop. I hit the brakes on my bicycle and

stopped by. Especially because Tom is an *early* morning regular²¹, I suspected something might up if he was at Steve's so late in the day. I locked my bicycle and helped Tom unload the table. He told me he'd welded it back together for Steve.

"Oh, that's great, man. That's nice of you," I said, "Is he gonna pay you?"

"Awwww," Tom said shaking his head and stepping closer, "He's [Steve's] what I call at T.A. ... Tight ass!"

I smiled and chuckled.

"Oh ..." Tom went on, appearing frustrated, "who knows if he'll pay me ... I told him how much I wanted."

And so I helped him move the table back inside the donut shop and the next day sat back at "our" table in the newly remounted seat the next morning. On this particular morning, I was the first of the morning regulars to arrive and was rapping with Steve as he energetically scrambled around the donut shop.

"This seats great, man," I said, "You gonna pay Tom?"

"Yeah, yeah ... I pay Tom" Steve quickly replied in a manner suggesting that I wanted or needed reassurance. His use of the verb in the present tense left me wondering if he had already paid Tom or if he was going to do so in the future.

²¹ The "*early* morning regulars" gather at Steve's around seven a.m. I sat with these men only very occasionally. Their group is considerably smaller than the nine a.m. "morning regulars." Only about three or perhaps four men comprise the *early* morning regulars – as opposed to the nine a.m. "morning regulars" which would include around fifteen men; six or eight of who are likely to be found on any given day between nine and ten a.m.

When I saw Tom outside the donut shop a few days later, I asked if Steve had paid him.

“Shoouuuuosh” Tom answered moderately perturbed, “Not a nickel....”

And where the morning regulars from time to time hold hard feelings toward Steve for being too “tight” [miserly], their feelings toward Amy, Steve’s hired help during the morning rush, are rarely if ever negative. In Robert’s words, “by gosh ... she’s the greatest.”

Amy is a Cambodian immigrant aged in the forties and a proud mother of two children who, like Steve, also “goes by” a self-appointed White name. She can be straight-faced and “all-business” – especially when patrons act in such a way. Unlike Steve, she rarely interjects into the ongoing conversations of people in the donut shop. At work she’s often a bit impassive, but she’s easy to crack when met with a smile and a friendly greeting. She can be as sociable as Steve, but is rarely the one to initiate small talk with non-regular patrons. During the very busy work periods, she is at times short with customers. And she may or may not get frustrated with any one of the other morning regulars if we ask for a refill after she’s already working on her post-morning-rush work duties “in the back” and is requested to drop whatever work she is doing and come up to the front counter to do us the favor of refilling our cups for free – a privilege regulars are provided despite the aforementioned handwritten “No Free Refills” sign.

But Amy shows her appreciation of the morning regulars in her own ways. She and Lester have invented a special patty-cake style handshake that both very

much seem to enjoy. When she asks me “how is school going?” I sense that she means it in a genuinely caring way. After visiting her mother in Cambodia, she returned with gift trinkets for the morning regulars. And during the winter holidays, she prepares greeting cards and hands them out to the regulars. My own name on the envelope has at times been misspelled and is usually penned with a mixture of capital and lower-case letters. Each year, the personal touch on the inside of the card is not a handwritten note, but is instead an ink stamp – a stamp of the return mailing address of the donut shop. Such gestures, however impersonal they might seem to non regulars, are appreciated by the morning regulars and are interpreted as acts of kindness.

The morning regulars: A “Romeo Club”

It has been suggested, convincingly, that “regulars” are habitual participants so integrated, so familiar, and so attached that they “act ‘as if’ the social world into which they are integrated is their home²².” The morning regulars who “act ‘as if’” Steve’s Donut Shop is “their home” are, overwhelmingly, old White straight middle-class men. A small core friendship group of between 8 and 10 such men regularly gather at Steve’s from around nine a.m. to around ten a.m. Where these men range in age from sixty-seven to ninety-five, most are aged in the mid-eighties. Three of them, Robert, Orville, and Frank, have been coming to Steve’s for more than

²² Unruh (1979: 120).

seventeen years. And although the phrase is not one used in the neighborhood, these men are something akin to “old heads²³,” having “been around the block a time or two,” they see themselves as wise, and at times provide assistance and care for neighborhood residents younger than themselves. These acts, demonstrative of what they consider “helpin’ out,” enable them to see themselves as needed, able-bodied, assistive men of moral worth. At one point they dubbed themselves “The Romeo Club,” an acronym for “retired old men eating out²⁴,” although they seldom use this label to describe themselves today, opting instead for either “the coffee club,” “the coffee group,” “the nine o’clock Group,” or “the morning regulars.”

Their personal biographies are, generally, staggeringly interesting: Robert escaped the infamous Bataan Death March during World War II and lived in Philippine jungles, at times alone, as an escaped Prisoner of War for nearly three years; Orville was labeled by a local news publication as “The Communist Mayor of _____” in 1970 – while he was mayor of a small city in southern California – after he’d joined a group of college students on a peaceful march “[in] opposition to America’s Asian policy [and to express] anger at recent student deaths [at Kent State

²³ See Anderson (1990: 69-37) and Brooks (2009: 34-40)

²⁴ They didn’t create this label. Varied “Romeo Clubs” meet across the US and at least one quasi-formal organization has been devoted to their formation (see <http://romeoclub.org>). This group, however, is not formally associated with the organization, but at least two members know of its existence. See also Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation* (1998: 77-88) for the new anchor’s story of meeting John “Lefty” Caulfield and “the guys from Kerry Corner” that stake claim for coining the acronym. To avoid confusion, I’ll refer to the group as the “the morning regulars.”

and in Santa Barbara]²⁵"; Raymond is aged in the early eighties – he played linebacker for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish and fought as a fighter pilot the Korean and Vietnam wars; Frank, an avid cyclist, rode his bicycle from California to Kansas (just in time to arrive for his mother's birthday party in Ness County, Kansas) after he'd retired, and even let me join him on a twelve mile bicycle ride when he was eighty-four years old; Paul is aged in the mid-eighties, was for a short time a golf caddy on the Professional Golf Association circuit, is a Canadian immigrant, and continues to hold employment so as to "have something to do." There are others as well. In general, the morning regulars are White, straight, over-educated for their age cohort (three members hold PhD's, and most of the rest have bachelor's or master's degrees), solidly middle-class, veterans of World War II and/or The Korean War, Midwestern American farm boys, and children of the Great Depression.

Anywhere from two or three to six or eight of these men can be found in Steve's Donut Shop on any given day between roughly nine a.m. to ten a.m., although attendance is particularly spotty on Sundays as some of the men attend various church services around the neighborhood. On some days, though, the group will number more than ten. Between ten and fifteen different morning regulars, who also dine in, arrive less frequently. Most of these "occasionally visiting regulars" are also old White men, but handful of them are old White women who arrive with their old White husbands, two are old Black men, and one is a Latino man who is a gardening buddy of one of the morning regulars.

²⁵ Reference masked to protect anonymity.

The Shopping Center

Steve's Donut Shop, open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is a corner unit in a semi-circled shopping center built in the 1960s. A city bus stop sits a mere fifteen or twenty paces from the front door to Steve's, and a small Indian grocery store (that also shells out meals for around three dollars) flanks the donut shop. Next to the grocer was a dollar-store that closed toward the end of the study and was replaced by a yoga studio. A university sorority office makes up the westernmost part of the shopping center.

The easternmost side includes a boba and smoothie shop, a bakery and sandwich place, a sushi spot, an empty restaurant space, a laundromat, and a pizza joint/bar – all independently owned “mom ‘n pop” shops. The northern side of the shopping center includes a considerably large office space (formerly a large grocery store) for County Social Services. The facility also houses a Clinic of the County Department of Mental Health – an outpatient clinic specializing in psychiatric services to those with severe mental illness. The facility also offers other adult services including food stamp assistance and elderly services.

By and large, it's a sleepy shopping center. Occasionally, university students will eat a meal at one of the eateries, but the area is by no means a hot spot for students to hang out. The pizza joint/bar, for example, hosts a happy hour that only rarely draws a double-digit crowd. And the parking lot, surrounded by curbed sidewalks, rarely if ever nears capacity. The mostly bare lot, coupled with its

recently repaved asphalt and a small set of concrete stairs, draws small crowds of neighborhood skateboarders – mostly in the evenings.

A four-lane street divides the shopping center from the university. The area across the street from the shopping center – formerly barracks for the US Army – is fenced, although there is a small walkway for those on foot or bicycle, and serves as a married and family housing area for university students. Various three-story apartment buildings, mostly built in the 1970's, sit behind the shopping center. Just east of the shopping center is mechanic's garage in a structure that used to be a gas and service station. Just west of the shopping center is a carwash and another freestanding building – also formerly a gas station – that houses both a grocery/liquor store and a pizza carryout.

The shopping center and this little nook of the city is a bit peculiar. It isn't terribly characteristic of the postmodern dystopian suburban areas one can find in other parts of the city – there are no oppressive and sexually-charged billboards, no behemoth corporate super-marts, and though on occasion poverty-stricken folks can be found in the shopping center, occasionally sleeping in the small grassy area between the donut shop and the sidewalk, it is more typical to see working and middle class residents doing laundry or grabbing a quick lunch. Perhaps a co-ed adult softball team will meet up at the pizza joint after a game. Nonetheless, the area isn't totally characteristic of what we might think of as ideal-type suburbs either: there are no tract, cookie-cutter homes nearby and no gated communities as there are in other parts of the city.

But the shopping center doesn't really qualify as a bona fide urban space either. There aren't any buildings of more than two or three stories. And while there are passersby on foot and on bicycle, the majority of transit in and around the immediate area sees people driving in their cars. There is rarely more than a person or two waiting at the shopping center bus stop. The shopping center and the immediate surrounding area is an in-between kind of space – not quite urban, not quite suburban. Businesses in the shopping center don't seem to thrive, but tend to stay open. Perhaps it's an outdated, outmoded space. Its average ordinariness, similar to the donut shop itself, makes the shopping center, for some, an ignorable, possibly even "invisible" space.

The Neighborhood

The donut shop and the shopping center are embedded within a neighborhood where I lived throughout three years of the study. It's a predominantly White neighborhood – disproportionately so when compared to many other neighborhoods and when compared to the city as a whole²⁶. Apartment complexes are sprinkled throughout the neighborhood with most of them very close to if not directly adjacent to the university. The neighborhood is somewhat mixed along class lines where many of the old residents are middle-class and live in one-story ranch homes built in the 1950s and 60s. Some of the newer residents are

²⁶ Reference masked.

working-class. Neighborhood college students, of which there are considerably fewer than one might expect due to (perhaps discriminatory) zoning codes²⁷, are more transient and come from various racial and economic backgrounds. And only a handful of neighborhood residents are poor. Occasionally, some of the city's homeless come to the neighborhood – sometimes in the evenings to collect bottles and cans from the residential recycle bins that most keep in their driveways, sometimes for support they hope to find at the County Social Services offices in the shopping center. But for the most part, homeless and in-between folks are more likely to be found along a few block span on and around Thoroughfare Avenue – about two miles away from the shopping center.

And there is some crime in the neighborhood. A friend of mine who lived in the neighborhood had the catalytic converter [a car part commonly made with platinum] stolen from the bottom of this pickup truck when it was parked on his driveway one night. The police officer from the Sheriff's office with whom he filed

²⁷ City zoning codes, which are somewhat enforced, state that only “single families” can inhabit dwelling units in the zone the neighborhood is embedded in (reference masked). Single-family dwelling units are defined by the city as “A dwelling designed for occupancy by one family and located on one lot delineated by front, side and rear lot lines” (reference masked). Though city codes do not define “family,” code enforcing agents target rental properties in the area – many of which are occupied by students. I rented a bedroom in a six-bedroom home in the area for two years during the study. My landlord rented out each room separately, and all six renters would sign one-year leases at varied times of the year. In the three years I rented this room, I lived with at least fourteen different people, none of whom were my kin. The majority of us were graduate students or working professionals, and one was a visiting professor. Enforcement agents visited this home on at least three occasions in the three years I lived there and my landlord told me she'd been “regularly hassled” by city code enforcement agents and had paid fines in the past.

the report explained, “The ‘tweakers²⁸’ are comin’ up here [to this particular neighborhood] to steal these things all the time” because the part is worth a considerable amount of money at scrap metal yards and unscrupulous used car parts dealers. Where the police officer wasn’t warranted in suggesting the crime was likely committed to fuel a drug addiction, the point is that petty crime does occur in the neighborhood. Serious crime is not as common. In July of 2008, however, a drug-related robbery left one neighborhood resident shot dead. Quasi-suburbia is an in-between kind of place.

But not all in the neighborhood seems so unfortunate. The area is sandwiched between a very small mountain range and the university. There is the occasional sidewalk lemonade stand staffed with an entrepreneurial youngster or two to boot. Neighborhood parks are used, but aren’t overly crowded. And Gwen, the retired Black woman who volunteers as a crossing guard at a neighborhood thoroughfare near an elementary school, regularly waves hello to people driving in their cars and nearly always chats up pedestrians noting how beautiful the morning or afternoon is. Her stock response to my usual greeting, “How’s it goin’, Gwen?,” is: “Blessed! How ‘bout you?!” and is without fail delivered with a genuine smile.

It is interactions with people like Gwen and Steve and the morning regulars at the donut shop that make the neighborhood feel like a neighborhood. Where

²⁸ “Tweaker” is a common term, particularly in southern California, used to refer to those who habitually use or are addicted to methamphetamines such as “crystal meth” or “ice.” See Nyamathi et al. (2007: 4) for the use of the term in California.

many of the old reside in the neighborhood by choice, “aging in place²⁹,” most other neighborhood residents reside there because it is near the university, or because they cannot afford to live somewhere else more preferable. The neighborhood is an in-between kind of space in the sense that it is somewhat diverse along lines of socioeconomic class and is neither urban nor suburban.

²⁹ Ethnographies concerning old people and aging processes have often been conducted in more age-segregated settings such as assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and government sponsored community centers. Important early works include Hochschild (1978), Jacobs (1974), Myerhoff (1978), and Ross (1977).

Chapter 2: Old White Straight Middle-Class Men in Quasi-Suburbia

If a primary goal of ethnography is to explain how people meet the demands of everyday life, a primary task in doing ethnography involves figuring out what it is that is demanded. To be sure, the nuanced demands of everyday life vary, sometimes greatly, across contexts. One way of beginning to think of the particulars of local everyday demands is to gain an understanding of what those under study think they must do to maintain a sense that “everything will be okay.” And by placing such assumed necessities within a constellation of privilege and disadvantage, we can begin to gain a greater sense of what might constitute an “everyday demand.” The morning regulars at the donut shop have no worries, for example, about putting food on the table, few if any worries about securing or maintaining housing³⁰, and can reasonably expect that they will not be treated unfairly by others on the basis of their gender, their race, or their sexual orientation³¹.

The lives of most of the morning regulars at Steve’s Donut Shop (as well as my own) have been endowed with a shield of unearned privilege. While such

³⁰ In fact, most of the morning regulars at Steve’s purchased their homes in the 1950’s and 1960’s when discriminatory housing markets flourished in southern California. See Oliver and Shapiro (1997: Chapter 4).

³¹ For stimulating contrasts, see Slevin (2008), Bergling (2004), and Cruz (2003) on old gay men, Reich (2008) and Duneier (1992) on old Black men, Wood (2006a, 2006b) on old working-class men. See especially Newman (2003) on old men and women of color in the inner city.

privilege – often accorded to those who are White, straight, and male – is at times understood-but-ignored by these men, and it is perhaps more often the case that the unearned privilege such categories afford isn't anywhere near the realm of comprehension. In other words, they don't typically think of themselves as "having race" or "having gender." The morning regulars generally see Whiteness as the race-less norm³². Prevailing understandings of meritocracy and individualism help us understand the contours of Whiteness and of racialized identities. Logics of meritocracy and rugged individualism impede the "seeing" of White racial privilege for Whites³³. And although particular shifting standpoints of White masculinities depend on "different matrices of vision, White men are prone to experience a visual intelligibility characterized by ways of "seeing" that have been described as linear, defensive, ambivalent, and resistive³⁴. These limited and incomplete ways of seeing help to make Whiteness seem normative and remain invisible to Whites by "asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the markings of others on which its transparency depends³⁵." It is not surprising, then, that many Whites deny their own structural privilege and feel benevolent in subscribing to a "color-blind"

³² Where the literature on Whiteness is burgeoning and becoming increasingly rich, literature on old men and Whiteness is conspicuously absent. See Frankenberg (1993, 1997), McIntosh (1990), Lipsitz (2006), and Haney-López (2006) for pioneering works in Whiteness.

³³ See, e.g., Dalton (2005).

³⁴ See Farough (2006), especially p. 53-55

³⁵ Frankenberg (1997: 6).

logic with regard to race and racial identities. But the logic of “color-blindness” entails “color-evasiveness” and “power-evasiveness³⁶.” Where many of the morning regulars in the donut shop would say they subscribe to the logics of “color-blindness” if it meant seeing others as equal, they generally take their own racial category for granted. They know personal and individual racism is among us, but they don’t tend to see institutionalized racism or its effects on persons of color. One morning regular, for example, steadfastly believes that people should, “and really always do – except for when they know somebody,” attain employment based solely on merit. He’s also told me he’s “worked [in the realm of paid employment] with a ton’a Mexicans ... Blacks too ... and all that stuff [race and ethnicity] don’t matter when you’re workin’.”

And the same goes for heteronormativity. That at least three of the morning regulars at Steve’s have and have had members of their immediate families that are gay (some in the closet and some out) doesn’t much seem to matter. Where they’ll publicly show their love for gay family members, they by and large see gayness as counter-normative, and for most, though not all of the morning regulars, homosexuality is seen as a “choice.”

Like so many straight Whites of seemingly all ages, when they begin a story with something like, “...So I was talking with somebody over there at the grocery store and...,” I can reasonably assume that they mean a White, presumably straight man. They commonly, though not always use racial markers when talking about

³⁶ See Frankenberg (1993). See also West (1993).

interactions they've had with people of color and they usually verbally mark gender if the story involves someone they assume identifies as a woman (e.g., "So I was talking with this Black guy over there at ..." or "So I was talking with this woman over at...").

Though they sometimes refer to themselves as "old men," "old fogies," or "old farts," the morning regulars at Steve's Donut shop see themselves first and foremost *as men* – not necessarily as old men, but as men who happen to also be old. So then, what *is* demanded in everyday life for these men?

"Good manhood" in the donut shop

A primary demand, if not *the* primary demand, in the everyday lives of the morning regulars at Steve's Donut Shop is to sense being seen by others as "good men." This has less to do with feeling liked than it does with feeling respected. But being regarded by others as "good men," at least for the morning regulars requires that one be out of house and about the neighborhood. Though this has become difficult in new ways for them as they've approached and are entering what some gerontologists call the "fourth stage³⁷" of age. As *good* men, they make their busyness known to others. And as *men*, they see such busyness as legitimate evidence of their independence, being in control, and being socially integrated.

³⁷ See Twigg (2004): by third and fourth stages of age, gerontologists – including most feminist gerontologists – call for emphasizing qualitative distinctions in health and well being over chronological age distinctions. In the fourth stage, the body tends to dominate subjective experience and becomes a major "problem" of old age.

They're simply different than the caricatured stereotype of the invisible lonely infirm old man.

Nonetheless, where they can reasonably expect *not* to face discriminations based upon their race, gender, or sexual orientation, they can also reasonably expect to face forms of ageist treatment in varied ways: to be infantilized by cashiers, cold-calling telemarketers, and even neighbors; to be visited by dishonest building contractors knocking at the front door and telling them that they need to replace all the windows in their home; to be assumed by others as incapable of driving according to accepted and expected ways of driving cars in southern California; to be perpetually asked if they need assistance when they feel they clearly do not, and so on. Where such treatment may not seem ostensibly unjust, unfair, oppressive, or even terribly burdensome, it does throw the regulars at the donut shop a curveball in terms of how they feel they ought to proceed so as to work in interaction to convince others that despite being perceived as old, one is nonetheless a "good man." They're in a curious predicament. By the time people of color, women, and queer-identified people, for example, have reached the third or fourth stage in age, they've lived to the point where it is hard to imagine such folks wouldn't have deep and nuanced understandings of what everyday life is like when being often treated as "Other" (commonly by straight White males, but also by those in different categorical locations) – that is to be singled out on the basis of some constructed categorical "difference" whereby institutionalized dialectical power differentials are

reproduced and perhaps even justified by those in positions of power³⁸. Some children of color, for example, learn strategies from elders to cope with such treatment – and though some strategies have positive effects, other strategies have prolonged adverse psychological effects³⁹. But for the morning regulars at Steve’s, experiencing being Othered on the basis of old age is generally experienced as a, comparatively, *new* phenomenon with which they’ve only been forced to grapple with late in life. Appeals to “good manhood” are the overwhelmingly salient kinds of responses these men provide when faced with grappling with being Othered.

What constitutes “good manhood” for these old men in the neighborhood involves nuanced sets of meanings that I’ve outlined in this chapter, and will be further elaborated throughout the subsequent chapters. To meet the primary demand of sensing being seen by others as a “good man,” at least for these neighborhood old men, involves “keepin’ busy” and “helpin’ out.” Where the meanings of “good manhood,” “keepin’ busy,” and “helpin’ out” are nuanced, the relationships between these concepts are similarly complex. In order to more fully get at the heart of what being a “good man” means for these neighborhood men, it’s necessary to first gain a sense of their routines in everyday life. In so describing

³⁸ Simone de Beauvoir (1953) analyzes, for example, how women are Othered in the contemporary male-dominated sex-gender social system. See also Butler (1986) for a festschrift on de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, and Krekula (2007: 157-60) and Twigg (2004) for feminist insights on Othering and aging.

³⁹ See Masko’s (2005) analysis, from the perspective of Critical Race Theory, that explains how a young Black woman learned to cope with such treatment in and through interactions with her Black grandmother.

some of these routines, I provide in this chapter an empirically grounded foundation on which deeper understandings of such nuanced meanings can subsequently arise throughout the rest of the chapters.

And so this chapter begins to illuminate good manhood through a description of routine. Routines are regular, habituated, everyday activities, procedures, and methods that people persistently take for granted. Routines carry with them the disposition that “This is how these things are done” over and above a “There we go again⁴⁰.”

A day in the life of Robert

Robert typically lumbers his 6’4” frame and shuffles his nearly ninety year old feet through the front doors of the donut shop around nine-fifteen or nine-thirty in the morning. He has already tended to the many sun-drenched flora in the front and back yards at his home. These are yards he’s carefully landscaped himself throughout the years. True to his proclivities toward scientific inquisition, he’s affixed small wooden labels to most, if not all, of the flora in his backyard with thin twists of wire – usually favoring their scientific names and occasionally writing what he calls their “common” names in quotation marks underneath. The labels have faded and some are no longer legible, but Robert can usually recall the names of his plants on the spot. When he cannot, he gets a bit frustrated with himself and says to me, “Awwwwwww. Now, Murph ... It’ll come to me.” And by the time we walk back to

⁴⁰ See Berger and Luckmann (1966: 59-60).

the back patio, or to the front porch, or back inside to the living room (our most common places to hang out when I'm at Robert's home), he's nearly always recalled the name. "Sollya heterophylla," he'll tell me smirking and shaking his finger, "they call it a Bluebell creeper."

By the time he goes to the donut shop, he's also had breakfast – fruit, usually, and occasionally some cereal. He's read the morning newspaper. Most importantly, his daily rounds of caring for his wife have commenced. Margaret, Robert's wife of more than sixty years, had developed severely progressed Alzheimer's disease. Robert and his children had considered the idea of hiring an in-home caregiver for Margaret, a decision they could indeed have afforded financially, but ultimately chose not to hire an in-home caregiving nurse. "Too expensive," Robert would say, "and Murph, we're doing just fine without one."

But before he leaves to have coffee with the morning regulars, he's administered Margaret's morning round medications – again mentioning the fact that she is on them and has been on them "for years." He'll have to again administer her noon, evening, and bedtime rounds for her. He's also reminded her, often frustratingly, that she cannot eat a grapefruit from the tree in their front yard this morning – the doctor has instructed that she can no longer eat grapefruits due to a potentially adverse side effect from the interaction between grapefruit acids and her medications. And he's informed her, firmly and assertively, that she is not under any circumstances whatsoever to leave the house while he's "down at [the donut shop for] coffee."

And then he walks to Steve's Donut Shop. Or he might drive – as became increasingly common toward the end of my fieldwork and as Margaret's (and Robert's own) overall physical health declined. Either way, his breath is heavy as he enters through the donut shop door. Robert's long limbs lend a smooth, slow flow to his shuffle. He eyes "his seat" at "our table" and scans the space to see who is there. Amy will undoubtedly warmly greet Robert, smiling and dragging out the middle portion of his name. And he'll smile back, gleefully exclaiming, "Hi Amy!" By the time he flows the few paces to the front counter, she'll have ready for him a black tea and a "plain old-fashioned" donut without his having to ask. Robert will dump out all the change from his small plastic oval-shaped coin purse onto the counter. They'll continue to exchange a short round of pleasantries as Robert counts out \$1.65 by sorting the dumped change with a single index finger. Scooping up the excess change into the small coin purse, Robert is ready to join the rest of the morning regulars at the table.

In a manner that can classically mark the respected, he's commonly one of the later arrivals and one of the first to leave. But for Robert, the thirty or so minutes he spends in the donut shop is a vital part of each day. It is not so much that this space provides for Robert a setting and forum to "be somebody" wholly new, its that it provides Robert with a setting and forum to work to be somebody that he sees himself as always having worked to be – a "good man." And for those fleeting moments in the donut shop, Robert is not only a man temporarily relieved

from his caregiving duties; he's also a man freed from having to watch the condition of the woman he loves worsen.

But when Robert returns home, he'll scold Margaret if she's outside:

"She's always falling out here ... trying to pick up leaves and sticks," he'll tell me, "and I keep telling her that we pay somebody else to do all that." I know of at least three such falls that occurred during the course of my fieldwork. Thankfully, Margaret was not seriously injured on any of these occasions.

Early in my fieldwork, not yet understanding the severity of Margaret's Alzheimer's, I mustered up enough chutzpa one afternoon as Robert and I were sitting together on his front patio to try to be more explicitly honest about how I felt:

"You gotta let her outside." I said, "I mean ... I bet she gets just as sick of *Jeopardy!* as you say you do...."

Robert smiled, perhaps amused at my naïveté, but looked more sober as he put his hand on my shoulder, "Murph, she wanders off, you know..."

I felt awful, "I'm sorry, man ... I just ... I don't know ... I just ... you can't really keep her locked up in there [in the house] all day can you?"

"Well, I don't," he retorted, squinting civilly, "She just has to stay inside when I'm gone and no one else is here, you see ... and that's when I'm at coffee or running errands. We go outside together everyday, Murph. And we leave the house too, you know."

Robert went on to tell me that before he began commanding that she stay inside when he while he was away, she'd not only end up at times fallen on the

ground around their home, but that she'd also often end up in various parts of the neighborhood (presumably after just going out for a walk) not knowing where she was at.

"Sometimes I still get phone calls ... somebody knows its Margaret and she tells 'em she doesn't know where she's at," he went on, "...I can't have anything [adverse] happen to her, Murph."

And so Robert, in a manner displaying what is reminiscent of what many sociologists would consider "hegemonic masculinity"⁴¹, justifies his treatment of her in a way that assumes he knows what is in her best interest.

On most days, however, Robert returns home from the donut shop around ten o'clock, and for the next four or five hours, and perhaps counter-stereotypically, his on-goings are less routine: Robert and Margaret typically take turns preparing lunch (typically sandwiches) for the both of them around noon. On some days he'll read during this time – usually autobiographical accounts written by prisoners of war in the Philippines during World War II – books written by men like himself. Or Robert might be found picking grapefruits from the grapefruit tree in the front yard to give away to friends and neighbors. Or he'll go to an appointment at the VA hospital. Or he'll run errands – to the grocery store or to the bank, or to the university campus where he spent the last 22 years of his academic career as a professor.

⁴¹ Connell (1987) sees hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal whereby men's social relations with women are characterized by normative pressures to ensure male domination over women as well as the domination of some males in relation to other males.

During this time, and throughout most of the day, Margaret and Robert's garage door remains open. And this is code in the quasi-suburbs, signifying at once an assumption of safety, and an aura of busyness. For the morning regulars at the donut shop, an open garage door means that one is at home, up and about the house, and may need or decide to hop in the sedan or the small pickup truck and leave on a seconds notice.

And on some evenings Robert does indeed hop in the sedan and drives "all the way down" to a franchise sandwich shop (less than one mile away), and returns home with a submarine sandwich to split with Margaret for dinner. And about once a week, he'll walk down to the pizza joint/bar across from the donut shop and pick up a small pizza for carryout. Or they may on occasion drive together "waaaay across town" (about three miles away) to a favorite, independently owned Americana café whose owners aim to provide a down-home family atmosphere.

Before dinner, around three o'clock, Robert enjoys a brief "snack time"⁴². Cheddar cheese and Ritz brand unsalted crackers or a piece of fruit seem to be his favorites. Margaret nearly always naps during this time, and snack time is more or

⁴² On a related theme, see Roy's (1959) research on the set of "times" that a small group of men created to alleviate boredom while at work. Ritual occasions such as "Banana time," "Coke time," and "Pick-up time" amongst others, provided these men with a temporary escape from the boundaries instrumental work frames and enabled them to experience a more expressive reality with a logical order of its own. "Snack time" for Robert, however, is not fully analogous. His activities throughout the day move back and forth from instrumental to expressive to some combination of both, but "snack time" is a sure departure from the mixture of instrumental and expressive tasks he is to complete in being the primary caregiver for his wife. When she naps, if only for a half-hour or so, Robert sees himself as effectively off-the-clock. See also Handelman (1976) for a revisiting of Roy's paper on "times."

less Robert's time alone. Perhaps intrusively, Robert and I often hung out together during snack time on the front porch or on the back patio. Dave, a middle-aged friend of Robert's that lives in the neighborhood and who joined the faculty in Robert's former academic department just as Robert was getting ready to retire, will also occasionally stop by during snack time. They may talk a little workplace-related shop, but Dave's visits seem more in the spirit of genuine friendship than they seem concerned with university gossip.

Where I initially thought of snack time as merely a time for quiet contemplation and reflection for Robert, I eventually came to understand snack time as more of a meditative kind of time – meditative in the sense of practicing a sort of mindful awareness⁴³. Robert does not consciously practice a specific style of meditation, but snack time seems to be a time for observing the mind and body in operation in a non-analytical way.

As I arrived unannounced one day during snack time, Robert was sitting on the front porch and looked particularly emotionless, almost frozen. He didn't wave to me as he typically did as I pedaled up the street. I rode up the short driveway and walked my bicycle around to the front porch like I always did, leaning it up against the hydrangea-sprinkled window planter.

"Hey Robert," I said hoping nothing was wrong, "How's it goin'?"

"Oh, hey Murph," replied Robert, seemingly "snapping out of it."

⁴³ Preston (1988) notes the special attitude involved in doing Zen meditation: "One must assume ... and attitude of 'active passivity' – that is, a posture of wakeful attentiveness that is at the same time a nondoing" (p. 87).

“[Are] you alright?,” I asked, trying not to appear overly concerned and just gaining cognizance of the possibility that I might be treating Robert in an ageist fashion.

“Oh, fine, fine. I was just ... well ... I may have fallen asleep there ... I’m not really sure,” said Robert, first smiling and then chuckling.

I was relieved things were okay. But he “wasn’t really sure” if he’d fallen asleep. I was immediately intrigued, thinking I understood what he’d meant, but wondering about exactly what it must have felt like for him. And after asking me how my studies were going and reporting to me who was at the donut shop that morning (I hadn’t gone on this particular day), our conversation naturally moved to his and Margaret’s health. The mood grew more serious. I was pressing him to be a little more personal. We talked about difficulties in the restroom. We talked about Margaret’s medications. And during a short lull, Robert would hit me with a heavy one:

“Basically, Murph,” he paused, “Margaret and I are waiting to die.”

I was shocked. But despite whatever latent meanings might lay in such a moment occurring between different people in different contexts, this one was peculiar. It was the sense of peacefulness with which he delivered the statement with that seemed so shocking. He was serious, but not cold. He seemed calm, and despite the weight of his statement, it was delivered without despondency. I sensed that he’d just taught me something important, but I wasn’t yet sure what that something was – perhaps something about awareness and acceptance....

A day in the life of Frank

Frank wakes up around six in the morning, alone, in his bed in his bedroom, knowing that Dorothy, his wife of over sixty years, will wake up alone, in her separate bed in her separate bedroom in another hour or so. He wears his bathrobe outside to retrieve the morning newspaper. He'll often inspect the cumquat tree and whatever he's recently planted in the front yard. He showers and then prepares his own breakfast: pancakes on Wednesdays, a poached egg on toast on Fridays. A glass dish of his homemade cumquat marmalade perpetually sits on his breakfast tray, along with a small glass dish of sugar and salt and pepper shakers. He eats wearing his bathrobe, reading the newspaper – proudly doing so without glasses.

At the press of a button, Frank opens the garage door usually between seven and eight in the morning. And at least a few times each week, a friend will arrive to the house during this time. Usually it's Mark. He's a stout, White, straight handyman approaching middle-age and a former plumber's apprentice. Or it may be John, a middle-aged Latino handyman. These men are part of Frank's network of "swampers" – men that help Frank with gardening, home maintenance, and landscaping projects at Frank's home or at his church. "Swampers" are normally paid help, though sometimes they're happy to provide assistance pro-bono. It seems to depend on the time commitment of the project. And since Frank typically has one or two ongoing projects at all times, there's always "work to do."

Alternatively, Bonnie or Connie might arrive. These middle-aged White straight women are both divorced, close friends of Dorothy and Frank's, and spend many of their mornings working on projects with Frank – at Dorothy and Frank's home, at Bonnie or Connie's homes, or occasionally at church. They do not receive monetary pay in exchange for work: they barter with one another in a manner treating "favors" as the medium of exchange. Together, they may run an errand or two and continue to work on whatever home maintenance or improvement project they've begun. Frank tends to help them with projects at their homes: landscaping, irrigation, fencing, gardening – anything outside, really. And although most of these activities might be understood by broader society as "man's work," neither Bonnie nor Connie hesitates to engage in such activities. Bonnie and Connie also hang out with Dorothy – going out to lunch together or running errands, as Dorothy is no longer able to drive a car.

On Wednesday mornings, however, projects are put on hold for golf. Frank used to play in a foursome that included Robert and Orville from the donut shop, but they've since quit playing and now it's just Frank and his golf-buddy, Clyde. And when Frank "pars one," the morning regulars are sure to find out over the course of the next few days.

Frank is usually ready for coffee just after nine o'clock and often jokes that he's "earned it!" By the time he arrives to the donut shop, occasionally with whomever his project buddy is for the day, most of the other regulars are already there – most typically some combination including Lester, Jasper, Orville, Raymond,

Charles, Robert, and myself. There's always the possibility that Lenora and her husband Erwin will be there too or that Rex or Doyle will still be hanging around since their arrival at seven that morning. In general, he can reasonably expect that everyone sitting down will likely be old White straight men with whom he's already acquainted.

Frank often arrives wearing his ubiquitously well-dirtied shorts, and occasionally he's kept on his leather work gloves – even after walking or driving his 2-wheel drive Dodge pickup truck. When he walks through the door, he'll remove his soiled straw hat and his leather work gloves in a way insuring that one can't help but notice that he's already spent some of the morning doing some kind of manual labor. He's prone to report to the regulars about the project he's currently working on and on how it's going whether they inquire or not. And for the next forty-five minutes or so, Frank will enjoy the breeze-shooting.

On Fridays, Frank will take his coffee at the church (about a half a mile away) he attends with Orville and Robert instead of with the morning regulars at Steve's. He and Dorothy keep a dozen donuts, purchased from Steve's, frozen in their chest-style freezer, and a few are pulled out on Thursday nights to thaw. He'll have coffee and a donut with the church secretary, and then make sure the church grounds are up to snuff for the weekend.

He's likely to finish the morning at the church whether he had coffee there or at Steve's. Frank is the (perhaps self-proclaimed) "head gardener" at the church where he keeps a vegetable garden and a flower garden. There are other areas on

the large church property with smaller flower beds he also tends, but the two aforementioned gardens seem to be his primary focus.

He's in charge of the landscaping in general at the church as well. Ensuring that the church's large grass lawn in "cut right" can be a major ordeal depending on whom he currently has rounded up to do the mowing. He no longer cuts the lawn himself, and it isn't rare to hear how this or that person could have or should have done a better job cutting the grass. And he's aware that others think of him as a bit too nitpicky about the lawn. He'll acknowledge, and usually agree with that particular assertion when it comes up. On at least two different occasions I've watched him smile and say with a slight chuckle, "Well, we used to have this other guy, you see, but he didn't sit on the tractor right!" He means it as a joke to the effect of smoothing the interaction and discounting the importance of the accusation – regardless of its accuracy⁴⁴.

Dorothy will begin preparing lunch for her and Frank around eleven-thirty, and it will be ready around noon. Despite a small scrape or bruise or two that Frank will have likely attained by this time of the day, he won't often complain about any aches and pains his eighty-five year old body might feel.

"He tries so hard to be macho," Dorothy will tell me when Frank isn't in earshot.

⁴⁴ See Fine and De Soucey (2005) for an account of how joking as such serves to smooth interaction.

And by the time the two are done with lunch, Dorothy will begin cleaning up and Frank will put his hat and gloves back on and go out back to the garden of their own: sugar-snap peas, beets, cabbage, carrots, broccoli, and other homegrown treats were harvested when I spent most of my time with Dorothy and Frank.

Alternatively, Frank might have an afternoon meeting to attend – a community forum on whether or not the city should approve a plan to extend a commuter train line through the neighborhood and on the tracks that are only a few paces from their backyard (a plan that Frank supported), or a meeting with the land acquisition authorities from the university that have shown interest in purchasing a section of the large and underused lot owned by their church, or a meeting with a group of organizers working on the next sailboat race to be held at The Lake across town.

By around four o'clock he's ready for a single glass of red wine – a glass he usually pours from a four-liter, Carlo Rossi-branded bottle:

"They say it's good for you, Murphy," he'll tell me, sitting outside or in front of the new flat-screen television while flipping to ESPN, "A glass a day ... and it just so happens that I like it too, you know!"

On Mondays, at around four-thirty, Dorothy and Frank will close the garage door, get in their white Cadillac Seville, and drive off to meet up with the "Monday Night Group"⁴⁵ for dinner. Dorothy and Frank carpool with Connie, and driving

⁴⁵ See the subsequent chapter, "The Monday Night Group" for a more detailed account of these meals, their meanings, and their purposes.

arrangements are dependent upon which area of town the restaurant they'll be eating at is located. They'll return back home anywhere between seven and eight o'clock, watch a little television – nearly always sports (Dorothy is a proud and very dedicated California Angels and Los Angeles Clippers fan). They'll return to their separate bedrooms around nine.

On other evenings, they like to go with Bonnie to the small chain fast food burger joint (just over a mile away) down a neighborhood main drag in a larger shopping center complex. On other nights, Frank will cook dinner – sometimes pastas complete with a side of whatever he's harvested from the garden that day. Or Dorothy might roast a small chicken. Frozen pizzas aren't rare either. They say they like to "keep it simple."

"Keepin' Busy" and "Helpin' Out"

In the words of Robert, "the secret" is to "always do something constructive." The same holds for the rest of the morning regulars: a good man is one who "keeps busy." The donut shop provides a setting for these men to report to their peers (as well as to community members at large) that they've been sufficiently busy and ought to be respected as such. "Keepin' busy" is an accounting practice – a way of ensuring that one will later have a justifiable report they could potentially use to bridge any perceived gap between actions and expectations⁴⁶. In this sense, "keepin'

⁴⁶ This is akin to Scott and Lyman's (1968) understanding of justifications, which they define as "socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its

busy” is itself also a reportable term that regulars at Steve’s donut shop can use open the door to conversational stories that highlight their busyness. The telling of such stories help these men to convince themselves that other people see them, counter-age-stereotypically, as independent, in-control, socially integrated men of moral worth. But the locally constructed meanings of “keepin’ busy” also feature a reproduction of traditional masculine gender norms – namely being in control and being independent⁴⁷.

“Helpin’ out” is one form of “keepin’ busy.” It entails activities the morning regulars define as demonstrative of acceptable moral worth and enables them to feel needed, able-bodied, and assistive. And again, “helpin’ out” also features a reproduction of traditional masculine gender norms – in this case namely feeling needed and able-bodied.

Where early socio-gerontological theories of “successful” aging emphasizing activity and busyness were functionalist in the sense that they saw old people’s

consequences when one or both are called into question” (p. 51) in the sense that it is an attempt to assert some positive value as inherent in an act. It differs from Scott and Lyman, however, in the sense that reports and assertions of “keepin’ busy” are typically provided without prompt. In other words, “keepin’ busy” is more of an expectation implied within the code of the morning regulars at Steve’s than it is a fallback option when put on the defensive. This is further elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

⁴⁷ See also Ekherdt (1986) who suggests the “busy ethic” is a transformation of the work ethic in hopes of justifying retirement: “retirement is a morally managed and legitimated on a day-to-day basis in part by an ethic that esteems leisure that is earnest, occupied, and filled with activity – a ‘busy ethic’” (p. 239).

activity as helping to maintain some degree of social equilibrium⁴⁸, more recent theoretical work emphasizing activity and busyness is attuned to the body and conceptualizes adjustment practices as problematizing practices⁴⁹: understanding ordinary aspects of everyday life as an old person in terms of qualitatively new dilemmas to be grappled with. For the morning regulars at Steve's, pensions are secure, homes are paid off, and racism is generally not directed towards them. The major dilemma is not grappling with merely being old: it is in grappling with sensing that others see him as a "good man" who happens to be old. While the morning regulars have worked throughout their lives to sense themselves as being seen by others as "good men," old age has changed both the meanings of "good manhood" and the kinds of activities that qualify as demonstrative of "good manhood." For the morning regulars at Steve's, a "good man" "helps out" and "keeps busy."

⁴⁸ See e.g., Havighurst and Albrecht (1953).

⁴⁹ See e.g., Katz (2000).

Chapter 3: Breeze-Shooting

It is not uncommon to walk into Steve's Donut shop to the sights and sounds of a few old White straight middle-class neighborhood men talking about the errands they have already run that morning or will run later in the day. Reports of their ongoing busyness are generally abound and include more than trips to the barber, the grocery store, or to the VA hospital. There are banquets and exercise classes to attend, hardware stores to visit, children and grandchildren to see, cultural and academic events at nearby universities to attend, and so forth. Alternatively, one might hear them swapping stories about a current "project" they're working on – most typically outdoor landscaping or gardening projects at their own homes. Reports also at times outline the changing meanings of what qualifies for the morning regulars as "hard work" and what does not. Or perhaps they'll be talking about some service they're providing for a friend or local organization. To be sure – they'll be talking with each other, sipping coffee, attentively listening to each other, will be often laughing together, and will often appear to passersby to be effortlessly shooting the breeze⁵⁰.

But breeze-shooting in the donut shop isn't totally effortless and indeed serves important social purposes. For the morning regulars at Steve's, *breeze-shooting* most typically involves turn-taking in proactively providing unsolicited *reports* of one's past, current, or future on-goings. Moreover, there are three

⁵⁰ See Liebow (1967: 22) on "effortless sociability." See also Anderson (1976: 23-29) on "working at sociability."

primary kinds of reports in the donut shop: talk asserting personal storybook careers of meritocratic achievement as related to current neighborhood, city, state, national, and international events; talk implying one's altruistic disposition in instances of "helpin' out;" and talk of "keepin' busy." Reports are implicitly aimed at suggesting one's everyday conduct is in line with their own abstract ideals of activeness, earnestness, and "good manhood." Where gathering in the donut shop is a reportable activity in and of itself, talking-about-activity is a common activity for the morning regulars at Steve's. Codes of conduct built up through interaction serve as guides that help to make the morning regulars capable of breeze-shooting with one another and hence capable of providing each other with identity affirming and identity confirming reports helping them to see themselves and each other as "good men."

Outline for a Vocabulary of Capability

For C. Wright Mills, *vocabularies of motive* are delimited, milieu-specific sets of talk that provide "accepted justifications for present, future, or past programs or acts⁵¹." Such talk, for Mills, justifies or criticizes acts, integrates one person's actions with another's, and constructs conduct as normative. The game, then, is one of influencing others in attributing motives to justified personal dispositions in the context personal situations over which they may have very little control. Hence,

⁵¹ Mills (1940: 907).

“what is reason for one man is rationalization for the other⁵².” Mills continues, in a sidebar manner, to suggest *moral* motives have traditionally been linked to ethical and religious justifications: “under the aegis of religious institutions, men use vocabularies of moral motives: they call acts and programs ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ and impute these qualities to the soul⁵³.” In general, for Mills, people draw upon vocabularies of motive when they sense an expectation for explanation⁵⁴.

Justifications are reactionary bouts of talk people employ when put on the defensive. While vocabularies of motive akin to what Mills describes can be found in the donut shop, breeze-shooting is a more preventative, preemptive, and perhaps *offensive* (though not necessarily aggressive or malicious) activity. Breeze-shooting involves what I call *vocabularies of capability*: where vocabularies of motive answer “why?,” vocabularies of capability answer “what?” and/or “how?” Vocabularies of capability are milieu-specific sets of talk that provide accepted *reports* of past, present, and future programs or acts that highlight abstract ideals concomitant with specific identities. In other words, where vocabularies of motive use talk to justify acts, vocabularies of capability use *talk about acts* to assert that one is such and such a person and ought to be regarded by others accordingly. The emphasis is on an

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 910.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 913.

⁵⁴ See also Burke (1945), whose work influenced Mills’ conceptualization of vocabularies of motive.

individual's ability to complete an act over and above the manifest meanings of the act.

One autumn day Orville, Frank, Robert, Lester and I were in the donut shop, shooting the breeze: Frank was on his way to his church to harvest some lettuce in the small garden; Robert discussed his own parents' divorce in relation to his enduring marriage in the context of present-day divorce; Lester reminded us of how physically demanding his job as a firefighter with the state forest service was and how he could have been promoted to Chief, but had declined; and I bemoaned a pile of papers I had yet to grade. Orville, however, had nothing of his own to report to the rest of us, and endured some good-natured ribbing from Frank:

"Well what about you, Orville ... surely, you've got *something* going on," chuckled Frank.

"Well I'm plenty busy" Orville retorted, "... I ... ah ... I"

"Well, you're busy being Orville," I interjected, hoping to save him from any embarrassment.

"That's right!" laughed Orville, "I'm the only one that can do it!"

Orville had clearly gotten a haircut recently, and I went on, "Well, it looks like you got a haircut, Orville."

"I guess I did ... I don't know ... I fell asleep!" replied Orville to another round of laughter.

On this day, Frank's talk about his harvesting obligations reported to the rest of us that he both had something to do and that he was physically able-bodied

enough to do it. Robert's talk of his enduring marriage reported that he had the moral resolve necessary to remain married. Lester's talk of his firefighting career reported to the rest of us that his work peers recognized him as a capable man worthy of a leadership position. My own talk reported to the rest of the morning regulars that, though I was complaining, I had not only had teaching obligations to fulfill, but that those obligations also implied that I was regarded by my superiors at the university as capable of doing the evaluative work necessary in grading papers. Orville initially had nothing to report. When I mentioned his recent haircut, his non-report in some sense *became* a report. I reported for Orville. Though the morning regulars typically provide reports about their own on-goings, they at times provide reports on the behalf of others. These kinds of reports can be found in seemingly mundane talk:

"Where's Jasper?" I asked Orville in the donut shop one day.

"I just saw him driving ... I bet he went down to Rhonda's [another donut shop] today ... he goes down there every once in a while too, you know."

Orville's report on behalf of Jasper let me know that Jasper was not only busy doing something else, but that I could also reasonably assume that Jasper was also integrated – if only somewhat – with another scene at another donut shop.

"I don't have to do that stuff anymore"

Frank has been a longtime bicycling enthusiast. He once rode half way across the United States. He went on long cycling trips in various parts of southern

California well into his retirement. He took his own children and their friends from the neighborhood on bike trips when they were younger. In his early eighties, he still went on rides, though not terribly often, and he preferred to go on shorter ones and preferred to go along with a friend. I'm not myself an avid cyclist in the sense of cycling as a sport or as a training regiment or as weekend hobby. I'm more of a bike-rider. Whenever possible, I prefer to ride my bicycle when in transit. I typically rode my bicycle to the donut shop, to campus, and at times around town when running errands.

Frank and I eventually started talking about going on a bicycle ride together. He was eighty-four at the time, and suggested we try the bike path. We'd meet up, load our bicycles into the back of his pickup truck, drive over to the bike path and he'd give it a whirl. We were both looking forward to the adventure.

"Ah, Murphy, I've got my bike down at the shop now ... gettin' it ready," reported Frank.

"Yeah? Great," I replied, "when is it supposed to be ready?"

"Oh, I don't know. They said a week or so ... I'm having new shifters put on it ... the old ones are mounted clear down there at the bottom front of the frame ... and I'm having 'em put some new ones up on the handlebars to make it a little easier."

A couple weeks would pass and Frank's bike still wasn't ready. "Still haven't heard from 'em," Frank would tell me at the donut shop. And a few days later, in Frank's dining room in his home, I asked Frank why it was taking so long.

“Oh ... ah ... well, they had to order some parts I think ... I don’t know. You’d think they could have it ready by now!”

I said, jokingly, “Well why don’t you go down there and tell ‘em off!”

“Ha,” chuckled Frank, “I’m too old for that,” and after a short pause we made eye-contact, he smiled, and became more serious, “I don’t *have* to do that stuff anymore.”

I’d just learned something profound. I immediately sensed that this was perhaps a special kind of vocabulary of capability. He didn’t *have* to do “that stuff” anymore. In this magnified moment, I understood Frank’s words to mean that he no longer felt any need to engage in aggressive and/or daring behavior to feel like a man. Perhaps he was “more” of a man or a “better” man for not having to do “that stuff” “anymore.” I’d just dared Frank, however jokingly, to basically storm on in to the bicycle shop and “give ‘em hell⁵⁵.”

So I stood there, just having myself performed a bout of talk reminiscent of hegemonic masculinity, only to be trumped with vocabulary of capability that unveiled a core part of Frank’s personal sense of “good manhood.” He’d been “keepin’ busy” in getting ready for the bike ride. And he knew I knew that. He also knew that “keepin’ busy” in this context, as in others, involved degrees of independence and being in-control. And so Frank used talk-about-a-non-act to assert a manhood independent from and unaffected by broader norms of hegemonic masculinity involving aggression. Moreover, his talk implied a sense of being in-

⁵⁵ See Brannon (1976) on “Give ‘em hell” masculinities.

control of his own situated manhood: old or not, aggressive or not, he's still a man and should be regarded by others as such. We'd go on two different bike rides together – events that would create a slew of reports we could use at the donut shop to help us think of ourselves as “good men.”

Chapter 4: A Humor Orgy

To build up what Charles Horton Cooley (1909) calls a “we-feeling” is a curious process that has long interested sociologists. A “we-feeling” is essentially a sense of solidarity – a sense of togetherness. In this chapter, I outline one such process within the world of the regulars at the donut shop – a process that, perhaps counter-intuitively, involves a distinct form of *ritual insult*. Where insult typically results in marking me/you or us/them boundaries (and often leaves people upset), what I call “humor orgies” are not only less caustic, but are also more about building up a sense of solidarity between insulters and the insulted. The logic is something akin to a comedic “roast” of a respected peer – people taking turns making fun of one another and, in the end, everybody has positive feelings toward sensing a membership to a definitive group they are proud to be associated with.

It seems most prudent to provide a story of a humor orgy at the onset. The reason for doing so is to provide the reader with a story of one particular morning in the donut shop that is characteristic of how our gatherings typically unfold. And where certainly not all mornings in the donut shop see the phenomenon I’ve called a humor orgy, they do indeed occur from time to time and serve the important social purpose of providing peers with a sense of solidarity. After telling the story of our seemingly mundane interactions on this day, I’ll provide an analysis of the gathering in outlining in detail exactly what a humor orgy is and what a humor orgy does.

*

One day I walked in to the donut shop to the sound of Lester's voice proudly telling Robert how, when he was firefighter, he'd learned how to "stand around on the job and let all the others work," but that he also never himself would loaf as such. He knew how to loaf, but never really did so himself. And so as I was wrapping up some small talk with Amy at the counter, I turned around and completed the habitualized round of morning handshakes with Robert and Lester. Robert kept on the topic of employment, but shifted the focus towards my own.

"Have you got a job lined up after you graduate, Murph?" Robert asked.

"Yeah," I said, and then joked while taking a seat at the table, "I got [sic] jobs diggin' holes [manual labor jobs⁵⁶] all across the country!"

We chuckled together as I'd painted myself as prospect-less in the academic job market and perhaps even unemployable. Robert and Lester already well knew of my working-class upbringing in the Midwest and that I'd worked occasionally in the construction world, "diggin' holes" off and on before entering graduate school. Robert, aged 87 at the time and himself a retired academic, seemed particularly amused at my self-deprecating talk. And we went on, humorlessly shooting the breeze about our past work experience, noting how physically and mentally demanding we claimed the jobs to be.

⁵⁶ "Diggin' holes," is a phrase that means engaging in manual labor for pay, usually under the table in the construction world, and is a somewhat common term among White working-class men in the neighborhood, and, in parts of southern California generally – use of the term in Ocean Beach, San Diego is quite prominent for example.

Orville, aged 85 at the time, arrived a few minutes later wearing his usual garb: his Greek fisherman's cap cocked slightly to the left, a pair of Vans brand slip-on shoes, and his back-brace – worn on the outside of his three-button short-sleeve golf-style collared shirt. We'd already begun discussing the winter holidays with Orville as he shuffled past the donut display cases toward the counter where his coffee and donut were already waiting. And again we go through the habitualized handshakes, each of us shaking hands with Orville.

"Orville," said Robert in his usual salutatory way.

"Robert," Orville returned.

"Hey Orville," I greeted.

"Murph," Orville replied while reaching out to Lester to shake the last remaining hand.

"Lester."

And Lester smiled, "You [to Orville] don't wanna know where that hand [Lester's hand] has been!"

"Oh yeah?" said Orville in a not all too inquisitive way.

"I been ornery this morning!" exclaimed Lester, alluding to masturbation. And we all laughed – Orville included. My own chuckle, admittedly, was a bit forced on this occasion and was perhaps of the faux variety. I was surprised that Robert and Orville would permit this kind of talk in the donut shop.

"Aw geeze, Lester..." chuckled Orville subtly but publicly as he settled into his seat at the table – cleverly and skillfully reminding Lester that such talk toed the line

of appropriateness in the donut shop. The mild corrective of “Aw geeze, Lester” let Lester know at one that he both could (in words of Orville stated to me elsewhere) “get away with [saying] it,” but also that anything further would be (in words Frank stated to me elsewhere) “too crude.” Lester’s smirk and laughter suggested he’d thought of himself as “gettin’ one” “on” Orville. So there was Lester, overtly presenting a virile (if perhaps lonely) self – a kind of self that for many regulars in the donut shop, particularly those over the age of 80 (though not all of them) is a virile self of days past.

Despite the alleged fact that Lester remains a virile man, and regardless or whether or not Orville is virile himself, Orville’s been the victim of what might be considered a practical joke and has been the fall guy in a borderline lewd act. In their words, Orville is here “takin’ it.” And Lester was “givin’ it.” By virtue of my own age (28 at the time), I was perhaps “givin’ it” by implication, insofar as Orville and Robert thought of myself as “more” virile than themselves. Robert, on the other hand, was perhaps “takin’ it” by implication insofar as Lester’s claim also placed Robert in a subordinate position on the situationally-invented hierarchy of virility. And Robert is a man (as Lester, Orville and myself were all well at the time) that will readily share, even when unsolicited, that “*nothing* works down there anymore.” And so there we were, temporally situated in a temporary hierarchy of virility – a

hierarchy whose construction takes on meaning only within the temporary, fictitious world of jest⁵⁷.

We would move seamlessly to, of all topics of conversation, the weather and how much we all enjoyed this time of year. And after a few more minutes, we moved to city politics and their concerns about the increasingly low quality of the driving conditions of two neighborhood thoroughfares. We enjoyed a few more minutes of humorless breeze-shooting.

And then Doris walked in. Doris is a White woman known in the neighborhood as a “tweaker,” and lives mostly on the streets. She is well-meaning and, when sober and in the mood to be sociable, is apologetic in demeanor and seems embarrassed in conversation as she perpetually fidgets when describing herself as “down on [her] luck.” Her skin is tanned from a life on the streets of Sunny, California where the average high temperature is over 80 degrees for six months of the year. Her chronological age is alarmingly difficult to discern – it appears that she could be aged anywhere from the mid-40’s to the mid-70’s. She looks weathered in more ways than one. And although she visits the donut shop often, she does not seem to visit in any scheduled or patterned way, and is not known as a “regular” to the morning regulars. Doris may or may not be found in the donut shop or hanging out alone in the shopping center on any given morning, mid-

⁵⁷ Peter Berger (1997) considers the “fictitious world of jest” to be a phenomenological, temporary departure from the reality of everyday life.

day, and/or night. On this particular morning, although seemingly “tweaked⁵⁸,” Doris had ordered and paid for a donut and coffee. On other days she hasn’t enough money and sits alone. And on rare occasions, Steve or Amy will ask her to leave if she is too boisterous – which she does without much if any protest. On this day, however, she was sitting at the table adjacent to “our table,” and she talked incoherently to herself and repeatedly fumbled and fidgeted through several small folded pieces of paper in her purse. She wasn’t drastically breaching norms of behavior in public space on this day and was able to keep it together enough to place and pay for an order, to find and sit at an open table⁵⁹. And though talking to herself, she seemed to be genuinely trying to mind her own business. She stayed only for a few minutes eating only a couple of bites of her donut and left. On this day, none of us had spoken with Doris⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ This is to say that she was presumably either experiencing the effects of some methamphetamine at this particular point in time, or was experiencing anxiety due to the wearing off of the effects. To be “tweaked” is a normative term that can refer to either such state. In the case of Doris, excessively repetitive fidgeting is commonly a noticeable effect. It also seems likely that prolonged use has left Doris with some permanent psychological damage. Different drugs with different effects have different labels used to denote one’s experiencing of them. See Becker’s (1953) description of the meanings of being “high” after smoking marijuana.

⁵⁹ See Goffman (1963, especially Part II) on unfocused interaction. See also Goffman’s essay on alienation from interaction (1967: 113-136).

⁶⁰ Typically, morning regulars don’t interact with Doris, though they do on occasion – most commonly when she initiates interaction. Most of my own interactions with Doris have been outside of the donut shop – in the shopping center or elsewhere in the neighborhood. Also noteworthy is that on this particularly, I hadn’t yet become close to Doris in a way that commands mutual address. Our relationship gained steam in later phases of my fieldwork.

After Doris had left the donut shop, Robert professorially addressed our table while looking at Orville,

“Now there’s a person with some serious psychological problems.”

Orville nodded his head in agreement in a matter-of-fact but earnest way, expressing to the rest of us his sympathy and empathy – sympathy because he agreed with Robert’s assessment, and empathy because (as Robert, Lester and I each knew at the time), one of Orville’s own sons is a person with schizophrenia.

Robert perked up, “You’d know [referring to Orville] since you’ve got so many psychological problems yourself!⁶¹”

Orville chuckled with the rest of us. And just when I thought either Orville, Lester or Robert would make a follow-up joke about aging and memory (which is most often the case in these types of moments in the donut shop), Robert unleashed what he seemed to think of as a real zinger,

“That’s because you went to UCLA!”

Again we all laughed. We all knew that where Orville received his PhD from UCLA, Robert had received a PhD from UC Berkeley. Each of us also knew that Lester had received a MS from California State University, and that I was currently a

⁶¹ It is possible that Robert was here attempting to save face (See Goffman 1959) having likely realized that his comment about psychological problems may have conjured up some difficult feelings in Orville. Robert is here attempting to make it clear that he is not chalking Orville’s experiential knowledge of psychological problems to his fathering a person with schizophrenia, but is instead jokingly chalking them up to Orville’s own mental faculties.

graduate student pursuing a PhD. All of this was shared knowledge at the table. So I then nudged Orville with my elbow, looked at him, and addressed the table,

“I didn’t even get *in* [accepted for admission] to UCLA!”

We all laughed together, this time more boisterously. Again, we’d constructed a temporary hierarchy in a fictitious world of jest: Robert was “givin’ it” to all of us – directly to Orville and indirectly to Lester and me. Robert was “on top.” And where my own self-deprecating remark kept me in a position of “takin’ it” (perhaps even “givin’ it” to myself), and also kept Robert “givin’ it” “on top,” it also shifted Orville’s position to one where he was “givin’ it” to me and also to Lester by implication.

A few minutes later, Frank and John arrived as we were talking about donut shop tenancy. Robert and Orville had just proudly reminded me that they’d been coming to Steve’s Donut Shop for about 15 years.

Orville greeted Frank, “Frank.”

“Orville,” replied Frank, shaking his hand, after removing his straw hat and leather work gloves.

“Robert,” greeted Frank.

“Hello, Frank,” replied Robert.

“John! Haven’t seen you in a while!” said Orville extending his hand.

“Well I’m here now!” replied John.

And so we all go through the habitualized greetings together – shaking hands and matter-of-factly stating names. This time, Lester made no allusion to masturbation.

“In fact,” Orville continued, “we used to come here [to Steve’s] after golf ... Robert, Frank, and I.”

“And you know,” Robert added, “Orville was the only one I could beat [at golf]!”

We chuckled again. We knew that Robert was exaggerating, perhaps greatly. Orville was a longtime golf coach at a prestigious private college in southern California and is known by his peers as having a deft stroke during those years when he was most “on his game.” Nonetheless, a new hierarchy of middle-class athletic prowess had been constructed and Robert was again “givin’ it” to Orville.

Orville retorted, “If you ever did [win] its ‘cause you cheated!” – in other words “take” *that*, Robert.... And the group of morning regulars that had grown in size to the point of taking up two tables in the donut shop laughed in concert.

“Hell,” Orville continued, “Robert and Frank don’t even know there *are* rules in golf!” and we laughed again, without any protest from Robert or Frank, sharing the understanding that Robert and Frank were taking a turn at “takin’ it” and that Orville was taking a turn at “givin’ it” within the fictitious world of jest on a freshly constructed hierarchy of ethical sportsmanship.

We’d regress into more mundane talk about the holidays, and I realized I needed to get to campus. I shook hands, again, with Robert, Orville, and Lester and approached the table where Frank and John were sitting to shake hands with them (the handshaking is habitual upon exit for the morning regulars too) on my way to

the front door. On my way out, Lester said to me, raising his voice just slightly, “You’d better watch your step over there [near Frank and John]!”

We chuckled again, knowing that Lester was referring to the “bullshit” that Frank says he at times “leaves” in the donut shop. For Frank, “bullshit” of this kind refers to talk characterized by an intention to have no serious manifest consequences⁶².

I turned to Lester, “Well, I know to watch it around Frank!” and we again laughed.

“Ha!” exclaimed John, “He [Murphy] knows! He knows *you*, Frank!”

Smiling, I shake hands with Frank and John, and Lester again calls across the donut shop to leave me with some parting advice,

“You go and wash that hand now!”

*

There are many events occurring in the above story worthy of attention: Lester, in his allusions to masturbation, is perhaps “doing⁶³” a youthful, virile masculinity that would make even the slightest Freudian drool; the public allusions to the effects of particular educational credentials help to define Steve’s Donut Shop as a middle or possibly upper-middle class establishment for these men;

⁶² See Frankfurt (2005) for a conceptualization of bullshit, as talk disinterested in the truth-value of statements. Additionally, Brooks (2009) provides an understanding of bullshit as a set of excuses that deny responsibility.

⁶³ See West and Zimmerman (1987) and Laz (1998). The “doing” literature sees socially constructed categories (e.g., gender or age) as ongoing, processual, and emergent features of everyday life instead of external objective facts.

neighborhood notions of what constitutes morally “right” treatment undergirds their talk, and so forth. These and other equally important sociological insights notwithstanding, its undeniable that the morning regulars at Steve’s take turns making fun of each other periodically throughout the morning, each member knowing he is permitted to put other peer group members down but is also obliged to accept their ribs of him. Participants in naturally occurring conversation can draw upon shared knowledge and situational on-goings to provide improvisational commentary to construct a series of temporary, temporal hierarchies that take on meaning only in the fictitious world of jest in the donut shop.

What occurred on this day is what I refer to as a “humor orgy.” And the metaphor shouldn’t be taken as startling. It is appropriated from William Fry who reminds us that laughter and orgasm are both paroxysmal phenomena – sudden and spasmodic – and writes of “joke orgies,” that “...all of us can recall our participation at certain parties or gatherings where many jokes were told in an almost frenzied manner with much hilarity⁶⁴.” Where Fry goes on to imply that by “joke orgy” he means a gathering where people tell a succession of canned jokes (we might imagine talk of several proverbial guys walking into several bars), humor orgies involve only spontaneous improvisational humor of the superiority sort in a context where both the jokers “givin’ it” “on top” and “butts” “takin’ it” “on bottom” are peers hanging out together. Humor orgies are in this regard a distinct form of ritual insult.

⁶⁴ Fry (1963: 32).

It was thinking through a lunch I'd had with Frank at a nearby burger joint that helped me to arrive at exactly what the purpose of a humor orgy was. I'd asked him, as vaguely and as open-ended as possible, what he thought "happened" each day in the donut shop. And his words ended up being remarkably telling:

Its an event during the day [gathering at the donut shop] that ah, you're very comfortable with ... you meet [up with] people you know ... the conversation is light ... there's no real decisions.... So sometimes, you know, a buncha' people will meet up in the coffee shop and sit there and look at each other in cold silence. But not this group, you know? In a group like that there's no rules. You know? A football games got rules, a basketball games got rules, and you 'gotta play by the rules. And if you go to coffee there's no rules. *Except maybe you don't want to be too crude or rude, you know ... etiquette is there underlying it a bit, you know.* But I look forward to it. Its good for me ... and we don't have an angle. *There's no, ah, ladder, you know? The ... Captains down to the lowest, you know? There's no ... whatever you call that ladder, you know. None'a that.*

Touché, Frank. There's no ladder. And this is perhaps at the crux of discovering what the "climax" of a humor orgy does: humor orgies provide participants with the sense that the socially constructed status hierarchies they associate with broader society are not truly meaningful markers of social and moral worth. *That understanding is the climax.* In this sense, the climax of a humor orgy occurs when a member comes to understand the very idea of status-hierarchies-as-meaningful-markers-of-social-and-moral-worth to be the *butt of the joke* insofar as we might characterize ritually insulting each other to be *the joke*.

Humor orgies, then, are emergent interactional phenomena characterized by successive, situation-dependent accomplishments whereby group members play with interpersonal meanings and take turns "givin' it" and "takin' it." By

“successive,” I don’t mean immediately successive, which seems to be a feature of Fry’s “joke orgy,” but instead mean a roughly regular sequence of turns at talk whereby no single participant monopolizes turns at either “givin’ it” or “takin’ it.” And by “situation-dependent accomplishment,” I mean the establishment of shared understanding contingent upon situational on-goings. By “playing with interpersonal meanings,” I borrow from Zijderveld (1983) the notion that the defining characteristic of humor is that it fundamentally plays with meaning. By “interpersonal meanings,” I mean shared meanings to which not everyone is privy – as found in “inside” jokes. And so we can adapt the first of Blumer’s (1967) famous three premises to humor in this way: when people play with meanings, they act towards things on the basis of the *comprehensible but not necessarily plausible or normative* meanings that the things *may or may not* have to them *and to others*. Playing with meaning, then, seems a necessary, though not sufficient condition for humor – and the same might be said of course for the absurdist literature of Franz Kafka or Samuel Beckett, or the visual art of Elizabeth Murray or Raymond Pettibon, or the songs of Lil Wayne or Bob Dylan.

Hence the proposition:

When sociable occasions are characterized by successive, situation-dependent accomplishments whereby group members take turns playing with person-directed interpersonal meanings and participants highlight differing individual positions constructed and array of temporary status hierarchies, active participants are more likely to experience a sense of group solidarity insofar as they collectively understand “status-categories-as-meaningful-markers-of-worth” as the “butt” of the “joke” of ritually insulting one another.

Chapter 5: Bullshitting in the Donut Shop

Sitting in the donut shop provides the morning regulars with an ongoing stream of sociable occasions with acquaintances, strangers from the neighborhood, and the community at large. The morning regulars at times initiate casual conversation with non-regulars, and non-regulars at times initiate conversation with the regulars.

Unlike vocabularies of capability (though these are at times employed in conversation between regulars and non-regulars), *bullshitting* between regulars and non-regulars is commonly distinguishable from breeze-shooting in the sense that it is talk intended at having no serious manifest consequences where talking-about-activity is less important than talk-for-its-own-sake. Unlike other meanings, bullshitting in the donut shop is less about deception, exaggeration, or insincerity and is more centered around polite, casual, and safe conversations between regulars and non-regulars – it is also a distinct form of what Simmel calls sociability.

Simmel sees sociability as “a play-form of association,” asserting – though never fully explaining the analogy – that “sociability is related to the content-determined concreteness of association as art is related to reality⁶⁵.” And Simmel goes so far as to provide a principle of sociability:

Everyone should guarantee to the other that maximum of sociable values (joy, relief, vivacity) which is consonant with the maximum of values he himself receives. As justice upon the Kantian basis is thoroughly democratic, so likewise this principle shows the democratic structure of all sociability, which to be sure every social stratum can realize only within itself and which

⁶⁵ Simmel (1949: 255).

so often makes sociability between members of different social classes burdensome and painful⁶⁶.

In other words, in sociability people are less concerned with the content of talk and are more concerned with association for its own sake. The bracketing of deeply meaningful content, as such, casts inequalities aside (however superficially) and demands participants in sociability rest on roughly equal footing. Encounters of sociability, then, are those moments in talk where we not only treat others in a manner suggesting that this talk is occurring between equals, but also accept that the content of this talk is more a means to build up and maintain a sense of shared understanding and togetherness – what gets talked about is less important than the fact that people are talking with one another and understand such association to a sense of being-together wrapped up in talk.

In the previous chapter, I outlined one process of creating a “we” feeling amongst in-group members. In this chapter, I outline a different – but related – process of creating a “we” feeling amongst the morning regulars and non-regulars. More specifically, I explain how bullshitting with non-regulars creates a “we” feeling whereby a sense of community is constructed. It is best to begin with a few examples.

One morning I was sitting with Lester, Orville, and James. Three police officers entered the donut shop – two were uniformed and one was not. We exchanged “hellos” and “how do you dos.” Steve was behind the counter, counting

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

money in the cash register. He noticed the police officers and turned around, holding a wad of cash in his hand:

“Hey,” Steve said to the group of officers, “...haven’t seen you in a while!”

“Yeah ... well, we’ve been....”

“Hey you come for this!!” exclaimed Steve, interrupting, “You come for the money! Ok! Ok! Here, you take it!”

We all laughed.

“They’re bustin’ you, Steve ... for bad business!” added James from our table.

Again we all laughed. The officers went on to make some small talk with Steve and with our table, mostly explaining the un-uniformed officer’s promotion to detective. The officers grabbed their coffees and headed out and we all exchanged “have a good day” pleasantries.

James’ humorous remark, and the ensuing laughter, serve to mark a moment of shared understanding and shared experience – a “we” feeling of both being-together and being-on-the-same-page. Taken literally, James’ words would constitute a questioning of Steve’s business ethic. But, as described in the previous chapter, humorous moments as such mark a fictitious world of jest – in this case invoking the imagery of these particular police officers engaging in the work they are expected to do. James’ joke was communal in the sense that it involved the work roles of the police officers as if to say, “we understand the duties of police work and we value ethical business practices.” And the police officer’s enjoyment of the joke, expressed in their laughter, perhaps provides them with an intermezzo of sorts – a

very temporary break from the world of serious police work in bullshitting with the morning regulars in the donut shop⁶⁷.

The morning regulars do not exclusively bullshit with strangers who are middle aged or old men or White. Any given patron has a roughly equal chance of being called out to by one of the morning regulars. One morning I was sitting with Jasper, Charles and Robert. There was a brief lull in our conversation as a mother and a young boy (presumably her child) entered the donut shop. We watched the boy carefully examine the donuts in the case, seemingly taking his decision of which donut to have quite seriously. Jasper smiled to the mother:

“I’ll betcha’ he samples that [donut] before he gets home.”

The woman chuckled with us, “I bet he does!”

“How old are you?” continued Jasper. The child held up five fingers and Jasper was quick to respond, “What are you going to do when you run out of fingers?” The boy appeared a bit confused, though not necessarily embarrassed. We all again warmheartedly chuckled and as the boy and the woman were heading for the front door, Jasper left the boy with one last smiling remark, “...Now keep exercising so you’ll stay nice and thin.” And again, we chuckled together.

In bullshitting, the morning regulars engage in talk with strangers with the intent that the talk will have no serious manifest consequences. While bullshitting in the donut shop is on one hand talk-for-its-own-sake, it is also talk that depends

⁶⁷ See Katz (1999) for an analysis of shared experience in laughter. See also Pogrebin and Poole (1988) for an analysis of humor characteristics in police work.

upon some degree of shared understanding. In this sense, however superficial the bullshitting, talk with strangers in the donut shop engenders a sense of *being-with* neighborhood residents at large and gives rise to a feeling of integration within the broader community in general.

On another morning, I sat with Charles, Lester, Erwin and Orville. An acquaintance of Lester's came into the donut shop. He was an old White man who I'd never seen before in the donut shop. He and Lester used to be neighbors. Lester's acquaintance was wearing a sheath attached to his brown leather belt that encased a small utility knife. In the neighborhood, the sporting of such a knife is common to construction workers and general building contractors. It is not meant as a weapon and is instead more a sign of blue-collar work, and in this man's case, signified hands-on busyness in retirement. Jasper commented on the knife and the man pulled it out proudly. He handed it to Jasper in a more exhibitivish than brandishing manner.

"It's a mid-eastern switchblade," said the man, laughing. None of us laughed or chuckled nor did any of us respond with talk as Jasper continued to examine the knife, sliding the blade open and closed a few times.

"Well, this is pretty slick," concluded Jasper.

"That's right ... a mid-eastern switchblade," the man again laughed.

"A mid-eastern switchblade?" inquired Jasper earnestly.

"Ha! Yep," replied the man, again chuckling alone, "...a mid-eastern switchblade."

Jasper passed the knife over to Charles, whose ninety-five year old hands seemed to have little trouble opening and closing the blade. We all remained silent and I felt awkward. I sensed the man thought the morning regulars would interpret “mid-eastern switchblade” as some sort of joke worthy of laughter. But none of us were laughing. I felt a sort of secondhand embarrassment. I was embarrassed *for* him.

“A mid-eastern switchblade,” he again tried, this time even more awkwardly – raising his pitch at the end of “switchblade” as if to say, “Does anybody ‘get’ it?”

“What did those guys use anyways? Box cutters, right?” asked Jasper, referring to 9/11. We all agreed that box cutters were used.

“I don’t even know what box cutters look like,” added Charles. The knife-sporting acquaintance of Lester’s explained the shape and size of box cutters. Charles handed him his knife back and he walked out to a chorus of “have a good day.”

Though the encounter was awkward, it provided an opportunity for the morning regulars to wrap themselves up in talk with a non-regular – however blundering it may have been. This particular encounter also highlights the democratic structure of sociability noted above by Simmel: we let the man try his “mid-eastern switchblade” script again and again, and though we never laughed, our collective reply was in our silence – a silence that meant “that way of talk is not our way of talk.” In shifting the discussion to box-cutters, Jasper effectively moved the conversation in a more sociable, bullshitable direction.

In breeze-shooting, an individual's talk is commonly centered around the on-goings of himself or someone else – small news reports most commonly highlighting one's busyness. Bullshitting in the donut shop is different: the content of the talk plays second fiddle to very act of talking. In bullshitting, the morning regulars build a bridge of talk connecting themselves to non-regulars. However small, such talk-for-its-own-sake arouses a sense being-with. Bullshitting often involves habituated, routine, and taken for granted phrases such as “how do you do?”, “[its] hot out there today, huh?”, or “have a good one.” Interactants in sociable bullshitting take turns providing such phrases of little content. Though we-feelings can arise through many different kinds of interaction, the we-feelings that arise from bullshitting require that interactants exchange as mundanely routine talk as possible. Contrary to breeze-shooting, we-feelings in bullshitting arise not out of what-gets-talked-about; they arise out of the very activity of exchanging talk.

Chapter 6: Old Men's Caregiving and "Good Manhood"

While it remains unclear how many men in the United States are in-home primary caregivers for their wives, it is estimated that one million men in the US care for wives with dementia alone⁶⁸. To be thrown into a situation where one sees oneself as the best person reasonably available to provide care for another is to be thrown into a position of situational power. In these situations, caregivers are presented with opportunities to feel good about who they think they are by engaging in acts they define as altruistic. As I observed how Robert and Frank provided care for their ailing wives, and as I participated in some caregiving for their wives as well, I came to understand how Frank and Robert worked to redefine the difficulties associated with being primary caregivers into opportunities they could use to impress upon themselves and others that they ought to be regarded as "good men."

Part of this stems from the actuality of caregiving: it isn't easy work. Though it involves great emotional engagement and requires boundlessly heavy emotion work⁶⁹, men caregivers have been found to be less verbally expressive about the

⁶⁸ See Russell (2007).

⁶⁹ "Emotion work," for Hochschild (1979), is the (unpaid) work people consciously and purposely do when they try to change the "degree or quality [of] emotion or feeling ... [emotion work] refers more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself" (p. 561). Hochschild also writes that emotion work involves cognitive, bodily, and expressive techniques – in effect, in emotion work, people try to change their feelings to match those they feel are appropriate to the situation. See also Mac Rae (1998) for an application of Hochschild's perspective to primary caregivers for people with Alzheimer's disease.

demands involved in caregiving work⁷⁰. In other words, men caregivers tend not to talk about the emotional strains they feel in caregiving. Perhaps this helps to explain part of the reason why men caregivers of wives with dementia, as is the case with Robert, are more likely to develop depressive disorders⁷¹. In order to maintain a sense of masculinity, older men in caregiving roles tend to downplay and even suppress their non-masculine feelings about the role in favor of renegotiating dominant masculine ideologies and reframing “their definition of a man and [reinforcing] that of a husband ... by retaining varying degrees of power over the caregiving relationship⁷².” Further, when caregiving men engage in help-seeking behaviors they often account for the caregiving (in)adequacies with a narrative of “doing the best they can⁷³.”

Spending time with both Robert and Frank in their respective caregiving contexts enabled me to realize the extent to which the understandings and meanings of manhood are contradictory – perhaps especially for old men⁷⁴. Being an old man and an in-home spousal primary caregiver for one’s non-

⁷⁰ See Fromme et al (2005) and R. Russell (2008).

⁷¹ See Cuijpers (2005).

⁷² Riberio et al (2007: 302).

⁷³ See Brown et al (2007).

⁷⁴ See Coltrane (1994) on his astute point that the understandings and meanings of masculinity are contradictory. He also advises that standpoint theoretical orientations may be better suited than other approaches insofar as standpoints are “socially constructed under specific microstructural conditions” and can “tell about the creation and maintenance of gender difference and gender inequality” (p. 54).

institutionalized wife can be at once frustrating and rewarding, it can both cause and alleviate suffering, and perhaps most interestingly, caregiving is complex role comprised of tasks and actions that are *at once* instrumental *and* expressive⁷⁵. We might think of caregiving as a distinct kind of labor of love. If instrumental roles involve goal/ends oriented activity aimed at securing or maintaining perceived tangible necessities (e.g., procuring and organizing medications), and expressive roles involve means oriented activity aimed at securing or maintaining perceived intangible necessities (e.g. improving socio-emotional well-being by maintaining a positive attitude and/or administering medications), then caregiving roles involve complex activities that can be at once instrumental and expressive. Moreover, caregiving roles imply a power/dependency relationship. Without Robert, to continue the example, Margaret would not have known what, when, or how many medications she was supposed to take due to her severely progressed Alzheimer's disease. Assuming Margaret's medications helped her condition, her well being, however unbeknownst to her, was greatly dependent upon Robert's caregiving.

Constant caregiving

One afternoon I was hanging out with Robert and Margaret in their home. On this particular day, I'd ended up staying until around five or five-thirty and they

⁷⁵ Parsons and Bales (1955) see instrumental and expressive gender roles as a dichotomous binary. They see a division of labor with men in instrumental roles (e.g., "breadwinning") and women in expressive roles (e.g. working to maintain emotional and relational harmony within the family). As is evident in much functionalist logic, Parsons and Bales largely ignore issues of power and domination.

were getting ready to eat dinner. Robert lumbered out of his recliner and walked over to the kitchen table as I was leaving. I answered Margaret's question about whether or not I was a student at the nearby university (for the fourth time on this particular day), and then said goodbye to her. I headed for the front door:

"Okay, bye Margaret," I said, "Hey Robert, I'll see you tomorrow," I called from the front entryway.

"Now wait there just a minute, Murph," Robert called out from the kitchen, "Here Margaret, now you take these."

"Oh, Honey, now I don't take these, do I?" said Margaret cheerily, but matter-of-factly.

I walked back from the front entryway into the kitchen entryway where I would be within eyeshot. Robert had laid out Margaret's evening round of medications:

"Well *yes* you do," said Robert with an only partially masked frustration, "These are your dinnertime pills," he went on, shifting both his tone and demeanor into a more caring (though *not* sales-pitching) aura, "You'll feel better. You've been wandering around the house for the last hour⁷⁶."

"Oh," chuckled Margaret, then looking back at me smiling and continuing to chuckle "I never know what [medications] I'm supposed to be taking anymore."

⁷⁶ It is possible Margaret's evening round includes medication for wandering and/or "Sundowning" – a syndrome suspected to be related to disrupted circadian rhythms that results in both worsening and mood swings and often accompanies wandering (Baker et al 1999).

She seemed to deeply and genuinely trust Robert that the medications he'd laid out would indeed help her feel better and that they were indeed the ones she'd been prescribed. She took the pills right then and there, standing up in the kitchen, seemingly without hesitation or second thought. He'd reassured her, however frustratingly, and she trusted him fully.

Robert walked me outside to my bicycle.

"Thanks for having me over, Robert," I said.

"Oh gosh, yes ... ah ... Margaret's Alzheimer's is getting worse, as you can see," he said soberly.

"Yeah," I said, not quite knowing how to go about consoling, "But Robert, you're both really ..."

"It's just hard for me to leave her here by herself for very long," he interrupted, "One time I came home and she was right here [on the driveway] ... *right here* laying on the ground. She'd fallen ... and it's getting hard for me to pick her up, you see. She's hurt herself in the house several times while I've been gone. I worry about her every time I have to go the VA [Veteran's Administration Hospital about 15 miles from their home]."

At this point it occurred to me that Robert and I had exchanged phone numbers more than a year ago. He'd never called me for any sort of help or assistance. I took out my notebook and gave Robert my phone number again:

"Here Robert. Just call me if you need something.... For you or for Margaret or whatever. Even if it's not health stuff."

“Well, okay, Murph. Thanks. But you know we have a son that just lives about five miles away....”

“Yeah, I know. But now you’ve got it [my telephone number] again anyways. I live a half mile away and I can be here in five minutes on my bike.” I went on, continuing my seriousness, but also trying to be more assertive, “Look, don’t be too proud to call ...” I continued, now huffing a bit, “I’m serious. I can be here in five minutes. Ten or fifteen if I’m on campus. Just call.”

“Well, I appreciate it, Murph.”

Of course Robert and I continued to see each other on most mornings at the donut shop, and I kept stopping by his and Margaret’s home periodically on both scheduled and impromptu occasions. But Robert wouldn’t call me by telephone until ten months later – I was in my small office on campus and my cellular phone rang: “Private Call” flashed on the screen.

“Hello?”

“Ah, is this Murphy?”

“Robert?” I replied, at first feeling surprised, but then immediately feeling uneasy. I didn’t exactly gasp, but I became a bit fearful that something had gone awry.

“Yes, Murph, this is Robert,” he answered calmly, matter-of-factly, and without an ounce of distress, somewhat easing my feelings of nervousness.

Yet I still continued assuming that something was perhaps wrong, and in retrospect, I now understand that I delivered a question which given his demeanor over the telephone was ageist: “Is everything okay?”

“Oh fine, fine, Murph,” chuckled Robert, laughing off my insensitive remark, “ah ... can you come over tomorrow?”

“[Do] you mean at the usual time (at “snack time” around 3pm)?”

“Yeah, yeah, come over for a snack ... why ... ah, we’ll have cheese and crackers.”

I was certain he had something he wanted to tell me – maybe had a recent revelation about his time as a POW, maybe he wanted to talk more about Margaret, I wasn’t quite sure. I stopped by the next afternoon:

“Now come on back here, Murph. I wanna show you this.”

We walked to the small patio table in the back yard.

“See, I wanted to show you what a dissertation in [his own former field of study in the natural sciences] looks like ... I went in to my office and just pulled one off of the shelf ... and by gosh I’d just happened to pull off one of the best ones I ever supervised.”

I read the abstract and flipped through the pages: loads of descriptive statistics, what seemed to be a somewhat antiquated statistical procedure that I’d never encountered before, and little bits of text sprinkled throughout. I thought to myself, “Really? This is what Robert wanted me to see? What’s he really putting off asking or telling me?” And he was particularly talkative that afternoon. Margaret

was taking her afternoon nap and Robert, somewhat characteristically but in a decidedly more prolonged manner, went on and on and on about the ecology of broccoli-eating insects – the topic of the dissertation I held in my hand. I was still a bit perplexed as to why he’d called to have me over⁷⁷. Perhaps he saw this as a sort of pep talk for my own upcoming dissertation – maybe he saw his sharing of that dissertation as “helpin’ out.”

I didn’t leave until around four-thirty, and Robert walked me out front:

“Ah, Murph?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you think you’d be able to give me a ride to the VA hospital ... ah, the appointment is in two weeks.”

“Oh, of course,” I immediately replied, “Well ... I mean, probably ... ah, what time?” I was relieved with my new understanding that he’d really called me over to personally ask if I could do him this little favor. He was shy to ask, and had put it off until the last minute as I was leaving.

“Well you’d need to be here at two.”

I checked my day timer that I kept in my bag, and Robert went on,

“I’ve got to go to the optometrist ... and they make you wear those real dark sunglasses, you see. Orville usually takes me when I have to go to the optometrist, but he can’t this time ... and, ah ... I can’t really drive with those dark glasses and ...”

⁷⁷ It’s worth mentioning that Robert and I typically schedule our appointments in person at the donut shop.

“Yeah,” I interrupted, “I can do it.”

“Well it’d be much appreciated, Murph ... you see if I leave Margaret alone here for too long ... you see sometimes she’ll wander off and....”

“I know, Robert,” I again interrupted, “I know.”

And we stood there for few seconds enjoying the moment of shared understanding, sheepishly exchanging smiles. Robert understood an important part of caring for Margaret as requiring the nearly constant presence of either himself or another family member. And so in this moment (regardless of my own personal feelings about the ethics of his constant-caregiving style) we stood *as men* – men experiencing the contradictory meanings of manhood: I’d provide care for him (and by implication, for Margaret as well) insofar as “helpin’ out” with the everyday task of driving entailed care, and he understood that I understood (to however small a degree) and sympathized with his own difficulties with the “hard work” associated with being a primary caregiver. And though he was apprehensive about having to ask for a favor, he’d eventually put his independence at bay and asked if I could do the driving. I felt like a “good man” on the terms of the morning regulars – I’d be the one to feel needed, in control, and able-bodied enough to do the driving, but I’d be doing so in a context that would enable me to see the activity as an altruistic one that both Robert and I would surely report to the rest of the morning regulars at the donut shop. Driving Robert to the VA would be an instru-expressive act. And though I’d yet to actually drive him to the VA, I already felt good about myself in that

very moment in the driveway – just in simply knowing that in two weeks, I’d give him a ride to the VA.

Managerial caregiving

Dorothy doesn’t require vast amounts of bona-fide caregiving, but her Sciatica (a condition caused by nerve compression resulting in, for Dorothy, severe pain the lower back, hips, and legs) has grown into a disability that has left Dorothy more or less relegated to their home. She always uses a walker that has wheels and a seat, though it is not outfitted with a hand brake as is common to many walkers. Traversing up anything more than one stair isn’t really possible without the help of another – anything more than four or five isn’t really possible at all. Nonetheless, she is only partially dependent – mostly upon others to get her around town: to church and to “get-togethers” with family and friends, the grocery store, the doctor’s office, the beauty salon, and various eateries around town. In their home, Dorothy is fully self-sufficient. She prepares her breakfast for herself and typically prepares lunch for both herself and Frank (though Frank commonly prepares dinner for the both of them), she administers her own medications, and, with the help of grab bars and a toilet seat riser is fully self-sufficient in the bathroom. She also does the laundry. And though Dorothy is careful to “keep things picked up around the

house,” she and Frank have hired an independent contracting Peruvian woman to do the house cleaning every two weeks⁷⁸.

It is the sciatica that is the major daily problem for Dorothy. This becomes particularly problematic for Frank and Dorothy when they attend evening or weekend “get togethers” with family and friends – and they may attend as many as six or eight (*excluding* weekly dinners with the Monday Night Group) of these invitational-but-informal social gatherings in any given month:

“We went over to Kathleen and Orville’s with the Monday Night Group for Kathleen’s eightieth surprise birthday party the other night,” Dorothy told me over the phone after I’d geographically exited the field to write up my dissertation. And after a few minutes noting how “nice it was” to see Kathleen so genuinely surprised, how wonderful the food was, and how nice it was to see some of Kathleen and Orville’s extended family members who’d come in from out of town, Dorothy said to me, “You’ve been over there, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve been over there.”

“Those *stairs*,” she sighed partly in wonderment and partly in dread, “...My gosh there are stairs *everywhere*!”

⁷⁸ Hired, in-home housecleaners in the neighborhood seem to overwhelmingly be Latinas. Jasper has hired the same Peruvian woman. Frank, Dorothy, and Jasper are all quick to note “what a great job she does,” and seem to have framed their relationships with her in ways that reproduce racial inequality – “well, I know she’s happy to have the work,” Frank once said to me, framing his hiring of her as perhaps at once magnanimous and superior. And Robert and Margaret, though they contract through a local in-home housecleaning company, seemed to tend to see the Latinas that clean their homes in similar ways.

“Yeah, that first flight especially ... its a big one,” I said, empathizing.

“Well, *yeah* it is ... there must be six or eight [steps].”

“Yeah, that’s probably right,” I agreed, “and then there’s a buncha’ little two step deals on the main floor too ... Its kinda’ weird in there....”

“Yeah! But *I* went around the side of the house to the back.... One or two fewer steps that way,” she said in a slightly prideful tone. “Let’s see, there was Doug and ah, Kevin ... they’re Kathleen’s kids, you know ... well I had each one of them on either side of me and Frank was going to be behind me, but he didn’t really have to do anything because they had it covered ... And boy, we made it alright ... took a bit, but we made it.”

In this particular situation, and in many I’ve observed and participated in, Frank is ready, willing, and able to let others take the reigns in assisting Dorothy with daily tasks. But this is not suggest that Frank is particularly aloof or disinterested in assisting in these situations. He seems more than happy, however, to stand on the sidelines if it seems reasonable to him. Where Robert seemed to try to proactively avoid the problems he saw as potentially arising with his own caregiving for Margaret (particularly problems associated with wandering), Frank’s caregiving style is more in and of the moment – he’s more attuned to attempting to solve problems as they come. That Dorothy’s cognitive skills are remarkable for an eighty-five year old woman only makes Frank’s caregiving easier. She has very small and inconsequential bouts of forgetfulness here and there – as does Frank – but cognitively, she can also be a partner in solving problems:

“Over at King’s [grocery store] ... well, I’ve used the scooter [motorized cart] they have over there a few times” said Dorothy, “but I only use it if I *aaaabsolutely* have to.”

“Well, when do *absolutely* have to?” I asked.

“Well ... Frank and I split up ... ah, he goes one way and I go the other ... that saves a lot of time, you know? But If I need something *waaaaay* in the back and I don’t feel like I can do it that day, then I’ll take the scooter.”

“Oh, cool ... I bet its fun,” I said naturally – in a playful, but inadvertently leading way.

“Well they’re hard to drive! The one [motorized cart] they have next door at MegaMart [department store] is better,” she chuckled, “I knock over more things there at King’s than I do over there at MegaMart.”

I chuckled with Dorothy.

“But Frank’s good about running all over [the store] ... so I don’t always use it ... I don’t always *have to* ... but if I go with someone else [typically friends Bonnie or Connie], I’ll use it....”

This little bit brings a larger point to light. Dorothy doesn’t prefer to use the scooter when shopping – it can cause embarrassment, both overtly and covertly. When shopping with Frank, she may or may not use it. With others, however, she says, “I’ll use it.” Moreover, Frank is aware that Dorothy prefers not to use the scooter, and regardless of whether or not other shopping companions are or are not aware of this, Dorothy tends to use it when she shops with them. The intimacy of

Frank and Dorothy's caregiving relationship, no doubt indebted to their nearly sixty year marriage, involves mutual understandings of each others' nuanced preferences in how to best go about completing everyday tasks.

Dorothy knows when she needs assistance and isn't shy to ask relatives and close friends for it if need be. Her mental acumen, keen bodily awareness, and openly frank demeanor in effect allows Frank to take a situational approach to being Dorothy's primary caregiver. He can assist her when she needs it, they can work together in solving problems as they arise, and when things are running smoothly, she can care for herself.

The instru-expressive demands of caregiving and "good manhood."

Though perhaps not all instances of spousal caregiving are understood as such, both Robert and Frank see their caregiving work as, quintessentially, labors of love. Such labors of love embody the abovementioned contradictory experiences and meanings of manhood. On one hand, caregiving work involves some managerial work – administering medications, scheduling medical appointments, and organizing everyday household tasks. There is no doubt an instrumental aspect to caregiving tasks. On the other hand, caregiving work involves nurturing – providing emotional support, espousing a "can do" attitude, and being warmheartedly devoted. There is also, then, no doubt an expressive aspect to caregiving tasks. The concept of *instru-expressive* tasks – a perhaps jargonized, but certainly very nuanced version of what is more commonly referred to as "labors of love" – relates to "good

manhood.” Among the social world of the morning regulars at the donut shop, “good men” “help out” and “keep busy.” The completion of instru-expressive tasks does indeed provide both Robert and Frank with reports that could be potentially shared with the rest of the morning regulars at the donut shop. But typically, they do not provide such reports that involve stories of their own caregiving.

Very early on in my fieldwork, before the vast majority of the findings I’ve reported throughout this dissertation became clear to me, Robert agreed to have lunch with me at an eatery across from the donut shop in the shopping center. I’d asked him a series of very open-ended questions. One moment we shared that day became understandable only after the research had considerable progressed:

“I mean, I have a good idea about what happens in the [donut] shop,” I said to Robert, “But how would you describe ‘what happens’ in the shop to other people who don’t sit with us ... for example, if your wife just up and asked, ‘What is it you guys do over there?’ how would you respond?”

“Well, we don’t bring our wives into it, you see,” responded Robert, both evading my question and providing a new insight that I’d only later come to understand.

Though they may know little of the details, the morning regulars know and have long known about each other’s past and present caregiving roles at home. Everybody knows about Robert and Margaret. Everybody knows about Frank and Dorothy. Everybody knows about Orville and his adult son Gregg – who is a person with schizophrenia. Everybody knows about Jasper and Donna. If caregiving

activities provide these men with reports demonstrative of “keepin’ busy” and “helpin’ out,” then why don’t they share these reports with the rest of the morning regulars? In short, they don’t provide reports concerning caregiving in the donut shop because they don’t see the donut shop as the proper setting to do so.

It is not that the morning regulars are afraid they wouldn’t be able to sufficiently frame the supposedly feminized tasks of caregiving into narratives that fit their mold of what constitutes “helpin’ out,” it is that the donut shop isn’t a setting where these men feel comfortable talking of familial emotional strain. They could, but the don’t. The donut shop is in this sense a haven of escape from the burdens of caregiving. And while each other’s burdens associated with their caregiving duties are known to others, the donut shop is a setting for these men to work to see themselves as “good men” whether or not they have been or are currently primary caregivers. The donut shop provides a setting for the sharing of narratives of independence – it provides a setting where the morning regulars can build up and maintain identities of individualism and independence separate from their familial roles, be they caregiving roles or not. And so “good men” aren’t above providing care for family members, and caregiving doesn’t compromise “good manhood.” The *non*-sharing of caregiving narratives within the donut shop as a space, coupled with the unspoken knowledge the morning regulars share about each other’s caregiving roles and associated strains, serves to make the space an escapist haven – a so-called “man-cave” of sorts – a haven where *family* men can become “good men” aside from their families.

Chapter 7: The Garage Sale

Frank had prepared for the garage sale for at least six months – sorting, cleaning, and looking through boxes of old relics, excess consumer goods, tools, and the usual suburban garage sale garb.

“Thirty-five years of junk to go through,” he’d tell me. Apparently, Frank and Dorothy last had a garage sale sometime in the 1970’s. Frank had cleaned out the garage over the winter and had moved a few pickup loads of pictures, knick-knacks, books, furniture, and the like to a storage unit across town. Bonnie had helped with the project on several occasions, helping to go through things and helping organize them. Bonnie is, in Frank’s words, “an *expert* at garage sales ... knows what people will buy and won’t buy ... knows how much to price everything ... knows how to do the ad [in the newspaper] ... she knows it all – the works!”

And I was recruited to help. My job, delegated by Frank, was to be in the driveway and ready to go at six in the morning to move things out from the garage onto the driveway. And that’s exactly what it did. I moved tools – a table saw, a grinder, and an assortment of hand tools including a torque wrench. Weathered basketballs and baseballs. A dresser. Holiday knick-knacks. Picture frames. A couple of boxes of books. A box of long-play vinyl records.

In one of the boxes of for-sale books, I noticed Robert’s book – his memoir of his time as a prisoner of war in the Philippines during World War II. My immediate reaction was that the book must have been accidentally placed in the for-sale box. I

thought that certainly Frank wouldn't want to part with Robert's book. In the bustle of the garage sale readying, reacting more than thinking, I grabbed the book and scurried off to quickly put it inside Frank and Dorothy's home. If it was supposed to be for sale, I reasoned while walking back through the hallway towards the front door, then I'd be the one to buy it. I briefly imagined Robert stopping by and seeing his book for sale and that wasn't a situation I wanted to see unfold. Later, a different one would....

Many others with recruited to help on the day of the garage sale too – along with Frank, Bonnie-the-garage-sale-expert, and myself, family friends Donna and Connie, and two of Frank and Dorothy's sons, Dan and Eric were also there to help. Frank's assembled garage sale crew would outnumber the total amount of "customers" in the driveway, more or less, at any given point throughout the day. This was particularly the case after Orville from the donut shop and his wife Kathleen showed up. They weren't formally invited as helpers, but knew about the sale and stopped by. Orville stayed while Kathleen drove off to a few other garage sales whose advertisements "looked good." Orville must have been hanging around for a couple of hours, drinking coffee and eating donuts – at one point proclaiming the garage sale to be a hit: "Ha! It's Frank's social event of the year!"

As we were getting started, there was a bit of confusion as to who was supposed to be the cashier. Bonnie hand on an apron and a casino-style visor – and looked ready to wheel and deal. Connie had quietly taken up at the small folding card table where the money box sat. The two of them, in an almost frenzied but

forcibly polite way negotiated their roles, “Well, you can do it [be the cashier], Connie, I don’t mind,” said Bonnie while scurrying about straightening up knick-knacks on another table.

“Are you sure? You can do it if you want, Bonnie.”

“No, no, no. That’s fine,” replied Bonnie, perhaps feeling her garage sale expertise compromised, “you can do it.”

“Well you can if you want, I just saw the empty spot here and”

“No, you can do it, I don’t mind,” replied Bonnie again seemingly a bit frustrated.

“Well you let me know if you want to do it and I’ll just do it until then,” answered Connie a bit defensively.

“Well there’s already people here and we’re not totally put together just yet ... I’ve still got to move those books and get the towels folded and ...” and so went on Bonnie with a short list of tasks that she asserted still needed to be finished.

And there were people waiting – the so-called early birds. A White man with long blonde hair and a scraggly beard, looking haggard and aged somewhere between the forties and fifties waited politely on the sidewalk, puffing his way through a few GPC brand cigarettes. None of us had acknowledged the man as we were setting things up. He engaged us first.

“[Is it] okay if I wait right here until you’re ready?”

“Yeah, sure, that’s fine,” I said.

He was fidgety, seemed anxious, and had chosen (presumably from the newspaper advertisement, to arrive at the garage sale a good half-hour before the advertised start time. Something in the ad had perhaps piqued his interest.

And by this time about six of us were helping – Bonnie moving books from the driveway concrete onto the top of a table and generally organizing what went where. Connie was at the money box playing cashier, Dorothy was inside making coffee in the percolator, Dan and Eric trying to make sure Dorothy was okay with all the clamor and scurrying about, and myself – mostly watching all the action while moving a few more tables onto the driveway. Frank, in his usual fashion, was mostly orchestrating.

And a Latino couple had arrived by this time as well. Their weathered minivan clanked and puffed dark exhaust. They appeared to be aged in the fifties. We still weren't quite ready to be open for business. The Latino man made a b-line for the tools table and she to the holiday and clothes tables. The haggard man who had been waiting had also somehow sneaked his way into sifting through things before we were ready. Bonnie appeared stressed. All the helpers, myself included, seemed a bit stressed. Apparently, we'd opened for business.

The haggard White man bustled through Dorothy's old jewelry – dumping out boxes and separating pieces so as to get a closer look. He even had a small jewelers loop. After he'd picked out about fifteen pieces, mostly earrings and bracelets, and a broach, he took them up to the card table where Connie was sitting. She looked nervous and a bit taken aback. He was sprawled across the table and

Connie shifted her chair further away from the table so as to create some more personal space. I walked over to the table in hopes of soothing any discomfort. The man again whipped out his jewelers loop and again inspected the pieces, spreading them out on the table. He worked quickly. It was clear to that that he knew what he was looking for. The pieces he'd chosen had again made the cut and he bought all of them – at 50 cents each. He was polite, but the helpers seemed skeptical, almost fearful of the man whom none of recognized as a resident of the neighborhood.

All the while the Latino man was scurrying through tools. He made a pile, a rather sizeable pile on the driveway. Wrenches, a spotlight, the table saw – a whole array of garage and toolbox goodies for the do-it-yourself handyperson. Eric was standing near the tools table, answering questions and pricing items that hadn't yet been stickered. Earlier, with a salesperson's confident aura, he'd told Frank, "Dad, I'll work the tools table, don't worry." And he was willing to wheel and deal. He seemed proud to say that he'd "priced the stuff to sell," and used small color coded stickers with prices printed on them to lower the prices on many of the items on the tool table before the garage sale had begun. If someone offered a lower price than the one on the sticker, Eric would either say, "ok," or would pick a number seemingly at random between the sticker price and the one asked for. All the while the Latino man's pile continued to grow.

Ray, an *early* morning regular at the donut shop, had walked over and what chatting up Frank near the percolator in the garage.

“You’d better watch him over there, Frank. He’s gonna put all that stuff in that pile there, you see, and he’s gonna say, ‘How much for the whole pile? Twenty bucks?’ And you can’t let him do that,” said Ray with sense of spectacle.

Frank appeared to think about Ray’s words for a moment and walked over to Eric, still “working” the tools table. Words were exchanged, and although I was out of earshot, I can say with some certainty that Frank said something to the effect of “don’t let him lowball us.” I watched Eric smile, chuckle, and pat his father on the back – nodding his head and furrowing his brow in a way suggesting he had things under control. When the Latino man appeared finished, Eric started picking up the items one by one and quietly mouthed the running total, “5 ... 8 ... 9.50 ... 14.50”

Eric went on to do his sales shtick, and picked a number between the actual total and what the man had offered. It was a big sale, around forty dollars, and the tool table had been nearly half-emptied. It seemed clear to Eric, who saw himself as having brokered the deal, that the sale was fair and beneficial for both parties.

Later in the morning, a thirty something light-skinned Black woman, who had presumably either just gotten off of the night shift or was getting ready to go to work, was wearing nursing garb and headed first the knick-knack table. After a few minutes, she’d ended up with a set of Dr. Seuss books that must have been thirty or perhaps forty years old – *Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham* to boot. She had a few other small items. Frank had chatted her up in a friendly way, but she seemed tired, perhaps even depressed. She said she lived down the street, had seen the sale, and decided to walk down.

Upon arriving to Connie at the cashier's table, she found that she didn't have enough money to pay for all the items. She was two or three dollars shy. She didn't try to haggle, and Connie didn't use Eric's bartering technique. For Connie, the woman was simply short.

"Well, that's ... ah ... four ... five ... seven dollars," counted Connie out loud.

The woman pulled out a few bills and didn't appear to say anything (though she might have – I was in the garage having a donut and talking with Orville and couldn't make out the entire conversation). A few seconds later, certainly enough time to have completed the Dr. Seuss transaction, I heard the woman.

"Do you think you could hold them for me?"

"Um, sure. Of course," said Connie.

"I'll have to go get some more money at home."

"Okay."

"Alright, well ..." the woman paused, "I'll be back in a little while."

And so Connie placed her pile on the edge of the planter near the front door, behind the cashier's table.

Dan inspected the pile a few minutes after the woman had left. If must have been a somewhat nostalgic feeling – a man, aged into his forties, watching the books he grew up on as a child being sold, or in his words "*given*" away.

"Those books have gotta be worth fifty bucks each! ... And we're just *giving* them away," he said in a partly nostalgic, partly what-are-we-doing way, but not with an air of contention or protest. Eric is a car salesman by trade, owning a small

used car dealership in a neighboring small town. I couldn't help but think it must have perturbed him, of only a little, to sell some of these things at prices he thought were well below their value – especially given the fact that he sells cars at prices higher than he acquires them for to make a living. In the end, it was a handful of children's books and some "junk" from the garage and Eric didn't seem to care in any deeply meaningful way. Ultimately, he was just there to help out his parents. They wanted to rid themselves of things and he was there to help them do just that.

And later I realized that at least an hour had passed since the light-skinned Black woman, who had said that she just lived down the street hadn't returned yet. As I was wondering why she hadn't come back, she appeared out of the corner of my eye and was approaching the garage sale again. She walked slowly up to Connie.

"I was wondering if you were going to come back," said Connie, smiling.

"Yeah," she tiredly replied, "I had to feed my kids."

"Oh," replied Connie, accepting the explanation.

"Here's seven [dollars]," said the woman.

"Okay, great, here are your things," replied Connie handing her the small pile.

For Frank, the garage sale had been a rousing success. He'd ended up with "darned near a hundred and fifty bucks!" by the afternoon and offered to take all the helpers out to lunch at a local favorite burger joint a few miles away. Frank went in to his house and returned a few minutes later, announcing that we were to "close up shop" and that he'd called the Salvation Army and they were coming by on Monday to pick up the unsold items. The lodestone of things had indeed been sold. There

were a few things on the “sports table” – a weathered basketball and a small bucket of golf balls, some small hand towels, a few clothes, fifteen or twenty books, a garden hose and most of the long-play vinyl records. Nearly everything else was gone.

*

Garage sales are temporary, mini bargain-economies where people rid themselves of excess consumer goods and negotiate with neighbors and garage salers at large. In some contexts, this bargain hunters and those hosting garage sales hope to arriving at sense of consensual fun – a we-feeling of fun whereby community is constructed⁷⁹. One gains a nuanced sense of how their neighbors see themselves when looking through the old consumer goods that sellers think of as still holding monetary value but holding no real use value for them. At Dorothy and Frank’s garage sale, I noticed one overwhelmingly salient pattern: nearly every transaction involved some kind of bargaining and people were enjoying themselves. Moreover, people of varied categories were privy to bargaining: old, young, and somewhere in between; men and women; Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. These interactions were generally full of smiles, and at times involved some chuckling or laughter. People were having a good time. Both garage salers and Dorothy and Frank’s team of helpers (after the stresses of “opening up for business” had subsided) seemed to genuinely enjoy the event.

Two “negative cases,” however, stand out: the haggard White man and the light-skinned Black woman. They didn’t try to bargain with Connie and she didn’t

⁷⁹ See Herrmann’s (2006) work on garage sales and community construction.

initiate any bargaining with them. While it is not possible to identify definitively why no bargaining occurred in these two transaction interactions, there is at least one commonality between cases: neither one of these garage salers were presenting an overtly neighborly self. They didn't bullshit about how nice the weather was or about how good the grapefruit tree looked. They didn't mention how great they thought the items they were buying were. To put it bluntly, they didn't seem like they came there for the fun. While the Black woman seemed tired, overworked and perhaps depressed, the White man seemed in a hurry. The Latino man at the tools table is perhaps also a borderline "negative case:" where he was indeed bargained with, he too was more serious about being at the event and seemed less interested in bullshitting and more interested in finding a bargain.

Perhaps those not willing or able to engage in neighborly bullshitting attend garage sales for different reasons than those who are willing to engage in that kind of social activity. On one hand, then, garage sales indeed provide settings where friends and neighbors can gather together and gain some bits of intimate knowledge of each other through friendly bargaining and especially in seeing first-hand which neighborhood residents deem what items as holding enough use-value for them to either sell or buy. Through the process of friendly bargaining, neighbors build up a we-feeling. On the other hand, when garage salers are not willing or able to engage in neighborly interactions that frame transactions as "something fun," they are not only perhaps less likely to be bargained with, but they are also perhaps engaging in

a process that either creates or reinforces a boundary marking a “they”-feeling over and above a “we”-feeling.

The Book

I felt thoughtful that I’d grabbed Frank’s copy of Robert’s book. I was certain that Robert would show up at the garage sale, if only for a few minutes. After all, he lives only five or six houses away. I just didn’t want him to see Frank selling his book. But Robert never showed up....

It wasn’t until the following day that I had the chance to tell Dorothy that I’d grabbed the book and put it in their home. I told her that I’d like to buy the book.

“Oh, Murphy,” she said, playfully faux-scolding me, “you don’t need to pay for that. You can have it ... you should have known that.”

I didn’t tell her that I already owned a copy – a copy I bought from an online book seller for \$20 a few years previous.

“Well, I thought Robert would stop by ... so I took the book inside ... ah ... you know, I just didn’t want him to see Frank selling it.”

“You know,” started Dorothy, “Robert’s always been mad at Frank because he never paid for that book.”

I was surprised. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” said Dorothy, getting candid, “... and, you know, Frank thought he was doing Robert a favor just by reading it. And Robert’s *still* mad Frank never paid.”

She went on to tell me how Robert had gone “practically door to door” in the neighborhood after he’d published the book in the early 1990s, giving the book to anyone who’d read it and asking for \$10 if they could afford it. Frank certainly could have afforded to pay. Frank and Robert have been friends and neighbors for nearly fifty years, “Oh yeah, we’re friends,” Frank once told me over lunch, “I wouldn’t say we’re *real* close friends, but yeah, we’re friends.”

While the non-payment, the hard feelings, and the near for-sale-ness of the book may show just a single wrinkle in their friendship, it is illuminating in the sense that while some of the morning regulars may have their own personal squabbles with one another, this baggage isn’t typically brought into the donut shop. Because the donut shop is a place where old men work to be seen by others as “good men,” they generally keep whatever personal disagreements they may have at bay.

Chapter 8: Robert's Story

The major finding in the sociological life-course literature on American veterans of World War II is that civilian life after the war is highly likely to be characterized by negative outcomes. These veterans are more prone to fall into lives of crime, have higher rates of divorce and marital problems, live disproportionately economically precarious lives, have more physical health problems, and have higher mortality rates than their non-veteran peers⁸⁰. Much of this remains the same for American veterans of the Vietnam and Korean wars and emerging research is finding much the same for American veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan⁸¹. And seeing such negative outcomes are particularly the case for those who've engaged in heavy combat – or in the words of the morning regulars at the donut shop, those like himself who've “seen the shit.”

Robert and his story, however, might be thought of as a sort of “negative case” in some, but not all respects – he doesn't totally fit the pattern. He has no criminal record. He was married to his first wife for fifty-six years until her death in 2009. He's financially secure. And though he's had enduring health issues since his time in the war, overall he seems to be remarkably good physical health for an

⁸⁰ See especially MacLean and Elder (2007) and Settersten and Patterson (2006) for a general overview. See also Elder et al (2009) on mortality, Dechter and Elder (2004) on employment, Laub and Sampson (2003) on crime, Sampson and Booth (1994) on marital problems, Priegerson et al (2002) on substance abuse and job loss, and Linderman (1997) on health problems.

⁸¹ See Schnurr et al (2009).

eighty-nine year-old man. He has, however, been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and has struggled since his discharge with the psychological effects of war.

In this final chapter, I tell Robert's story of being a prisoner of war in the Philippines and in Japan during World War II, how he's grappled with the experience since, and explain how becoming "Other" provided Robert with what he calls "the secret" he uses to manage and cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and generally avoiding the negative outcomes associated with veterans who saw heavy combat.

As such, this chapter is a case study inspired methodologically by Clifford Shaw's *The Jack Roller* – an analysis of delinquency where Shaw takes seriously the stories told by a young boy in Chicago. Earnest Burgess describes the boy's story in *The Jack Roller* as being at once typical and atypical of juvenile delinquency in Chicago⁸². Case studies can show how the "intimate relation of the person to his group and neighborhood makes each person not so much a replica of a pattern as an intrinsic part of an ongoing process. Hence the study of the experiences of one person at the same time reveals the life-activities of his group⁸³."

⁸² Burgess in Shaw (1930: 184-197).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

Robert published a memoir of his experiences during WWII⁸⁴. It is his story in his words – nearly three hundred and fifty pages of stories, a handful of pictures from the National Archives and from his own collection, and a sizeable appendix of scanned documents. While I draw on his book extensively in this chapter, I also include our own personal conversations about the experience. First, I tell Robert’s POW story, focusing primarily on the two years and three months Robert spent as an escaped POW – living at a refugee camp, with various FilAmerican guerilla groups, with rural Filipino farming families, and at times alone in the Zambales mountains. Second, I provide an analysis of how Robert came to experience being Othered within this context. And lastly, I explain how becoming Other helped

⁸⁴ Though I’ve masked the citation throughout, I realize including quotations from his book significantly compromises Robert’s anonymity. Where he’s given me permission to use his real name and openly cite his memoir, I’ve not at the time of writing secured permission to use real names from all members of the study. Copies of the included quotes from Robert’s book can be provided upon request. In his book, he persistently refers to members of the Japanese Army as “japs” on the grounds that “I chose to use the word ‘jap’ in a derogatory sense in my writing as other ex-POW authors have done. The enemy (Japanese) we fought, and later were subservient to as POW slave laborers, were barbarians, and, therefore, not worthy of formalized terminology. Their atrocities against both civilian populations and military forces in the countries they invaded in Asia and the South Pacific are well documented, e.g. ‘Japan’s war, the great Pacific conflict, 1853-1952’ by Edwin P. Hoyt. Also, the cruelty and callousness of the individual Japanese soldier towards prisoners of war, especially on the Death March, earned them the demeaning title, ‘jap.’ If I have offended any of my Japanese/American friends and colleagues, I apologize. I have no malice for the Japanese people generally. I have far more reason to resent the U.S. Government for its isolationist policy that prevailed when I entered military service in 1940” (reference masked). I’ve taken the liberty to change these instances to “Japanese” on the grounds that as a researcher committed to both raising consciousness and challenging racism, I refuse reproduce racist discourse in any manner that could potentially justify its use. Today, Robert no longer uses the derogatory term in conversation, opting instead for “the Japanese.”

Robert to manage and cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder throughout his life. I also explain how what Robert calls “the secret” relates to his understandings of “good manhood.”

Becoming a Prisoner of War

“I was so *bored*,” Robert will tell me of his soil conservation work in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Though he was grateful to have his New Deal job, Robert “figured that I’d take my turn” at military service in September of 1940. He says this time was “as good a time as any” to enlist and serve in the military as he saw this as an obligation that men, at that time, were expected by others to fulfill. World War II was already well underway, but Robert had faith that US isolationist inclinations would hold out until the war’s end. And with the blessings of his mother, he enlisted in the US Army.

Robert spent his first nine months in the military stationed in “Tent City,” a large military camp in Oklahoma void of any buildings. Again, he grew bored. He was given permission to switch branches and joined the US Army Air Corps (what is today the US Air Force) and had hopes of becoming an airplane mechanic. He’d fail the eye examination due to colorblindness, but would remain in the US Army Air Corps as an infantryman. And on November 21st, 1941, just 3 weeks before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Robert arrived to the island of Luzon in the Philippines with the rest of his Infantry Regiment. He’d remain a boots-on-the-ground private.

The Japanese would begin bombing the Philippines immediately after Pearl Harbor. And amidst bombing campaigns on Luzon from the Japanese for the next five months, Robert and his squadron slept essentially defenseless (they were armed only with rifles – not much of a defense when faced with bomber airplanes) in a schoolhouse, endured scant rations – on occasion eating iguanas and monkeys when they had nothing else to eat. Robert was assigned to “guard a bridge,” which he thought of as “busy work” and often slept outside in the kogan grass around the bridge. He was hospitalized with a fever by the end of March of 1940, while the bombing campaigns continued.

On April 9, 1941, Bataan – a large peninsular province in central Luzon – was surrendered to the Japanese. And three days later, Robert would begin his trip on what is now infamously known as the “Bataan Death March⁸⁵.” On the march, Robert was “bludgeoned” with a club by a Japanese soldier after (having not eaten for two days) he’d stepped off of the trail to fill his canteen. Bloodied, he learned that stepping off the trail was, to say the least, dangerous. He witnessed other beatings, and heard of killings (though he did not witness any on the march), that he asserts were wanton in fashion and watched Filipino and American soldiers die on the trail from disease and starvation. Robert grew increasingly convinced that he would not survive the march.

⁸⁵ Many survivors of the Bataan Death March, like Robert, have written memoirs. Some of the better known include: Lester I. Tenney’s *My Hitch in Hell: The Bataan Death March*, William E. Dyess’ *Bataan Death March: A Survivor’s Account*, and Manny Lawton’s *Some Survived: An Eyewitness Account of the Bataan Death March and the Men Who Lived Through It*.

A Filipino soldier on the march had shown Robert how to spot white tuber (a kind of turnip) along the trail. He was now more careful in stepping off of the trail, and had managed to collect a few tubers. He kept some, and traded some for dry rice and matches with other Americans on the march. On April 16th, after four days on the march, Robert and his closest American friend, Paul, made a potentially perilous move – they'd decided to try to escape:

As we marched along the road after leaving Orani, I told Paul that it was obvious that the Japanese were trying to kill as many of us as possible and that I would rather die in the mountains than on the march or in a prison camp. Paul felt similarly. Therefore, we started preparations for our escape from the marching line. I traded some of my tubers for some dry rice and several matches from fellow POWs marching nearby. We then carefully watched the nearest Japanese guard's position, planning our escape. Eventually, the guard dropped back along the line, and Paul and I ran into a field of sugar cane on the left side of the road. We quickly moved towards the back of the field and lay down in the cane stalks, about two hundred yards off the road. It was incredibly hot in the dense cane as there was no air movement and we soon were soaked with perspiration. We lay quietly, literally holding our breath at times, as we could hear Japanese guards searching the field for prisoners. Fortunately, we were not discovered, as I am certain that we would have been shot if they had found us. When it was almost dark, we left the field and made our way towards the mountains looming in the distance, northwest of us.

They'd escaped. Two days later, Robert and Paul encountered a young Filipino man and were taken to Camp Fassoth – a nearby refugee camp for escaped American and Filipino prisoners of war set up by an American-born man and his Filipino wife who were farmers in the area. Robert would experience his first bout of malaria within a few days – an ailment that would come and go for the next few years. He had dysentery and beriberi (an ailment caused by a deficiency of vitamin B1 in the diet affecting the nervous system and resulting in weight loss, fatigue, and various other

symptoms) shortly thereafter. Though Camp Fassoth by no means had adequate facilities and resources to relieve the symptoms or cure Robert's diseases, he was nonetheless quartered and felt lucky to have escaped. By late August – more than three months after he and Paul had escaped, the malaria attacks (involving for Robert mostly fever, chills, vomiting and, at times, convulsions) had finally ceased.

Residents at Camp Fassoth were not encouraged to simply stay there and hide out. It was intended to be an interim place of refuge for the recently escaped, the sick, and the severely wounded. No one was encouraged to stick around for too long. Robert had made arrangements with a Filipino guide to take him to meet Captain Callihan – an American guerilla commander for the area of Zambales province in which Camp Fassoth was located. Robert stayed with the guerillas and the Filipino family that harbored the organization for two weeks, but ultimately decided not to join:

The food and tranquility of life with the Filipino family in a rural setting was tempting, but I did not want to be a guerilla. I felt that, in time, guerilla activities would prove harmful to the Filipino families associated therewith, as the Japanese Military Forces would increasingly try to destroy all American and Filipino guerrillas. Those who persisted in guerilla activities were, in fact, later killed when captured by Japanese patrols. My decision not to join any guerilla organization proved to be the correct one ... I returned to Capt. Callihan's headquarters and informed him of my decision not to join his organization. He suggested that I return to Camp Fassoth for further consideration of my position. I declined his offer of a Filipino guide and left early the next morning. I was somewhat apprehensive about traveling alone, but felt that I would have no difficulty finding my way back to Camp Fassoth.

It took Robert all day to return to Camp Fassoth – leeches were a persistent problem on this particular route and had considerably slowed his progress. Immensely

surprised, he'd return to a nearly empty Camp Fassoth. It had been raided and burned by the Japanese and was currently being evacuated. Robert was apprehensive about staying again at Camp Fassoth now that it was emptying, but effectively had nowhere else he felt he could go:

The day passed uneventfully. Meanwhile, I rehearsed in my mind an escape plan that I had devised much earlier if and/or when the camp was raided by the Japanese. I was sleeping in the lower bunk next to the back floor of the main building, the same bunks Paul and I used when we first occupied the building. The door open adjacent to the kitchen lean-to and was only about 10 feet from the corner of the main building. There was cleared, relatively even ground from the corner of the building to the near bank of a dry, boulder-strewn wash, about six to eight feet wide. The far bank of the wash was in natural vegetation, and only a short distance to a steep incline leading up to the jungle-covered mountain slopes, immediately west of the camp. Once past the cleared area and wash, I would be protected from view and would be relatively safe from pursuing Japanese soldiers. I was confident that my escape plan would work, provided that I had some advance warning. Successful escape depended largely on traversing the cleared area and the dry wash without stumbling or spraining an ankle on the uneven ground and rocks.

On the second night after his return to the recently raided Camp Fassoth, Robert heard the voices of Japanese soldiers. And again, with hazy blur of fear and a heart-wrenching bursts of adrenalin, he escaped. His plan had worked. This time he'd lost his shoes in the process, but eventually found a stroke of luck in encountering a hut occupied by Belugas – indigenous, primarily nomadic peoples of the island of Luzon. Robert used the small bits of the Taglog language he'd learned at Camp Fassoth to tell the Beluga of the recent raid of Camp Fassoth in hopes they would let him stay. But the Belugas didn't offer to harbor Robert, and showed him to a trail that he took to a small Filipino nipa house. Upon reaching the house, his left leg was injured to

the point where he could no longer walk⁸⁶. The Filipinos put Robert on a carabao – a water buffalo – and he was taken to the home of a Filipino guerilla leader in the nearest barrio, Bujaoen.

But Robert still did not want to be a guerilla and decided to take his chances again in being transient – moving from here to there to here to there. The guerilla leader in Bujaoen, perhaps not terribly disappointed at Robert's decline to join given his extremely poor health, took Robert to live with a small group of high-ranking American officers. After two and a half months living with the officers, Robert was sent to live with a Filipino family. Amazingly, Paul – the friend he'd escaped from the march with – was living with the same family. They'd live there for about four months, until the end of April of 1943. At this point, the Filipino family that were quartering Robert and Paul became fearful for their own lives due to their harboring of escaped American POWs, and provided Robert and Paul with food and sent them off to live in the Zambales foothills after hearing that the Japanese were soon coming to area homes to look for escaped POWs and hearing that they would kill those harboring them. Four weeks later, Robert and Paul returned to the home of the family that had hosted them a month before in hopes that the Japanese had come and gone. The family now feared so strongly for their own lives, that they were no longer willing to quarter Robert and Paul and had little more food to provide to them. And for the next ten weeks, Robert and Paul would live with a different

⁸⁶ Robert attributes this to beriberi, which can have adverse effects on the muscular and cardiovascular systems. To this day, Robert has trouble with this leg due to neurological damage suffered during his time as a POW.

Filipino family, hide out with a small band of Belugas, stay with heavily armed Filipino guerrillas, and visit barrios in the area looking for places to stay. Eventually, Robert was invited to stay a single night with a Filipino family and he woke up three days later with malaria. He was asked to leave, and he did. Upon arrival to the next barrio, he was strongly advised by the Filipinos there to turn himself in to the Japanese. No one was willing or able to harbor Robert any longer. He had nowhere to go.

Robert turned himself in to the Japanese on July 13, 1943 – two years and three months after he'd escaped from the march. But even when captured, he'd again be moved from here to there, not staying in any one place for very long. He was sent to Bilbid Prison Hospital and stayed for about six months, having two appendicitis operations and doing laundry for American officers in hopes for extra pay. After he was deemed well enough to work, Robert was sent to Cabanatuan Prison Camp and stayed there for about four months before he was sent to Manila by boxcar. In early July of 1944, he boarded the Prison Ship *Mati Mati Maru* and docked at Moji, Kyushu, Japan more than two months later. At Fanatsu Prison Camp, Robert would work mostly in a smelter doing sledgehammer work, but also worked in a cauldron and with coke-fire furnaces.

Robert's memoir is only sparsely peppered with stories of brute force and aggression – central tenants of hegemonic masculinity. But such behavior is historically omnipresent in situations where military personnel are imprisoned during wartime. It was at Fanatsu Prison Camp that Robert got himself involved in

two physical altercations with other American POWs – altercations certainly more representative of hegemonic masculinity than “good manhood:”

Several of us were sitting in the lower sleeping bay on the second floor. I was sitting with my back to the wall talking with others about past experiences and future plans. Such talks commonly were referred to as “bull sessions,” and helped us pass the time between work shifts. I left my place to go to the benjo [restroom]. When I returned, a marine POW had taken my place. I asked him politely to move. He declined to do so and arrogantly told me to “go to hell.” His reply and general demeanor upset me to such an extent that I reacted spontaneously and physically removed him from my place in the bay, pummeling him about the head while doing so. I never said a word. Though we were about the same size, my immediate, furious reaction overwhelmed him. He never challenged me again.

I did not believe that fighting was necessary while growing up, and still don't. Peaceful solutions to real or imaginary wrongs always are preferable. Nevertheless, at an early age, I learned that others didn't necessarily feel similarly. “Bullies” generally pick fights only with those smaller or weaker than themselves. They have always made life miserable for those reticent to fight during boyhood. Others feel that they can “whip” a particular individual, and thus challenge them to a fight. While growing up in a rural area, and going to a rural, one-room school house during the lower grades, I learned to more than “hold my own” in wrestling matches. In fact, wrestling was an accepted norm among country boys. When necessary, I also could exchange blows in a fist fight, giving as much or more punishment than I received. Still, I had not had such a fight since I was about 10 years old.

In the spring of 1945, I had to again fight an American POW. He had a Spanish surname and was from Los Angeles, California. He was about my size and age, and apparently thought that he was a “tough hombre.” Today, he would be referred to as a “macho” Mexican-American. Several of us on the day shift had been assigned to remove accumulated coke cinders from the immediate area of the narrow-gauge rail tracks behind the main shoko rusan building. The “spent” coke that had fired the furnaces was piled up there, awaiting removal to a permanent disposal site. We were working as a team, using rakes and shovels. For some unknown reason, the POW with the Spanish surname started calling me “cunt,” using it in a derogatory manner. This word is one of the several slang terms for the female vagina. I asked him politely to stop calling me cunt. He continued to do so, saying “and what are you doing to do about it, cunt?” I immediately hit him in the face as hard as I could, and continued to do so as rapidly as I could move my arms. He soon recovered from his surprise and returned by blows in kind. We fought thus “toe to toe,” falling and regaining out feet to continue until both of us were

exhausted. Neither of us could knock the other down as we both were essentially only “skin and bones.” I weighed only 128 lbs. then [Robert is 6’4”], and he was only slightly heavier.

As usual during the fight, I felt no pain. Later I learned that my lip had been cut and that I was scraped and bruised about the head. He had similar injuries. Once again, I had demonstrated that I would fight if it became necessary to do so. At least my adversary did not call me “names” again. Fortunately, the Japanese did not see us fighting or we summarily would have been punished severely.

Another story, however, is more emblematic of “good manhood” and paints a picture of how Robert found himself, again, inventing “constructive things to do:”

When it started getting cold in the late fall, I decided to make a warm vest to wear under my overcoat. I had located several pieces of insulating material in one of the buildings at work. The grayish-brown material was compressed into sheets about one-half inch thick. Full sheets (4x8) were used for insulating walls. The principal problems with using the insulating material was that it was too brittle to bend sufficiently for my purpose. Thus, I decided to use smaller sections for the vest.

On several occasions, I smuggled small sections of the insulating material into the prison compound, hiding it against my body under my undershirt. Fortunately, I was not caught doing so as I would have been harshly punished by the Japanese if we had had a “shake down.” I hid the pieces of material under my sleeping mat near the wall where I stored my meager belongings. I traded cigarettes for needle and thread, and borrowed a pair of small, blunt-ended scissors from one of the other POW’s who had managed to keep them hidden from the Japanese.

Between work shifts, I sat on my mat in the top sleeping bay, and laboriously cut the material into three panels, one back panel and two side/front panels. I used a worn-out cotton undershirt as a pattern. I partially formed the panels to fit the contour of my upper torso by gradually molding each panel from the center outward to the edge that would form the side seams under the arm holes. I then cut the front of the undershirt up the middle, and partially stitched [sic] it to the formed panels, creating an inside lining for the vest. Next, I cut off the collar and arms of an old wool army shirt, and used it as an outer lining. The cotton and wool materials then were stitched [sic] to the panels in several places to prevent the panels from slipping out of position. Next, I pulled the edges of the two materials together and sewed them securely, using a whip stitch. Finally, I stitched [sic] the two linings together between the panels, forming shoulder and side seams. The vest buttoned in front, using the button panels of the wool shirt.

I had tailored a collarless, sleeveless vest that fit well and that was exceedingly warm when worn outside of my shirt.

I disposed of the excess insulating material by dropping the remnants in the benjo pit. Though it took several days for me to finish the vest, I only wore it a few times. I soon learned that the vest was too warm to wear under my overcoat. I finally traded it to one of the other American POW's we called "Pop." He was about 45 years old, nearly twice my age, and the oldest enlisted man in our group. Pop was very happy with the vest, and often wore only the vest when the rest of us wore our overcoats. The Japanese never suspected that the vest was insulated with insulating material surreptitiously taken from the smelter. I had done a good job of tailoring.

And thus Robert had invented a project to perhaps not only help to occupy his mind, but to also keep him busy in a manner he thought of as both productive and forward-thinking. He saw himself at getting a lucky break, and was reassigned from working in the hot smelters to working outside on garden detail. But the best news would eventually arrive on August 17th, 1945 – Robert and the rest of the Filipino and American POW's were notified that the war was over:

In our isolated area, we knew nothing about the course of the war prior to being informed by the Japanese on Aug. 17 that the war was over. The POW's who were at work in the smelter were returned to the prison compound without being told why. I was still on garden detail, and we were just preparing to leave the compound when we were dismissed and told to return to our barracks. We finally were told the good news around noon. Everyone sat quietly talking. For several hours, no one outwardly expressed joy. Like me, most probably reflected on what we had heard, but could not fully comprehend what it meant. I had mixed feelings. I felt a sense of relief, but also wariness as we still were in Fanatsu Prison Camp, and the Japanese were still in charge.

Robert and the rest of the POW's were transported to Yokohama by railroad car and arrived on September 7th, 1945 to the US hospital ship *Rescue*. He was again sick with a fever and "still was somewhat apprehensive that I would 'wake up to find that it was only a dream.'" Again being transported after staying on the hospital

ship for only two days, this time to Okinawa and then back to Luzon, Robert longed to be home. While waiting in Manila to be shipped home, Robert was questioned individually (as were the rest of the POW's) by US military intelligence personnel as to the details of their imprisonment:

The sergeant, who was taking my deposition, looked at me and asked, "Are you an officer or a first three grader (staff, technical, or master sergeant)"? I said, "no." He then said that he could not accept the information [concerning the locations of burials of three American soldiers who'd died in Camp Fassoth] from me. Thereafter, I only answered yes or not to his questions.

Obviously, the military basically had not changed in the three and one-half years that I had been "out of touch with the world." The word of an enlisted man in the lower ranks still was considered untrustworthy. Clothing and weaponry had been improved somewhat, but military rank and mentality clearly was as antiquated and obtuse as ever. I learned early as an infantryman in 1940 that there was no democracy in the army. Nothing really had changed five years later. I looked forward more than ever to being discharged as soon as possible.

Robert boarded a US military transport ship and left Manila on September 20th and arrived in Seattle on October 9th. He was home.

After being granted three weeks of rest and relaxation, which he spent visiting family and friends in California and Oklahoma, Robert's wishes were granted and he was discharged. And in what I've come to learn to be classic Robert fashion, he took a job with a California Fire Department just two days later. Again, he found the work "too boring," and decided to take advantage of the GI Bill and attend college. While waiting for his "papers to go through," Robert worked in a VA hospital in Missouri as a ward orderly cleaning bedpans and giving backrubs. He'd later earn an undergraduate degree, and thought seriously of attending graduate

school, but was not totally sure of what to do next. In an interaction Robert to this day likes to retell, he asked his advisor at school what he ought to do: "I told my advisor that I wanted to go to graduate school and continue my studies. And he told me I should go to _____ because it was the best. So that's where I applied. I was accepted and that's where I went." For Robert, it was just that simple. He was awarded a PhD in early 1950s.

Becoming Other

As a young White farm-boy growing up in east-central Oklahoma during the Great Depression, Robert's family was "terribly poor – just like everyone else was." At times when his family didn't have enough food, he hunted possum and skunk – which he and his family were forced to eat. Through our conversations, it seems that his family would undoubtedly have looked very poor in comparison to other White families on a national scale. But as Robert says, "we didn't know any difference [between poor and well-to-do], Murph. In the country [rural Oklahoma], ah, nobody had anything...." So even if Robert was oppressed along class lines, it went unnoticed and as far as he is concerned and seemed of little or no consequence at the time. What Robert seems not to see, however, is the possibility that the land his family farmed was perhaps of superior quality for growing food and raising animals when compared to lands of nearby Native American reservations and lands farmed by Blacks – most of whom were only one generation away from slavery.

Well they [Black farmers in the area] *really* didn't have anything, Murph. My dad would, ah ... he had me take over the carcasses, ah, the possum carcasses to a Black family about a mile away after we were done with 'em ... they could use it for soup, you see ... and the grease for potatoes ... but, ah, he'd make me go at night ... he couldn't do it so he sent me to do it ... and ah, you see, he couldn't have anyone [White] we knew see *him* doin' that [giving "leftovers" to Blacks] ... and he didn't want anyone [White] to see me either ... so he sent me over at night ... after it was dark.

However magnanimous (or conversely offensive) one might deem such an act, it's clear that Robert and his family were privileged enough so as to have useable "excess" food *during the Great Depression*. And perhaps more telling is Robert's use of "anyone." Would another Black family "count" as "anyone?"

And there were other advantages. Robert attended school in a one-room rural schoolhouse with the rest of the Whites in the area. Blacks were not allowed in these schools and neither were Native Americans (which included many survivors of the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations that had been unjustly displaced and forcibly relocated to Oklahoma in the name of American imperialism). On the basis of skin color alone, Robert was granted the privilege of a primary and secondary education.

I could go on. But the point is clear: before his time in the military, Robert's situation could be reasonably characterized as being granted certain privileges vis a vis people of different races in the immediate area – people of color that were under similar economic restraint but suffered from extreme social structural and psychological constraints created historically by White domination. Whether or not Robert and his family were anti-racist or racist is beside the point. These are simply

two empirical manifestations [excess usable food and access to education] that White privilege provided for Robert in his youth.

One needn't press Robert today for him to express tenderheartedness toward people in any racial category who are in tough situations. And where it is likely that he would account for his own unearned privilege by appropriating the abstraction of unearned privilege into one of meritocratic achievement, he is a genuinely compassionate and humane person. And where becoming Other while being a POW unfortunately did not quell his own bouts of Othering (as in whether or not Blacks "count" as "anyone") in the present day, it did teach Robert about himself, his how agency still exists in situations of extreme constraint, and what it means to be a "good man."

*

Robert was an enlisted man of low rank – a private. The lowest of the low. At countless times in his memoir he (perhaps paradoxically) states the phrase "...once again proving that rank has its privileges." In the memoir, he'll tell briefly of various instances of unequal food distribution, unequal transport, unequal access to what little health services were available, and unequal living quarters and work assignments in military prisons. And none of this rubbed him the right way. He felt himself perpetually on the low end of the stick.

But the story is more complex in terms of race and ethnicity. In quantitative terms, White Americans were outnumbered by people of color on the island of Luzon and certainly in Japan during his time as a POW. There were far more

Filipino soldiers on the death march, for example – about 66,000 Filipinos as compared to about 12,000 Americans. But this is not the most important way of thinking about how Robert became Other as a POW. More importantly, he was thrown into a culture he knew virtually nothing about and became dependent upon its members for his own survival. Though Robert was able to pick up some phrases in Taglog, for example, and claims that he could communicate the essentials to Filipinos and Belugas in their “foreign” languages, he had difficulties in coming to understand the norms, attitudes, and values built up within the culture he was thrown into. Even the “how’s,” “when’s,” and “where’s” of essential everyday conduct had to be learned. And he struggled with this. For example, his memoir includes incessantly repeated referrals to difficulties in understanding how, when, and where Filipinos deemed defecation appropriate.

In his memoir, Robert leaves few if any signals that he might have seen his own masculinity in limbo. He’ll tell about how he physically fought when he thought it was necessary. He’ll tell about endurance, survival, and the toughness required. But there are a few reasons why he perhaps felt his own (straight) masculinity was in question:

Paul and I always helped each other at Camp Fassoth. Both of us had malaria and we did what we could to alleviate the other’s suffering. During the rainy season in the tropics, it is chilly at night. We each had only one blanket to sleep on or to cover ourselves. When one of us was shivering, either with cold or malaria, we doubled up to keep warm. We slept together, fully clothed, using one blanket to lay on and one for cover. I never thought anything about this practice. Paul, however, says that Mrs. Fassoth occasionally referred to us as Mr. and Mrs. Nothing was further from the truth. In fact, until I joined the Army, I was not aware that there was such a

thing as homosexuality, even then, only in the form of crude, filthy jokes common to army life

One day, as we were standing in the “chow” line, I heard Paul’s mess kit strike the ground behind me. I turned and saw Paul blankly staring into space. He never answered me, so I took his arm and led him to his bunk. I brought his food to him and he did eat a little of it without speaking. Paul gradually became well. We were not sure what his problem was, but suspected it was yellow jaundice [a yellowing of the eyes and/or skin perhaps caused by Paul’s malaria]. Mrs. Fassoth was very helpful in caring for Paul during his illness. In addition to malaria, Paul had chronic asthma. At times his breathing was labored, a condition intensified by his smoking cigarettes when they were available. Except for malaria, I was healthy during my stay in Camp Fassoth.

Mr. and Mrs. ... whether or not Robert and Paul had sexual relations or even sensed physical attraction toward each other is one thing – that they were defined by Mrs. Fassoth, a fixture and omnipresent sort of caregiving sage at Camp Fassoth, as a couple is another. This passage is all that Robert provides in his memoir for the rest of us. We don’t know if other people at Camp Fassoth felt the same way or if Mrs. Fassoth referred to the two of them to other POW’s in this manner either.

Robert became Other during his time as a POW. He was unfamiliar with accepted codes of conduct and couldn’t meaningfully communicate linguistically with those that did not speak his own language. He was defined, by at least one person (and perhaps more) as gay, and was labeled as such in the terribly straight-dominated context of American military life in the 1940’s. He was an enlisted man of the lowest rank. Where some Filipinos were willing harbor him for relatively short periods of time, overall he had nowhere to go. He felt himself an unwanted burden to others. He felt himself powerless. He had become Other.

On “doing something constructive” and “good manhood”

In person, Robert describes his time as a POW as a “situation over which I had no control.” And certainly it was a period characterized by extreme constraint: he was mentally anguished and extremely physically limited due to disease and malnutrition; when escaped, he was “completely dependent upon the goodwill of the Filipino people” for refuge; when he was captured, he was to comply with the wishes of Japanese soldiers or risk paying a potentially perilous price; as an enlisted man of low rank, he was underprivileged vis a vis higher ranking men; he barely knew the terrain and the vegetation, let alone the languages being spoken. In this sense, Robert was imprisoned in more ways than one: psychologically, socially, and geographically to name only a few. He was at dependent upon others, some of whom he felt controlled his situation, and hence his fate. He was powerless.

As an escapee, Robert was perpetually in need of places to find refuge. While he was able to find some such places, he was never welcome to stay for very long. And so he was transient. On one hand, he was welcomed by rural Filipino families because as an American soldier, Robert was an ally – and moreover, many families were under the impression that they would receive monetary compensation for harboring escaped POW’s should the Allied Forces win the war (this would largely turn out to be untrue). On the other hand, rural farming families known by the Japanese to be harboring Filipino or American soldiers were killed on the spot. He was encouraged at several points to join various FilAmerican guerilla organizations, but steadfastly believed that being armed only increased his own chances of being

killed, and more importantly saw all guerilla organizations as surviving at the expense of Filipinos:

When I was living over there on the river bank there with those Vasayan soldiers and [another other US soldier], they ... ah ... they had raided the Nippa bai hai where Paul and I and [another US soldier] were hiding out ... They were living like bandits, you see. They ... they went out at night. And they were noted for their fighting ability ... they were seemingly not afraid of anything and my gosh they had rifles, .45 caliber pistols ... all kinds of ammunition. And they even had that B.A.R. – a Browning automatic rifle ... which of course shot the same type of shell that the rifles used. But ah, when you pull the trigger on that thing, they go ‘pa pa pa pa pa pa pa pa’ – just like a machine gun ... And when we went to the barrio lieutenant’s house, their living quarters were up on the second floor, so we’d climb a ladder and go up the porthole and there’s all those Vasayan soldiers ... and *armed* ... and they’d actually tell the Barrio lieutenant and the other men how many sacks of rice they needed, sugar, fruit and so forth, you know? And they said they wanted it delivered to such and such a place at such and such a time. They were actually living at the expense of the people in those barrios, you see ... it’s very simple Murph, if you carried a gun, you know, then chances were you’d use a gun and you’d only end up getting Filipinos hurt. But we were *dependent upon the goodwill of the Filipino people to get food*. And ah, and number of times that I’ve been readin’ about these American guerillas in Northern Luzon ... and they would actually ambush and patrol these Japanese soldiers and kill as many of them as they could and everything. Well the reason it was at the expense of the Filipinos is that the Japanese would retaliate and burn all the houses and kill all the young men – sometimes they’d kill all the men, women, and children in, ah, those small barrios. In no way could I become a guerilla.

After he’d been initially captured and after he’d turned himself back in to the Japanese, he witnessed executions, engaged in forced labor, and was an all respects a prisoner. Captured or escaped, it was an extremely constrained situation either way. But I kept pressing Robert to elaborate on some of the choices he *was* able to make, and I brought up the fact that he’d taken a job only two days after being discharged:

I just kept moving forward. If I'd hadn't," Robert paused for a second and gave his memoir (which had been sitting on the coffee table next to his recliner when I'd arrived that day) a few gentle pats with his hand, "I would have gone crazy ... you see even today ... Everyday day at three o'clock, I go out back or front and have a cup of coffee or tea and something to eat. There's always work to be done in that backyard. There's *always* something to do.

"That's right," I agreed. And Robert sat forward.

"Something constructive..." he said pointing and shaking his finger at me, beginning to tear up, "*that's the secret*, you see. Remember that."

And for a week, I couldn't get that very moment we'd shared out of my head. I thought I had a good sense of what he meant, but I still wanted to get him to elaborate. I kept pressing him on other occasions when just the two of us were hanging out:

"Well if you want to have something, Murph ... you always have something constructive to do."

"Yeah," I replied, "and what about...."

"Plan ahead, in other words," interrupted Robert. And Margaret wandered into the living room at that very moment, and I realized he wouldn't continue.

Because I was not fully satisfied with my own understanding of what "doing something constructive" meant, and despite Robert's little elaboration about planning ahead, I continued to bring up the issue of choice-in-contexts-of-constraint with Robert over subsequent visits to his home, usually during the three o'clock snack time. And on one afternoon he again began talking of his time as a POW without my prompting. And then I prompted for more:

“So you can have a plan of escape ... you can choose not carry a gun and not join the guerillas ... what else?”

Well one of the things you could naturally do was be a decent human being of course. And ah, living as morally straight as you possibly could. And living with the Filipinos for example ... I was, ah, twenty-one, twenty-two years of age ... and ah those young Filipino girls were ... well many of them were quite beautiful – especially the mestizos. And ah, so ah, the best idea was to *not* get involved with those young ladies. You see we were born and raised in the country [rural America] and we were taught to respect the female ... simply because they were a female. And ah basically ... I always think of ah the female as the basis of the world. Because a civilization is based on ah moral behavior and [inaudible] things could easily go to pieces of course. But, ah, living with the Filipinos you were totally dependent upon the goodwill of those people. They were hiding you and they were also ... they were feeding us, you see, for a long time. And Paul and I lived with those people for a long time ... and, ah, so we were simply told to, to be quiet and to lay low ... to stay outta sight and so that’s what we tried to do.

On another day, I pressed yet again, in hopes of getting to the bottom of a more general understanding of what “doing something constructive” entailed:

Well, Murph ... everything I did when I was in prison camp or when I was out in the mountains and so forth, I made ... ah, I always had a *plan* ... of escape, for example. [That’s] what we had to do to stay alive ... to keep from being recaptured and so forth. And when I was in Cabantuan Prison Camp, I was on garden detail and ah, my dad had always taught us that whatever the work was, to do a good job of it ... to work hard and do a good job so you wouldn’t be afraid to up to the cash window and receive your pay ... and that’s what we were taught ... and ah ... if you didn’t [work hard and do a good job] ... well ... they didn’t allow us to get down on our hands and knees, you see, to pull the weeds out of the vegetable crops – we had to bend over and after a while bending over like that ... all that ... its pretty tough on your back ... So all of those things ... whatever we were doing we were taught to work hard and do a good job of it regardless of the type of work you were doing. Same thing when I was in the [academic] department over here [at the university], of course. I kept enough projects going that I was busy so I could publish papers and so forth of all my research ... and when I retired I was workin’ on my book.

I interjected, “Yeah, but how did it *feel*, Robert ... making those plans, doing, ah that work, writing the book?”

“Well,” he replied, “that was very therapeutic, of course. And I was busy. I left the house here and I went to work so I was there by eight o’clock and I worked ... putting everything together ... writing everything out in longhand... It was good.”

“Doing something constructive” is Robert’s more personal version of “keepin’ busy.” For Robert, this means to be engaged in social activities that he defines as morally “right” while keeping future plans of action in mind. As a POW, Robert in many ways became an ad-hoc-sociologist-at-large: he was thrown into an unfamiliar social world he did not choose and could do little to control. He learned about various cultures – of rural Filipino farmers, of the Japanese Army, of bands of mostly nomadic indigenous islanders. Social forces became more noticeable. And perhaps most importantly, Robert couldn’t help but notice patterns: POW’s who carried firearms seemed to get people killed – sometimes even themselves, POW’s who stayed in one place for “too long” seemed to get killed more often, and American POW’s who “had [sexual] relations” with Filipino women seemed to be killed more often. And so Robert refused to carry a gun. He stayed away from Filipino women, and he tried to stay mobile. He always had a plan of escape. When captive, and though the labor was forced, he’d do his best to do “good work.”

And however much “keepin’ busy” might (especially to a Freudian) seem to only ignore and hence repress Roberts tremendously troubling story deep into the subconscious, he steadfastly asserts that “doing something constructive,” that

“keepin’ busy,” has kept him from “going crazy.” For Robert, it has been *the* secret to managing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in a way that would enable him to reenter civilian life and see himself as a “good man.”

Methodological Appendix

This dissertation came into being from an assignment in a qualitative methods seminar during my first year of graduate school: go to some public place, hang out, and write-up what was “going on.” I went the neighborhood donut shop that I’d only once previously visited, and wasn’t looking for any one or any thing in particular – I just figured the donut shop would be a good spot to watch people. And it was. In the very first visits, I typically brought along some reading in hopes of making my direct observations more clandestine. I immediately noticed that many old neighborhood White men frequented the donut shop. And it was clear that some of these men were fixtures of this public setting: they knew each other, the employees knew them, and they knew the employees; they didn’t have to verbally place orders at the counter – their individualized, “usual” orders were waiting for them at the counter by the time they made it from the front door to the counter to pay; they sometimes chatted up strangers; they received free refills. It was their place.

Being White and “getting in”

It took little effort to notice that the morning regulars sitting in the donut shop were overwhelmingly White. Even in the very first visits, I noticed that while many people of color came to the donut shop, none of them seemed to sit down. They generally took their orders for carryout.

On my third visit to the donut shop, I'd exchange words with some of the morning regulars. I had an open book and a notebook on the table I was sitting at – two tables away from their table. On his way out, a jolly-but-serious-looking White man (who I'd later learn was Lester), considerably younger than the rest of the morning regulars, tapped his hand on table I was sitting at, looked sincere, and said, "take care, guy" as he headed for the door.

And another White man who was also sitting at their table, donned in a baby-blue fisherman's hat, glasses and a light jacket (who I'd later learn was Charles) exited the donut shop a few minutes later. Grinning genuinely, he stopped by the table I was sitting at:

"Do you get any thinking done in here?" he asked. And before I could answer, his grin grew larger and seemed even more genuine, "thinking is the best way to get ahead, you know."

"Well, it hasn't been for me," I kidded in response. He, chuckled, smiled back and looked nostalgically proud. And a few minutes after Charles had left, another White man (who I'd later learn was Orville) also stopped by to chat on his way out:

"Do you actually get anything done in here?" he asked, smiling.

"Not a damn thing," I replied smiling, again kidding. We chuckled together and he patted me on the shoulder in a way where his hand lingered for a second, perhaps to prolong that little bit of physical contact. And not a second later, just after Orville had removed his hand from my shoulder, but before he had exited,

Steve, the sixty-something Chinese-Thai owner of the donut shop, bounced out from behind the counter with an envelope in his hand:

“I gotta mail this [envelope]” Steve said to me, “... you watch [the donut shop].” And with that, Steve bustled across the large parking lot to the mailbox. In so doing, particularly in the presence of Orville and one other morning regular still sitting at their table, Steve had vouched⁸⁷ for me by symbolically expressing his own positive assessment of my trustworthiness. From that day forward, I had license to take my coffee at “their table:”

“Young man,” Robert said to me the next morning as I was paying at the counter, “why don’t you join us.”

And that statement wasn’t delivered as a question; it was delivered in a manner somewhere between directive and invitation. On the directive hand, I sensed that he thought I might benefit from joining them – that sitting at their table would be in my best interest and that I would perhaps learn something from them. On the invitation hand, I sensed that the statement involved desire on his part to learn more about who I was, and sensed that he thought of me as a stranger he’d enjoy getting to know and would potentially enjoy spending time with. In other words, when Robert said, “Why don’t you join us,” I took it to mean that Robert thought sitting together would be beneficial for all of us. Of course I hadn’t yet earned their trust in deep ways, but I was “in” enough to have earned a spot at their table and I joined them each day thereafter.

⁸⁷ See Brooks (2004) on vouching.

I'd later come to understand that "getting in" to this degree after only three visits was without question aided by my own Whiteness. Overall, they're more comfortable in approaching strangers "like me" (read presumably White-identified and presumably a straight man) than they are "others." Of course, they bullshitted with strangers of color on occasion, and a few old men of color had license to sit at their table: John, a Latino man, and Daryl, a Black man always joined the White morning regulars when they came to the donut shop – but they visited very infrequently. And I also hung out at Steve's occasionally in the afternoons and evenings. Different regulars come at different times of day and night. In the mornings, the donut shop is primarily a White space and persons of color are more or less relegated to being regulars at Steve's at "irregular" times – notably evenings and late at night.

Collecting and analyzing the data

And so I continued to visit the donut shop – most often arriving by bicycle and staying for between forty-five minutes and an hour. During the study, the men ranged in age from sixty-seven to ninety-five and the vast majority was aged in the mid to late eighties. In general, they're over-educated for their age-cohort, solidly middle-class, veterans of foreign wars, Midwestern and Southwestern-born American farm boys and are children of the Great Depression. We met in the donut shop in mornings, and I attended roughly three or four times a week. Anywhere from two or three to six or eight of these men can be found in Steve's Donut Shop on

any given morning, although attendance is particularly spotty on Sundays as many of the men attend various church services around the neighborhood. Jasper, Orville, Robert, Doyle, Frank, Rex, Lester, Charles, Raymond, Erwin, Paul, and Ray had the most consistent attendance and form the core group of the morning regulars at Steve's. Between ten and fifteen different morning regulars, who also dine in, arrive less frequently.

I wrote up fieldnotes immediately after leaving the donut shop or after running into people involved with this social world in other locales. My fieldnotes often include direct quotations and I keep "thick description" (Geertz 1973) as a primary goal when writing them up. Following Naples (2003) and Emerson et al (1995), my fieldnotes focus not only on empirically occurring events, but also on my own perceptions and feelings. And with their permission, I tape-recorded many of our one-on-one conversations outside of the donut shop. These conversations might be formally understood as semi-structured interviews; I wrote up interview guides and had certain topics I wanted to explore, but I also took pains to let the conversation evolve naturally. I transcribed these conversations afterward. Though the stories that emerged throughout the research have certainly panned out to be the most rich of all the data I collected, I also collected seemingly insignificant, but meaningfully relevant artifacts: napkins from the donut shop on which they've sketched plans for construction projects or written phrases or names they think I "ought to know." I've taken pictures inside some of their homes. I frequently talked (and still do) with some of them on the telephone. I've gathered a small collection of

pamphlets and programs from events we've attended together. After an afternoon snack-time at Robert's, he insisted I take with me a few broken arrowheads from an old shoebox he kept in the garage – artifacts he'd collected in the area with one of his sons some fifty years ago.

Taken together, I analyzed the data through taking a grounded theory approach. Though I roughly followed the classic orientation of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and the refined orientation of Strauss and Corbin (1998), I used Charmaz (2006) as a step-by-step guide in the task of theorizing and analyzing the data. My attempts to be theoretically sensitive involved giving primacy to coding and recoding, conceptualizing and reconceptualizing, categorizing and recategorizing, and constantly comparing my data in fieldnotes and memos. I first applied, line-by-line, "open codes" to fieldnotes and interview transcripts. These codes described what was "going on" so as to explain what the data indicate. Focused codes with more abstract labels were used to group open codes into more theoretically relevant concepts. In a deductive manner, I also sampled the data throughout to see how it fit (or did not fit) the emerging theory and continued to develop the theory in a way guided by those pesky "negative cases" that forced me to rethink the theory. And hence codes and concepts were continually revised and recategorized until I felt that my fieldwork had reached a point of saturation⁸⁸. After nearly four years, I no

⁸⁸ Though Charmaz (2006) was used primarily, I relied upon other qualitative methods texts. Most useful were Becker (1986; 1998), Bryant and Charmaz (2007), Emerson (2001), Lofland (1976), Lofland et al (2006), and Twine and Warren (2000).

longer saw any new data that didn't seem to support the grounded theory of "good manhood" that we'd constructed together.

Whiteness and self-pseudonymizing

Where ethnographers apply pseudonyms to those they study through the course of doing ethnography, those ethnographers engage in a political act and are exerting power⁸⁹. Pseudonymizing (the act of applying pseudonyms to those under study) ascribes, denies, and represents identities of both ethnographers and those they study. Because names are sometimes meaningful markers of age, race, gender, and social class⁹⁰, ethnographers are caught in a conundrum of ethical pseudonymizing suspended between, at the very least, aims for anonymity, accuracy, and authenticity.

In pseudonymizing, I used lists of popular baby names from the years they were born and tried to apply "White" pseudonyms to White participants. But, as mentioned in the endnote in Chapter 1, I had difficulties in ascribing pseudonyms to people of color. I chose to use "Steve" (a name disproportionately used by Whites) as a pseudonym for the Chinese-Thai proprietor of the donut shop because he himself "goes by" a self-appointed "White name." Hopefully this gives the reader a sense of the degree to which the donut shop and the neighborhood is White dominated. "Steve" has gone so far as to choose for himself a "White name:"

⁸⁹ See Duneier (1999) and Guenther (2009).

⁹⁰ See Lieberman and Bell (1992).

“Hey Steve,” I called out one morning as I sat alone, looking at the dinner plate sized, gold-painted character symbol that hung high up on the wall behind the counter, “what’s this character over here mean?”

“Oh, that ... ah, it sorta mean, ah like peace ... peace but good luck too.”

“Oh, cool ... what language is it in?”

“Its Chinese.”

“You’re Chinese?” I replied, perhaps insensitively.

“No, no, I’m Chinese-Thai.”

“Oh, cool.”

“My father was Chinese, my mother ... Thai.”

“Were you born here [in the US]?”

“No, no ... Hong Kong.”

“And they named you ‘Steve?’” I asked, not at all realizing how insensitive my line of questioning might have seemed to Steve until I wrote up my fieldnotes later that morning.

“No, no, no ... that’s my White name ... my *real* name is _____,” replied Steve in an overwhelmingly matter-of-fact way.

And before I could probe any further, a small group of employees from the County Mental Health Clinic in the shopping center walked into the donut shop and Steve moved his attention to them.

And so “Steve” doesn’t see his White name as his *real* name. His *real* name is Chinese, but he is not known in the donut shop by his real name. In situations that

involve the exchanging of names, he regularly introduces himself by using his White name. Though I will further investigate this and will provide deeper analysis in future research, it is clear to me – particularly after having built a healthy friendship with Steve over nearly four years – that Steve doesn't *overtly* seem to be bothered by his "going by" a White name. But his overwhelmingly matter-of-fact manner in telling me that Steve is his White name, and not his *real* name, suggests a deep taken-for-grantedness in the label he uses to identify himself to others. Moreover, the White name that "Steve" "goes by" is *not* an anglicized version of a Chinese-Thai name that might carry Chinese-Thai identity – a name such as Wong Jang Lee, for example, that lies somewhere between ethnic maintenance and acculturation⁹¹. Li (1997) suggests the adoption of Western-sounding names (though not necessarily White names) is "largely motivated by a preference to switch to a reciprocal first-name address pattern typical of egalitarian interpersonal communication in the West, in order to speed up the process of getting acquainted, both in inter- and intra-cultural encounters" (p. 489). While it is possible that this might hold for "Steve," he explicitly expressed to me that he sees his self-appointed pseudonym as specifically *White* – not as Western, not as "American⁹²," but instead in terms of race.

⁹¹ See Gerhards and Hans (2009) on immigrant parents' name-giving patterns and for an elaboration of how first names can mark identity and indicate assimilation. See also Finch (2008), who focuses primarily on names and kinship, but also explains how names can both map and mark social connections. Lastly, see Chiang (2007) for a quantitative analysis of anglicizing as increasing social capital.

⁹² See Chelliah 2005 for an exposition of how personal name choice can assert forms of nationhood.

His self-appointed pseudonym marks a deep racial acculturation and signifies the White social dominance of both the donut shop and the neighborhood.

Studying “up,” “down,” and “around”

An oft-mentioned dilemma in conducting ethnographic research concerns whether one is “studying up” or “studying down.” These are ultimately issues of status and power vis a vis researchers and those under study. While these issues are often centered on race, class, and gender, they are also issues concerning representation⁹³. When researchers say they’re studying up, they acknowledge their own place-holding of some kind of lower status or subordinate position in relation to those they study – as in the poor queer Latina graduate student from a modest upbringing interested in social networks that investigates the phenomenon by interviewing wealthy straight White tenured professors. Studying down can be understood as roughly the opposite. And while there is a laundry list of implications, ramifications, and consequences associated with studying up or studying down, there is at least one general theme: in studying up or down, researchers and those under study have such deeply different life experiences and carry with them such drastically different socio-historical baggage, that both the data and the analysis must be treated with caution because the degree to which the researcher actually gained access must be deeply questioned given power differentials between the researcher and those under study. Certainly cultural

⁹³ See especially May and Patillo-McCoy (2000) and Farough (2006).

identities, social power dynamics, and even particular spaces – like the donut shop – shape the way people interact with each other.

There have nonetheless been rallying calls to “study up.” In a classic statement, anthropologist Laura Nader (1972) argues that studying up can provide insights previously imponderable to those ethnographers that had traditionally only studied down. And hence the call is in the spirit of postcolonial theories, critical race theory, and feminist epistemologies. Mayer (2008) suggests studying “up” and “down” are terms that “highlight the shifting power relations that seem to mark any prolonged ethnographic project,” and goes on to write:

It was clear that I had to continually renegotiate the terms of access ... I had to show others [under study] I was ‘working my way up’ ... my self-presentation appropriated the dues-paying and meritocratic stories that practitioners told about themselves. I needed to prove my mettle, to follow the bootstraps storyline ... I felt both a sense of being a user and of being used. Perfect reciprocity was infrequent, occurring only when both the interviewee and I judged each other at the same status level. These moments felt exciting and fun, as I gathered data while feeling like I was giving something back. Role play and bizarre forms of complicity were common interactions. I could play roles at the top ... or at the bottom ... Roles involved implicit levels of control, sometimes made explicit when a potential interviewee dumps me or the project (p. 144-5).

And so fieldwork demands affability and interpersonal limberness. In this sense, doing ethnography is a morally ambiguous enterprise that can be reasonably likened to sexual intercourse:

Fieldwork is like sex: It is often messy. It can be awkward, especially at first. It requires some flexibility. It is at best spontaneous and, no matter what one’s proposal may say, simply cannot be planned. Like sex, even bad sex, fieldwork is always productive: it produces sensations, emotions, intimate knowledge of oneself and others (Kelly in Mayer 2008: 146).

At any given moment in my own fieldwork, I felt as if I was perpetually studying up and studying down in the same instance – and while much of this had to do with both chronological and social understandings of age, all of it was undoubtedly centered around situation-specific shifting of statuses.

I was “studying around” more than either studying up or down. Indeed, understanding ethnographic practice as studying *either* “up” or “down” involves a perhaps oversimplified binary logic. In the donut shop, my own roles and statuses were dependent upon who was sitting at the table and what we were talking about. One morning in the donut shop, for example, I was sitting with Doyle, Robert, and Orville, and was bemoaning my difficulties with the content of a course in statistics I was currently enrolled in.

“Murph, I used to do ANNOVA [a statistical procedure] by hand. *By hand*, you see! And that’s the way we did it,” said Robert in a way suggesting his own bouts with statistics must have been more laborious than my own.

“You probably have a computer that does everything for you,” said Orville in a manner less prideful than Robert, but felt to me to be similarly staking a claim to having endured a “more” laborious graduate student experience.

Rex had entered the donut shop during this banter, and turned to me chuckling, “You in here, workin’ on your PhD again, huh Murph?”

Then Rex shook his head from side, smiling in a righteously perplexed way, “Geeze.”

“Shoot,” added Doyle, turning to Rex, “[At] Least he’s gettin’ one!”

We all laughed, knowing that Rex had previously expressed some amazement that one can earn a PhD “*just* by sittin’ with us old guys at the coffee shop,” but that he also ultimately supported my endeavors and was proud to consider me a friend. For Rex, I sensed the mild aversion he held was oriented not toward me as a person, but toward his own understanding of what universities in general today consider legitimate knowledge and research enterprises:

“You can get a degree over there in *anything*” Rex had joked with me on a different day, “that, ah, underwater basket weaving degree ... Ha! You should be gettin’ that one!”

But we all sat there with the shared knowledge of each other’s credentialed pasts: Robert and Orville had earned PhD’s in the 1950’s, Rex and Doyle had earned bachelor’s degrees in the early 1960’s, and I was in graduate school pursuing a PhD. Everybody knew this. For Doyle (“at least he’s [Murphy] gettin’ one [a PhD]!”), the mere pursuit of the credential – regardless of its legitimacy – places me in a superordinate position on a hierarchy of educational attainment vis a vis himself and Rex. Robert and Orville’s comments suggested that though they had faith that I would eventually earn the degree, I would do so in a way less rigorous than their own. So let us oversimplify the moment and think of this little hierarchy as placing Robert and Orville on top, myself in the middle, and Rex and Doyle at the bottom.

“Ah, but you’ll see, Murph” added Orville a moment later, “Once you get a little older you’ll see that that [degree] doesn’t always mean very much.”

“That’s right,” added Robert, “ah, your career, you see, that’s what matters ... doesn’t matter what [career] it is ... just matters [that] you work hard at it.”

“Thirty year standin’ on concrete [as a machine operator at a paper factory], Murph,” said Doyle, “it don’t do much good for your back, but I did it ... and that’s how you support a family.”

“That’s right,” added Robert again.

And thus we create a new little hierarchy – this one concerning age and understanding the moral imperative they assert comes with prolonged employment characterized by “hard work.” I’d “see,” Orville had told me, when I got “a little older.” I’d eventually understand, Robert’s claimed, that “what matters” is not credentials and the status they can at times bestow – “what matters” is adhering to the moral imperative of “hard work.” My status had shifted: I was in this moment a pupil of Doyle’s and of the rest of the men – at the bottom of the hierarchy. I was expected to learn from them: to learn that I would only come to understand the merits of “hard work” after a prolonged career in any field regardless of any credentialed requirements that might be associated with that field.

In everyday talk at the donut shop, status locations perpetually shift across an array of hierarchies (in much the same manner as I outline in Chapter 4 on humor orgies). And in this particular fieldwork, I never sensed myself studying primarily “up” or primarily “down.” I instead sensed myself “studying around” – finding myself in a matrix of perpetually shifting statuses and shifting positions of social power vis a vis the men I was hanging out with.

Moving in with Dorothy and Frank

It happened naturalistically. The lease on the small room I rented in a six-bedroom home was almost up. I was looking for a different place to live, but hadn't found one yet, and Frank had kept telling me about how he was fixing up the guest room again so he and Dorothy could rent it out.

"We need a tenant," he'd say to me and follow with some variant of, "[do you] know anybody like yourself?"

"Get a nerdy graduate student, Frank," I'd say, "you need someone who won't make a ruckus ... graduate students don't do anything except read and stress out ... they're hermits, Frank."

Frank persisted in asking me to come over and take a look at the room. And in time it became increasingly evident to me that Frank was suggesting that perhaps *I* should be the one to move in. I was a good two and one half years into the fieldwork and thought about how important it is for ethnographers to immerse themselves as much as possible into the everyday lives of those they study. I thought living with Dorothy and Frank would provide a deeper context and broader view of what I was participating in and observing at the donut shop. I told Frank I'd stop by to look at the room.

Frank answered the door with an uncharacteristic spring in his step. He appeared excited to see me. A White woman, who to me appeared to be aged in the sixties, was right there with him.

“You must be Dorothy,” I said, extending my hand for a shake.

“Oh, no ...” she replied, fidgety, almost chuckling, and putting her head down,
“I’m not”

“This is Connie,” Frank interrupted, “She’s a friend of ours.”

“Oh,” I said, completely embarrassed. Given that my response definitely did not save any face for my mistake, I felt lucky that Frank had interrupted before the moment could grow too awkward. I heard a faint squeak – one that I would later come to know as the sound of Dorothy’s walker as it traversed over a particular floor rug in their home – and as introduced to Dorothy. She immediately seemed friendly, but her smile seemed apprehensive after I’d recalled what Jasper had told me a few days earlier – that Dorothy “wasn’t too keen on the idea” of renting out the room in her home.

So there we were, the four of us: my eighty-four year old friend from the donut shop, his eighty-four year old wife (who I’d heard would not want me, or anybody, to live in their home), a woman I’d just mistakenly assumed to be Frank’s wife, and the soon to be residence-less me – all crammed in the small entryway to their modest ranch-style home....

Frank excitedly showed me the room. The walls had been painted. Most of the furniture and the bedding looked brand new. I wasn’t sure what to expect, but the room looked like a bedroom out of a JC Penny’s catalog. The desk had a desktop computer and a printer, a lamp, a notepad, a framed picture of Frank and his two brothers, and a knick-knack bicyclist figurine. The bookshelf next to the dresser

held twenty or thirty books – mostly on gardening, but also a handful of romance novels, an autobiography by former vice-president Dan Quayle, and anthropologist Ralph Linton's *Tree of Culture*. On the other side of the bookshelf was a demur recliner and floor lamp.

"Our granddaughter ... she's majoring in graphic arts down at Orange County University ... we had her design the room," said Frank, proudly.

The brown comforter complimented the freshly painted rust-yellow walls and the blue and yellow pillows on the bed seemed to help to build up a somewhat a sedate, unisex color scheme. A large new area rug with a conservative geometric pattern covered most of the wood floor. It was a small room, but plenty big enough for me, and certainly nicer than any room I'd rented before.

"Here, 'lemme give you the tour," said Frank as he motioned me out of the bedroom.

"This here would be your bathroom," he said, "Nice, 'idn't it?"

The bathroom was equipped with an industrial handrail on the wall across from the sink. The toilet was also equipped with grab-bar safety handrails and a toilet seat riser.

"You'd, ah, share it with Dorothy."

The shower curtain was printed with lavender flowers and the sink counter and medicine cabinet were adorned with a few knick-knacks – one was a note-card sized sign reading, "All a man needs is a woman who lets him think he's right."

Frank would lead me into the living room and was proud to show off their new flat-screen LCD television in the living room. Area rugs that appeared to be twenty or thirty years old covered much of the wood floor. Current magazines were strewn about the coffee table and the end table placed between their two recliners saw a neatly organized array of television controllers, coasters, glasses, and reading materials.

The appliances in the kitchen were outdated, but functional, and refrigerator donned a small collection of US state magnets – including Idaho and Alaska – that held up pictures of friends and family and an array of business cards. The small dining area included a hutch that housed both dishes and mail – bills, invitations, and a few mailers from Charles Schwab: the dining room was also the office. I wasn't shown into Frank and Dorothy's separate bedrooms. The front and backyards were impeccably landscaped, and the vegetable garden was impressive – sugar snap peas, lettuce, carrots, beets, tomatoes, cabbage, and much more. Frank was an impressive gardener and certainly seemed to take more pride in the vegetables than he did in the fruit he also grew – oranges, grapes, limes, cumquats, and grapefruits. In the backyard, I also met Rusty, a cocker-spaniel mixed breed dog whose somewhat ratty, unkempt coat seemed to somehow add to his good-natured tail-wagging spirit. A hobie-cat sailboat sat covered underneath a small structure akin to a carport. In the shed, Frank told me, sat two Honda Goldwing touring motorcycles that he and Dorothy were storing for some friends currently living in Alaska.

Frank and I walked out front where I had parked my bicycle.

“Well, do you think this is the kind of place you could live?”

“Yeah,” I paused, “Yeah it is.”

“I’m not sure what rooms like this go for around here ... do you?” asked Frank genuinely.

I’d finished my coursework and most, though not all, of the other requirements in my graduate program and was planning on exiting the field and moving to the east coast to begin writing, “Well, yeah. I paid \$490 a month for the room in my old house ... and I’d say around \$400 is pretty much the low end around here ... I just ... I don’t know if I’d be here very long ... Maybe even as short as a couple of weeks ... I don’t know if I’m moving to the east coast soon or not,” I replied.

“Well, that’d be fine. Dorothy, ah ... well, she hasn’t been too excited about renting out the room, but I think you’d be a great fit. She already likes you, I can tell. And, ah ... well if she doesn’t then it may only be a short bit!” joked Frank.

“Well, I’m not really sure what I’d be able to pay.”

“Well,” said Frank, putting his hands in his pockets, kicking his feet around, and looking down at the front driveway and then back up at me, “How ‘bout you just pay us what you can and what you think is fair.”

“Well I’ll be back in the beginning of January,” I replied, reminding Frank that I was going to stay with my parents for two weeks during the winter holiday to do some writing, “Ummm ... how ‘bout a hundred bucks a week? I should be able to do that.”

“That’d be fine. Just fine. Whatever you can pay is fine,” Frank said immediately, and smiling, knowing that he and Dorothy would be receiving an income they didn’t really need, and also knowing that they would be “helpin’ out” in the sense that he was willing to accept what I’d told him was on the “low end” of rents in the neighborhood, and implying he’d perhaps even be willing to accept less. He knew I could afford little more.

I ended up living with Frank and Dorothy for nearly six months. Though during those months, I did not spend most of my time at Dorothy and Frank’s home. Typically, I awoke around eight, took a quick shower, and ate my breakfast while standing up in the kitchen and preparing a sandwich or two to take to campus with me that day. During those five or ten minutes I spent in the kitchen in the morning, Dorothy would either sit next to me atop her walker, or would sit in at the table in the adjacent dining room. And during those fleeting minutes, Dorothy gave me “The News” – a rundown of her and Frank’s on-goings from the previous day and what they had on tap for that particular day. The News also involved the on-goings of others: whose relatives were in town, who didn’t show up at church and why, how Frank and Dorothy’s kids were doing, and so on. Less reminiscent of gossip and more reminiscent of accountable reporting, Dorothy’s giving of The News became an invaluable event that, each morning, provided me with a fresh perspective from which to view the morning regulars at the donut shop and their own on-goings.

Friendship and objectivity

Fruitful relationships built up between ethnographers and informants in the field are ultimately founded upon mutual trust. And earning the trust of another requires, at the very least, a succession of interactions where people are able to cooperate with one another. In time, though the course repeated interactions demonstrative of cooperation, ethnographers and informants come to trust each other. Moreover, cooperation is a distinctly social psychological phenomenon only capable of being realized *in situ*. Sustained successions of situations either requiring or enabling cooperation serve to build up senses of mutual trust between ethnographers and informants. But such situations at times also require support – and in being both supporting and cooperative, relationships also tend to come to be characterized by respect, esteem, and affection. Ethnographers, in short, do at times come to befriend informants.

Brooks (2009) writes of fieldwork in terms of friendship: “As a researcher, you may be needed as a friend and you may need to be a friend ... You may have very little control of how close you become....” (p. 201-202). In the case of my own fieldwork, I found that “good men” at times find themselves “helpin’ out” *each other*. And in some instances, friends help each other out in ways that are perhaps altruistic in the sense that a “good man” may go out of his way to help another to such a degree that it may jeopardize his own situation:

“Well, how are you and Margaret getting along?” I asked.

"Oh, fine, Murph. Just fine," replied Robert, looking unusually sluggish as we sat down in the living room and as he, as usual, went on to ask me about school. I contemplated mocking his answer to my previous question by saying the exact same thing, but thought it better to answer thoughtfully.

"Well, I'm still staying on campus until ten or eleven every night ... keepin' my nose to grindstone, Robert."

"Well that's good, Murph, that's good for you, you see."

"Yeah," I said, wanting to get back to the topic of how he and Margaret were "getting along," "Yeah, a 'lotta long days, but it really is going well ... Things at school are good.... Ah, hey, I noticed the [number of] pills over there [their assortment of medications neatly arranged next to the salt and pepper shakers on the dining table in the kitchen] have grown Robert ... you two *really* gettin' along okay?"

"Well, there's a few new ones [medications]," Robert smiled with anxiety, "I've got breasts now, Murph ... about the size of fourteen year-old girl, you see."

We sat silently for a few moments and he took another sip of the sugar-free peach iced tea that I'd brought to his home.

"So that's what my prostate medication does ... it shifts my testosterone to estrogen ratio ... and my other medications ... some of 'em don't work at all ... and nothing works down there [in the groin area] either ... I'm limp and I leak."

"Well, Robert," I paused, "How does that make you feel?"

"Make me *feel*? Oh, I don't know."

And instead of trying to elaborate on his feelings, Robert characteristically changed the topic, but did continue on the topic of “getting along.”

“The worst ... *the worst* part of ... being old, Murph, its this ... I have to wear a pad, you see.”

“Yeah, I know you do [wear undergarments]”

“Well it gets in the way of everything,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“Well it seems like every time I get wrapped up in doing something ... and I’m not paying attention ... then sure enough, by God, I’ll have to stop what I’m doing ... go into the bedroom ... change my pants ... and my socks ... and my underwear....”

On this particular day, we talked for a couple of hours and Margaret had been in and out of the living room (and the conversation) moving about the house with remarkable dexterity in a blue cotton sweat suit and worn-in slippers. I noticed the rain outside was growing more and more intense and I also sensed that they were getting ready to eat dinner. I’d ridden my bike, and was ready to head back to campus. Robert and Margaret insisted that I put my bicycle in the back of Robert’s small two-wheel drive Toyota pickup and that he drive me back to campus. I argued, forcefully but not contentiously, that giving me a ride back to campus wouldn’t be necessary. I’d be getting wet either way. They continued their insistence and I eventually acquiesced.

By the time Robert had turned onto the main thoroughfare to campus, only a few blocks from their home, Robert had begun talking again about his time as a

POW. And not a block later, it became clear to me that Robert had soiled himself. Neither one of us said anything about it and I felt horrible. We arrived to campus a few minutes later.

“Well thanks again, Robert ... I mean, you really didn’t need to give me a ride, you know?”

“Well I know that,” smiled Robert, “Now you go on and go do something constructive....”

“Alright,” I said, opening the door to what had continued to evolve into a pretty serious downpour of rain, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Ok, Murph, see you at coffee,” he smiled.

I couldn’t help but sense that my decision *not* to mention Robert’s “accident” as it happened was interpreted by him to be a sign of support. His smile to me as we parted ways beamed a bashful kind of gratitude that I’d never really seen from Robert before. He knew I was aware of what had happened and he seemed glad that I didn’t do or say anything about it at that time.

Robert had insisted that I let him help me out by giving me a ride, and I eventually cooperated. But in the course of helping me out, Robert had uncontrollably defecated in his truck and probably felt at least a little bit embarrassed. And this goes without mentioning the fact that he’d left his ailing wife at home alone, something he definitely does not like to do, and that he’d have to endure the discomfort of driving back home while sitting in his own excrement.

He'd done me a favor, but doing so ended up being accompanied by some adverse consequences.

And so ethnographers and informants, through the course of sharing experiences across a constellation of situations, build up relationships that can become quite personal. In diving deep into the everyday lives their informants, ethnographers gain such deeply nuanced and intimate knowledge of those they study, that friendship, if anything, seems almost a natural consequence of doing ethnography. This is not to suggest that I became close friends with each and every one of the morning regulars at the donut shop, or that the relationships that did evolve into friendships were all essentially friendships of the same sort. Just as ethnographers are "in" with different informants to different degrees and are "in" in different ways, ethnographers also build up friendships with some informants – friendships that are qualitatively different from one another.

A perhaps logical, but perhaps warrantless common charge is that the ethnographer wrapped up in friendships with their informants would stray from ideals of objectivity and that the research would snowball into purely subjective reasoning. This is simply not the case. And while it certainly *is* the case that no research can be fully objective, mainstream social science generally leans toward assuming that adequate objectivity can be found within the community of social scientists – one can propose a theory, and another can test it, or so the logic goes.

Objectivity, however, implies distance from the object and/or the phenomenon under study. But this runs contrary to the ethnographic enterprise –

gaining intimate knowledge and familiarity with settings and the people in them by engaging in the behaviors found within the setting so as to collect the richest data possible⁹⁴. Friendships are a naturally occurring consequence of participating in the activities bound within settings. When people gain intimate knowledge of settings – they must also gain intimate knowledge of the regular participants within that setting. Intimate knowledge and immersed participation do not “contaminate” data; instead, they bring data to life. As Mannheim (1936) notes:

In order to do work in the social sciences one must participate in the social process, but this participation in collective-unconscious striving in no wise signifies that the persons participating in it falsify the facts or see them incorrectly, indeed, on the contrary, participation in the living context of social life is a presupposition of the understanding of the inner nature of this living context (p. 46).

As an attitude, objectivity isn’t totally possible on the grounds that when people interact with each other they cannot be morally and politically detached from their own actions. As a methodological aim, objectivity isn’t totally possible because intersubjective understanding can only be reached in and through interactions between ethnographers and those in settings. And as a regulatory ideal, mainstream calls for objectivity seem almost hegemonic. Reinharz (1979) is worth quoting at length:

Experiential knowledge is discounted as “mere subjectivity,” whereas lack of experiential knowledge is almost an index of respectability. Human contact and influence are labeled “contamination.” In this age, when the sense and reason are mistrusted in favor of statistics and technology, deep personal immersion as a method of study is either heresy or at least profoundly

⁹⁴ See Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006: 15-17) on how aims for objectivity, and hence distance, commonly results in collecting poor data.

suspect. There is an inverse relationship between the distance from the subject matter and the academic community's trust of results. Sociologists run from social reality to embrace truth; they do not want to get their hands dirty by plunging into the buzzing, blooming confusion ... Sociologists pride themselves on not being naïve, on not accepting their perceptions as truth, on relying only on hard data despite their questionable manufacture. Sociologists do not actually mistrust their perceptions as much as they rely on their professional vocabulary to define reality. They debunk the apparent social façade by positing another latent reality. They remove themselves from the flow of life to stay immune from commonsense explanations. The optional venture "into the field" occurs early in a career before the student becomes entrenched in the norms and life-style of the academic world (109-110).

Reinharz's words help us understand why some sociologists might be skeptical of ethnographer-informant friendships, if not the ethnographic enterprise as a whole. But if objectivity isn't really a possibility, how could people take the knowledge-claims that sociologists make seriously? Perhaps ironically, like getting "in" and building friendships, taking ethnographic representations of culture seriously involves trust.

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