

**All the world's a stage: how Irish immigrants negotiated life in England in the 1950s/60s using Goffman's theory of impression management.**

MAYE-BANBURY, Angela <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7710-5041>>

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All the world's a stage: how Irish immigrants negotiated life in England in the 1950s/60s using Goffman's theory of impression management.

Erving Goffman; impression management; oral history; Irish immigrants; identity work

## Introduction

To paraphrase the novelist E M Forster, how do you know what you mean until you hear what you say? Narratives of self (or more accurately selves) using the oral history method have played a valuable role in revealing previously undisclosed insights regarding the interface between expressions of identity and aspects of sociocultural identity (Georgakopoulou 2006; McAdams and McLean 2013; Schiffrin et al 2010). Previous immigration related research which has applied Erving Goffman's presentation of self thesis has tended to foreground the stigma experienced by immigrants in their new host countries (Rabikowska 2010; [Ryan 2010](#) and Valenta 2009). Yet symbolic interactionism, specifically theories of impression management attributed to Erving Goffman, are seldom applied to the Irish immigration experience in England. This paper bridges that gap in existing scholarship. According to the International Sociological Association (2019), Erving Goffman's 'Presentation Of Self' is the tenth most cited sociological text of the twentieth century with Foucault's 'Discipline and Punishment' and Simmel's 'Sociology' ranked sixteenth and eighteenth respectively. In today's post truth not to say post linguistic society, eyewitness accounts of immigration represent a unique form of intellectual capital which enables the storyteller to assign meaning to past events. As Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855), whose writings are deemed integral to our understanding of existentialism, asserted: 'life can only be understood backwards but it must be lived forwards.' Drawing on Irish men and women's accounts of immigration to England in the 1950s and 1960s, this paper uses a variety of rubrics related to symbolic interactionism attributed to Goffman (1955; 1959; 1963 and 1997) to critically explore how members of the Irish community engaged in 'identity work'

following their move to 'the mainland'. Such a critical exploration past events expressed orally enables us to understand the complexities of how sociocultural identity is performed, both now and in the future, from a standpoint of strength.

The research undertaken to inform this paper posed the following three questions:

- (i) To what extent does of symbolic interactionism, specifically Goffman's presentation of self treatise serve as a heuristic in yielding new insights on how Irish immigrants performed identity work in England, notably in Leicester, Sheffield and Manchester, during the 1950s and 1960s?
- (ii) How might oral accounts of identity work in everyday social interactions form part of Irish men and women's impression management repertoires in England?
- (iii) In what ways might identity work be construed as part of an integration and/or assimilation strategy for Irish immigrants in England?

This paper uses Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism, notably impression management, to critically explore how Irish men and women engaged in identity work when negotiating their sociocultural identity in England during the 1950s and 1960s. Several existing studies have considered issues related to the identity of the Irish in Britain (Ghaill, 2000; Ryan, 2010; 2016; 2007). However, there is a dearth of scholarship which critically explores how symbolic interactionism, specifically Goffman's thesis of impression management, may advance knowledge regarding Irish men and women's immigrations experiences in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. This paper bridges that gap in existing scholarship. The ontology of ethnicity is noteworthy in that it is complex, contested and

elusive shifting over space, place and time. In the words of Modood 1996:95, ethnicity may encompass 'real collectivities, common and distinctive forms of thinking and behaviour, of language, custom, religion and so on; not just modes of oppression but modes of being.' These complexities are reflected in our identity work i.e. diverse, fluid and ambiguous measures we use to communicate an innate and credible sense of self to others. Identity work is shaped and sustained by the institutional processes to which we accede (Rounds, 2006: Thompson and McHugh, 2002). In everyday life, people use identity work to create and sustain a positive image of themselves in situations where their identity is ambiguous, contested or contentious (Alvesson, 1998; Park, 2002). But crucially, it is how identity itself is 'performed' which is of interest to Goffman. Others have since built on Goffman's thesis of impression management. In keeping with Stryker's (1980) seminal writings on symbolic interactionism, the consequences of this role 'performance' require constant negotiation (Stryker, 1980). It demands credible dramaturgical performances informed by socially supplied discourses (Down and Reveley (2009). Collectively, these discourses help create what Mauss (1938) characterises as *le personne morale* i.e. the ensemble of words, actions, behaviours, facial and other expressions which help communicate our identities grounded in morality. Inevitably, however, when foregrounding such a microsociological approach, might these 'projected' images of self lack reflexivity and, by implication, application at the meta and macro level? Significantly, a Foucauldian informed macro level analysis contends that the locus of identity comprises the thoughts, feelings and behaviours which give rise to a distinct form of freedom underpinned by reflexive behaviours (Foucault 1979) drawing on technologies of self (Foucault 1988). In this regard, both Goffman and Foucault's framing of identity may be seen complementary as they show how everyday lived experiences interface with the institutions which shape them and vice versa.

The difference between 'identity', 'self identity' and 'identity work' requires qualification. Implicit within the concept self identity are temporality, reflexivity and context. For Goffman, identity is 'is not a material thing to be possessed and then 'dis-played; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated' (1959: 65). Significantly, however, Goffman sidesteps the temporal qualities of identity enabling others to step into the theoretical breach. Manning (1992) tackles this deficit in Goffman's work head on in highlighting how the episodic paradigm which forms the basis of Goffman's work limits the scope of the impression management thesis. Giddens (1991:53) challenge is more nuanced and is characterised in his claim that 'identity...presumes continuity across time and space: but self-identity is such continuity as interpreted reflexively by the agent.' Furthermore, there is a marked difference between being assigned nominal membership of a social group and the extent to which human agency shapes the projection of identity given that our perceived relative position within the social and moral order.. Here, Goffman's (1986) reflections on socially defined stigma and how this gives rise to both a spoiled identity and, by implication, racial stereotypes are instructive in shaping our understanding of the immigration experience. The social construction of the drunk Irishman (or woman) is one such stereotype expressly created to the service ideological goals of those who consider themselves of a high social status (Stivers, 2019). Bourdieu's (1977:77) reflections on cultural capital are also insightful here in that they remind us that 'our choices are restrained by our habitus characterised as a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts ('that's not for the likes of us') and, at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the ethos which determines 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' conduct for every agent.' The section which immediately follows examines this dialectical interrelationship between identity, self identity and identity work in more detail. More specifically, it considers how Goffman's theories of impression management, notably the concepts of front stage and backstage, may be instrumental in

providing new insights regarding how Irish men and women negotiated their sociocultural identity when moving to the 'mainland' during the 1950s and 1960s.

Holy Grail or Poisoned Chalice and Everything In Between: The Quest For The Authentic Self (Selves)

Polonious' last and lingering words of advice in Hamlet to his son Laertes 'To thine own self be true' before Laertes boarded a ship to Paris is likely to resonate strongly with most but perhaps most obviously with those who feel their identity may become compromised in later life. The Aristotelian notion of the 'authentic self' provided the foundation on which many critiques of identity (too numerous to include here) have been based. Today, from a sociological perspective, identity and by implication identity work, is fluid not to say chameleonic in nature, shifting in direct response to specific social situations. For Goffman, however, the crucial dimension of identity is the way in which it is performed. More specifically, it is how social norms in any given context shape these performances which is of interest to Goffman. Consequently, each representation of self is uniquely crafted to construct a situated identity relative to the both context and the audience's expectations. Critically, Goffman contends that the externally presented identity may be enacted without fundamentally blighting our 'authentic' sense of self. Rather, during social interactions, people don a metaphorical 'mask' which enables them to assume multiple desired identities to foreground 'our truer self, the self we would like to be' (Goffman 1959: 19). Other writers have since built on this premise by asserting that, in its sustained form, identity uses a complex series of both contrived and non-contrived behaviours which reflect the prevailing social, cultural and moral order (Carpenter et al 2017; Lyons et al 2017).

Self- Build: (Re) Constructions Of Identity in Social Situations

The genesis of symbolic interactionism from which Goffman's work emanated is generally attributed to Herbert Blumer whose writings on social relations foregrounded how

self-verification is facilitated by the meanings people assign to both their environments and their experiences in these environments (Blumer 1969; Burke and Stets 2009). According to Goffman (1996), individuals modify their behaviour, notably by engendering and sustaining multiple identities, to suit the protocols of co-mingling in specific social situations. Such situations are 'people-processing encounters, encounters in which the "impression" subjects make during the interaction affects their life chances...By a sort of prearrangement, then social situations seem to be perfectly designed to provide us with evidence of a participant's various attributes - if only to vividly re-present what we already know' (Goffman 1997:9). One of Goffman's primary preoccupations is the way in which actors choreograph social interactions to create a concerted 'impression' (Goffman, 1967:45). This compulsion arises because 'once individuals - for whatever reason - come into each other's presence, a fundamental condition of social life becomes enormously pronounced namely its promissory evidential character' (Goffman 1997:3). Interestingly, other commentators, notably Garfinkel (1952), Sacks (1992) and Schegloff (1968), favour the systematic analysis of retrospective and prospective human behaviours when exploring the sequential ordering of social interactions. Although Goffman and Garfinkel were both preoccupied with the sociology of everyday life, they differed in how they framed social interactions. Most fundamentally, whilst Garfinkel was known for his use of both 'the game' and 'breaching experiments' to examine how people interacted to define a given situation, Goffman's primary focus was how social actors negotiated established social norms. Equally, unlike Saks and Schegoff, Goffman foregrounded the interaction order, a framework which allowed for the exploration of public accountability. Returning to the paper's focus, therefore, the specific characteristics importance of symbolic interactionism, notably impression management as advocated by Goffman (1997) forms the basis of the section which now follows.

All the World's A Stage: The Quest For The Authentic Self (Selves)

Goffman uses the metaphorical stage to exemplify the repertoires of impression management people manifest in different social situations. According to Goffman, we use 'impression management' to modify our behaviour and actions in accordance with our given motives at any point in time. Just as identity is malleable, the metaphorical stage too is a flexible medium which shifts through space, place and time and through which identity is constructed frame by frame.. Significantly, even those most accomplished at identity work may assert little control over audience interpretation of his/her performance. For Goffman (1997:9), 'front stage' comprises three elements. These are: the 'setting' (the scene, props and decor); 'personal front' (aesthetic considerations including bodily modifications such as clothing and jewellery assert identity) and finally 'manners' which incorporate 'sign vehicles' such the voice, notably accent, and body language. Each of these three elements will be considered in turn below. This is followed by an exploration of Goffman's characterisation of 'backstage' performances whereby the performer is free from the audience's gaze and able to express his/her uninhibited selves.

Goffman contends that people's behaviour changes when confronted by a new environment, the so called 'setting' (Goffman, 1963). Curiously, given that he conducted his doctoral research in Shetland's northernmost island Unst, Goffman had little to say on the importance of landscape in constructing identity. Other writers have since stepped into the breach. Probyn (1996) highlights how emotional attachment to people and place fosters a strong sense of belonging. Agnew et al (2011) note how memories of landscape become accentuated for estranged groups. Sensory memory plays a key role in recollections of place. For example, the merits of Proustian scholarship are important when recreating Irish immigrants' reconstructions of their formative experiences (Lahiri 2011; Maye-Banbury and Casey 2016 and Wright, 2009). Goffman, however, favoured the physical delineation of the space in which we are located, notably its décor, the physical context in which it is located



and any objects which communicate the nature of setting. As Bourdieu (1984:479), contends 'social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat'. For the incomer, cities represent complex contested spaces underpinned by an unchartered infrastructure. Lefebvre's invitation to (1996:159) 'multiply the readings of the city' gives new comers a mandate to critically explore their new urban spaces from a standpoint of ambivalence.. Consequently, the yearning to become reunited with the rural landscape of both imagined and lived *dolce domum* gathers momentum.

### Keeping Up Appearances: The Role Of Props In Communicating Identity

Corporeal accessories are integral in the construction of our personal front, specifically when worn with the express intention of neutralising a spoiled identity (Goffman 1963). Some may see clothes as prosaic. Yet what we wear does provide compelling representations of identity. Motives for using clothes as a means of self presentation may include the desire to create a positive impression and/or to cover perceived bodily imperfections (Nezlek et al 2019). Uniforms communicate the demarcation between those who are disciplined and those who control them (Craik, 2007). Other corporeal signifiers which externalise identity include jewellery, watches, sunglasses and T shirts, all of which send visual cues to the audience regarding distinct and selected aspects of identity as socially constructed (Brown, 2015, Butler, 1990 and Niinimäki 2010). However, an assessment of identity based purely on a cursory review of visual cues may prove ambiguous i.e. the so called 'Rashomon' effect. For example, a balaclava may be worn to protect the face from cold (such as under a motorcycle helmet) or to protect the wearer's identity (in the case of a terrorist or criminal).

Sociocultural identity may also be expressed on a more sensuous level, for example through food and dance. In Goffmanesque terms (1959; 1967), sensory infused

performances of ethnicity may be understood as 'interaction rituals' and are therefore one way in which identity may be affirmed, refuted or negotiated.

'Manners', according to Goffman (1959), declare the part we intend to play. Manners form part of an overall impression by expression management strategy. We manage 'impression by expression' when persuading others to subscribe to our own point of view. But self expression may also be managed for the audience's own good. *The expressions we give (facilitated primarily through contrived and verbal facial expression) and those we give off (things we may communicate inadvertently which belies our real selves)* may result in incongruence between our words and what we were actually thinking or feeling. Goffman (ibid) characterises the mechanisms we use to communicate these impressions as 'sign vehicles.' Sign vehicles transcend linguistic cues to include other multisensory prompts, notably body language and the visible objects ('props') used to reinforce the desired identity we wish to communicate. *Goffman contends sign vehicles are deployed in three interrelated ways: to provide face to face confirmation of identity; to perform actions which transcend the information given in the interaction and to communicate an impression of ourselves within a prescribed social and moral order.*

Significantly, first impressions are potent in shaping subsequent social encounters. More specifically, for Goffman ([1963] 1986:5), first impressions hinge on the extent to which 'they (people) have attributes which signal a less desirable kind.' By implication, therefore, the sociocultural identities we present to others may be a contrived pre-emptive strike to neutralise, confirm or contest cultural stereotypes. As Meleau-Ponty (1962) has noted, actors' identities are enmeshed in a range of audiovisual cues including accent, facial expression and gestures. In relation to immigrants in their new host country, audible aural cultural cues are thus significant. Most notably, the 'voice' may be construed as an aural manifestation of

cultural, spatial and temporal identity. Indeed, the journey from thoughts to words is far from straightforward. For Bourdieu (1991:508), language modification may take the form of both linguistic habitus and bodily hexis as workers service the capitalist project. In his original thesis, however, Goffman's explicit references to cultural and political identities are limited. Indeed, one source suggests that Goffman's thesis of impression management is so detached from humanity that his observational techniques are more reminiscent of bird watching techniques than the anthropological practices associated with observing people in situ (Burns, 1992).

It could be argued that every entrance is an exit and vice versa. When negotiating the world, we may enter situations through the backstage. But for Goffman, 'backstage' equates with a private realm where an audience is not present enabling people to revert to their less contrived selves, a space where 'the performer can relax, he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character' (Goffman 1959: 115). It is puzzling, however, that Goffman has little to say about how our understanding of impression management may enhanced by exploring front stage/backstage through a metaphorical revolving door. To what extent is the transition from one to the other seamless? More specifically, how do people, negotiate the emotional and physical challenges that may come with the transition between front and backstage behaviours in everyday life?

#### All In The Voice: Vocal Aesthetics and Performances Of Self Identity

Everyone has an accent of one form or other. But, as ever, context is everything. Our manner of speaking may be construed as one of the social variables which belie our identity (Goffman 1964). Attempts to change one's accent confirm Schneider's proposition (1969; 1981) that impressions communicated by the voice may be modified, even staged, by third parties, to achieve individual and institutional gains. Poster's (2007) study of vocal aesthetics

revealed how employees in offshore Indian call centres were required to collude with 'national identity management' by imitating a British accent when dealing with customers. This form of linguistic discipline evokes Goffman's (1963) contention that self presentation may be modified in anticipation of the speaker being assigned a spoiled identity by his/her audience. Interpersonal communication, therefore, may be framed as culturally and historically specific. In the words of Hall (1990: 222), 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always "in context."' By contrast, on a micro level, by using 'audience segregation,' (Goffman 1959: 57) individuals contrive to ensure their self presentation remains intact as they shift from one interaction to another without fundamentally altering the representation of self. This change in self may not necessarily be detrimental to the speaker. Simmel's suggests that the Other may bring something positive to a social group, albeit that s/he may occupy an ambiguous position somewhere between wandering and fixation with that group (Wolff, 1950).

Ultimately, however, might all these visual and aural attempts to stifle manifestations of otherness be exercises in futility? For Bauman (1991: 56), at an abstract level, we may all be characterised as universal strangers who discombobulate the world as we 'bring the "outside" "inside" and poison the comfort of order with the suspicion of chaos.' Goffman's work on symbolic interactionism, notably impression management, arguably offers a more tangible way of understanding identity. The Irish immigration experience will now be explored in detail using Goffman's impression management thesis.

## Methodology

This paper uses extracts from Irish men and women's oral accounts of emigration from Ireland to England during the 1950s and 1960s. The oral history method is a distinct technique which places the narrator of his/her life story centre stage. It thereby gives a

platform for those whose experiences have been consigned to the margins of history (Maye-Banbury, 2018 and 2019; Maye-Banbury and Casey, 2016; Casey and Maye-Banbury, 2016; Perks and Thompson, 1998). In the context of this paper, oral history may be construed as a temporal medium which reveals the importance of space, place and time in mediating accounts of Irish sociocultural identity. Oral history seeks to be agentic in nature, giving the interviewee the space to recount his/her own story with minimal prompts from the interviewer. This 'listening space' allows for the creation of what Frisch (1990) describes as a 'shared authority' i.e. new knowledge created by dialogicality which draws on the rhetorical construction of self. As the recounting of one's personal history exemplifies how private reflections merge with public discourse, those engaged in oral history interviews occupy both front and backstage positions. Subsequent analysis and interpretations of oral history data must therefore be viewed with this limitation in mind. As verbal 're-presentations' of self make an important contribution to our understanding of identity work, oral history is a compelling method through which new insights may be disclosed. More specifically, the refractive lens used by the speaker, makes an important contribution to how identity is represented and interpreted (Foley and Faircloth 2003). Furthermore, as Goodchild et al (2017) observe, oral history is closely aligned with hermeneutics in that it is the intended meaning which lies behind the words which warrants our attention just as much as the actual words themselves. The research drew on the social constructionist approach of housing pathway analysis. Housing pathways may be defined as 'patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space' (Clapham, 2002: 63).

Since the study's inception in August 2014, a total of 36 Irish men and women who immigrated to England during the 1950s and 1960s have relayed their stories of immigration. Through collaboration with organisations working with the Irish in Leicester, Sheffield and Manchester, suitable interviewees were identified to participate in the study. The majority of

those interviewed were from the Republic of Ireland and emigrated from Ireland during the 1950s and 1960s. Without exception, all had worked in low skilled employment as coal miners, domestics, hotel receptionists, housekeepers, labourers and factory workers amongst others. Irish immigrants typically held numerous temporary jobs which afforded little opportunities for promotion (Casey and Maye-Banbury, 2016; Maye-Banbury, 2018; Maye-Banbury, 2019; Maye-Banbury and Casey, 2016). On the one hand, this heteroglossia of employment practices made it challenging to envisage a collective work related identity which had evolved over space, place and time. This challenge is compounded by the invisibility of the Irish in England relative to other minority ethnic groups. On the other hand, some of those interviewed reported how Goffmanesque like props helped them sustain sociocultural identities. The interviews were conducted by the paper's author, born in Tyrone, and her former colleague, originally from Cork. Both are highly experienced social science researchers having conducted qualitative research for some three decades each. The two interviewers were aware of their own ethnicity positionality and the potential for this positionality to impact on the dynamics of the oral history interview. A reflexive and deductive approach to ethics was therefore adopted throughout this study and later disseminated as Maye-Banbury, 2016. Both Interviewer and interviewee shared a sound understanding of the Irish immigrant experience in England underpinned by a common cultural understanding of language, music, literature, food and dance. These common frames of reference helped develop an instant rapport between interviewer and interviewee, allowing the oral history interviews to flow fluidly. Equally, both interviewees were aware of the perils of 'faking friendship' with respondents given that all research participants were aged 70 or more and keen to share their experiences (Maye-Banbury, *ibid*). The reassurances given to Interviewees of confidentiality and anonymity allowed them to be candid as they recounted their unique story of immigration.

## All Change - The Realities Of Scene Switching From Ireland To England

On first arrival in England, interviewees reported a wide range of initial reactions to their new surroundings ranging from euphoria, ambivalence to trepidation. For some, 'scene switching' from the harshness of subsistence farming in rural Ireland to the delights of England's urban centres was welcomed. Siobhán was captivated by her new environment, signalling the beginning of a love affair with England which would last a lifetime. Her emigration from Sligo to England in 1954 offered her the opportunity to leave behind manual labouring on the family farm, notably 'saving' (cutting and stacking) turf and harvesting potatoes. At that time, it was an accepted practice that those in rural Ireland (both men and women but mainly the former) would engage in seasonal work in England and Scotland, only returning to Ireland for short holidays. In their absence, the women assumed the dual role of farm labourer and childcare provider. 'I loved it (England) from the day I set foot in England. Absolutely loved it. There was that much work left for me to do while he (her father) was away, if it was saving the hay or the turf up on the bog or picking potatoes. I did have to work really hard on the farm and when I got away from it and come back here and work in the factories. I thought it was a holiday.'

Like Siobhán, Mairéad's was initially enthused by her new English rural setting (a private boys boarding school in Yorkshire), the grandeur of which proved a far cry from the lack lustre landscape of Tullamore, the town in Co Offaly where she was born: 'It was a private college. Huge grounds. Absolutely gorgeous.' Mairéad emigrated to 'the mainland' in 1954. She recruited by a company whose express purpose was to find young women (her self reference as 'some people like me' accentuates her perceived Otherness and the class identity to which had self assigned) to work as domestics at a renowned Catholic private boarding school for boys in North Yorkshire. The journey from Offaly to the boarding school was stage managed with precision by the recruitment company. Mairéad's account of how

she came to live in England evokes Goffman's claim that impression management plays a critical role during the people processing encounters which ultimately influence life chances (Goffman, 1997). She recalled: 'At up at the top of the street where I lived, this house was let out to these people who came from the college to get some people like me who didn't have any work and wanted to go to England to get a job. So I put my name down. And within a week, I was on my way to England.'

Others, when faced with the realities of Irish immigrant life in the 1950s and 1960s in post war urban Britain, yearned for both the beauty of the rural Irish landscape along and the family and friends they had left behind. The respondents' severance for the Irish landscape evoked Agnew et al's (2011) writings on the way in which, for many, immigration breaches the relationship between landscape and identity. Eimear, who had left Ireland in 1955 in search of new adventures, harboured a desire to be reunited with the Irish coast: 'When I first came here, I hated it. But I thought, stick it out and see what happens. It's no use looking back, is it? I miss Ireland, I miss the sea. I really miss the sea.' Other respondents reported unfavourable initial impressions of the stage on which their new lives were to be enacted. The lack of recreational activities in the evening alongside the desire to be reunited with the Irish landscape stirred emotional responses from those interviewed. For Eileen, moving to Salford breached her sense of sociocultural identity, the genesis of which came from growing up on her family farm in Monaghan: 'It's lonely when you come here. It takes you a long time to get used to. I lived on a farm and I wasn't used to being in the city. Witnessing first hand the offensive behaviour of his fellow lodgers on arrival in the Leicester boarding house did little to restore one interviewee's confidence in his new surroundings. Seamus, aged just 17 from Tandragee, was disgusted by the spectacle of seeing his fellow Irish men urinate in the sink of the bedroom of his digs: 'They were using the sink to pee into to. Never seen anything like it. Poor as we are, you went out to the basin in the scullery. And you got the water out of



the barrel outside the front door.' Seamus fled the digs and spent several weeks sleeping rough in a public park frequented by sex workers before he secured a hostel place.

The importance of sensory memory in understanding the Irish immigration experience noted by Maye-Banbury and Casey (2016) helps us understand Bridie's account of her early years in Manchester. For Bridie, the term being separated her 'home turf' held a particular poignancy. Other than the aroma of burning turf, fuel smells were anathema to Bridie. 'I'd never even seen coal in my life. Horrible dirty stuff. Not like turf at home. I'd never smelt gas either and I was used to the well water, the water was foul.' Similarly, Eimear's first impression of her new adoptive city of Leicester was overwhelmingly negative. The city's lack of leisure activities compounded its aesthetic limitations: 'Leicester was horrible. Everything closed down early. It was totally different to what I was used to. It was horrible. Absolutely horrible. No life.'

For others, a whimsical thirst for adventures fuelled by the exuberance of youth was the primary motive for emigrating from Ireland to England resulted in a demotion of stage positionality. Upon emigration from the working class district of the Liberties in Dublin to England in 1959, Áine's stage persona switched from centre front as a jewellery counter assistant in a well known Dublin department store to work as a backstage cleaner in a Leicester psychiatric hospital. Her love of jewellery transcended her working environment. 'I don't know why I came here (to England). I had a good job (laughs). My husband's parents lived here. I sort of drifted into it. There was no job problems. I worked in Switzers in the jewellery department. I love jewellery, anything that's shiny and sparkly. Still do. But anyway, I was sort of young and I wanted to see something different.'

For Mairéad, the grandeur of main school was metres apart but worlds away from the servants' quarters where the young female Irish domestic staff spent the vast majority of their time. Mairéad's backstage arena comprised almost entirely the kitchen, dormitory and the servants' quarters. She explained: 'The boys lived here and they slept here and cooking and everything was done in this part' (the servants' quarters). Significantly, meal times were laden with religious related ritual. The food went through three sets of hands (cook, domestic and monk or priest) before ultimate consumption, reflective of the strict demarcation of roles between the actors involved. Mairéad described the reverential way in which food was served, a daily regime which was a source of anxiety:

'And then I had to go in with the priest. Every time I went in, I was petrified. And he'd (the monk) would look up and me... And of course, all these young lads looking at you and you're only sixteen or seventeen. You know what I mean? You're absolutely petrified. You'd never been away from home in your life or anything. I think the toast landed on the table more times than not. I used to be like that. The only thing I could hold on to was the pot of coffee.'

On arrival in England, many Irish men and women lived in the euphemistically named 'boarding houses', the minimalist digs which resembled homeless hostels (Maye-Banbury, 2018; Maye-Banbury and Casey, 2016). Personal props were conspicuous by their absence, reflective of the poverty of Irish immigrants experienced during the 1950s and 1960s. When props in evidence in the lodgings, they were laden with cultural potency suggestive of people in a constant state of flux and flight. Speaking about the personal possessions he had on arrival in England, Gerard replied: 'Just a bag. I only had the shoes I had on my feet. Maybe a shirt and trousers. Maybe a pair of socks. Nothing. Nothing else'. Equally, Colm reported having minimalist possessions: 'All you needed was a bed and a pair of boots. If you weren't in one, you would be in the other'. In the boarding houses, there was a clear demarcation of

front stage and backstage.spaces occupied by lodger and landlord/lady: Dónal's recollected: 'They (landlord/lady) would mostly keep you upstairs. They wanted the run of the place downstairs. That's their kind of their living room. They never changed that, the parlour. You couldn't go in there.' Similarly, Aishling described how she and the other chamber maids were consigned to the downstairs kitchen to each breakfast: 'We'd sit in the kitchen. All these waiters and us. We had to go downstairs for us breakfast. Couldn't stay upstairs - that was banned.'

Interestingly, coats served the dual role of communicating constraints (where badges and other emblems suggested a conferment of rights) and freedom (upon purchase as a mode of personal expression fashion choice). Just after her sixteenth birthday, Mairéad found herself on the boat from Dublin to Liverpool with girls aged 16 and 17 from Tullamore, Co Offaly. 'They [the recruitment company] paid your fare over. They just put this little badge on your coat. Put you on the train. You went to Dublin.' Crucially, however, when her income permitted, one of the first items of clothing Mairéad replaced was her coat as a vehicle through which she could assert her new identity: 'I couldn't wait to get a new coat. You would go into York the odd time and buy a coat for a pound. Now that was brilliant.' Evoking Nezlek et al's (2019) spectrum of self consciousness exemplified by clothing choice, those interviewed reported the value of dressing to impress. Clothes were also used to make that all important first impression, specifically in anticipation of neutralising a spoiled identity (Goffman 1963). Eamonn reported how, following the advice of his friend Tom, he smartened up his appearance when seeking to secure accommodation in a Blackpool vicarage. 'And I said to this fella Tom, I'm looking for some digs. And he said, "If you're going to come with me, you'll have to come in your best suit, collar and tie and your shoes polished. And that way, we'll get a good place." This proved a successful strategy with both men moving into the boarding house the same day. For others, wearing a uniform presented an opportunity to

acquire social capital which had become eroded following emigration from Ireland. This was despite the way in which uniforms are visual representations of wider power relations at the micro and macro level (Craig, 2007). For Eimear, the mandate to wear a uniform following promotion in a Leicester psychiatric hospital was such an important part of her sense of self that it led to a sustained professional identity spanning some 50 years. She recalled: 'I was a supervisor with a uniform and everything. I was in charge of catering, domestic work and portering. It was a brilliant place to work. Stayed there until I retired when I was 73.'

Some props worn by those interviewed epitomised the nuanced nature of impression management. Sunglasses are a case in point. Brown (2015) has argued that sunglasses carry connotations of modernity and 'outsider cool'. Additionally, sunglasses enable the wearer to view the world literally through a lens whilst, at the same time, maintaining an illusion of anonymity. In Goffman (1963) parlance, they permit enough visual access to suggest engagement with fellow citizens whilst enabling the gazer to withdraw visual engagement when s/he sees fit. Based on a cursory glance, Charles' newly acquired sunglasses were suggestive of a cosmopolitan lifestyle which epitomised, as Brown (2015) has observed, being 'cool'. Yet Charles wore his new eyewear out of necessity following surgical intervention: 'I had an eye operation and I was told to wear these dark glasses and this was a bit unique in them days, 'cos everyone wears dark glasses now but at that time (1960s) nobody except real pop stars wore dark glasses. I felt great in them. I kept them on at night even when I went out.'

Similarly, passports revealed the complexities of identity as conferred by the passport and with it the extent to which, as Salis (2019) observed, the notion of 'home' and more specifically 'homeland' is laden with complexities for the Irish diaspora. The interviewees reported how passports reiterated identity to both the passport holder his/herself and the

audiences with whom they engaged. Passports were more than an official document which pronounced citizenship and with it, a connection to a well established global diaspora. Significantly, those born in Northern Ireland may apply for both an Irish and UK passport allowing the holder the socio spatial licence to toggle between national identities in accordance with the circumstances. More pragmatically, passports confer specific rights of citizenship to the holder. In doing so, by default, they create a sense of Otherness. Seamus, born in Co Tyrone Northern Ireland, forfeited his right to a British passport. His Republic of Ireland passport was a critical to both his internal and external locus of identity. He said: 'A few years ago when you needed a visa to go to America. I was working there a few years back and my daughter said to me "Get an English passport." I said "No. I'm an Irishman 'till the day I kick the bucket."' Equally, Dublin born Eimear regarded her Irish passport as a physical and metaphorical assertion of her sociocultural identity: 'I feel Irish. I've got an Irish passport. I always tell everybody I'm Irish.'

#### Word Up: The Voice As A Means Of Communicating Sociocultural Identity

Significantly, in the case of first generation Irish immigrants in England, physical appearance belies sociocultural identity, an ambiguity which soon disappeared readily following an inaugural verbal interaction. Research has shown how a self-evident Irish accent may result in employment opportunities being restricted exclusively to what McGovern (2002: 95) describes as 'an ethnically-specific niche in the labour market'. Crucially, in respect of the Irish in Britain, it appears that those who speak with accents associated with the Irish Republic trump their northern Irish counterparts both in respect of perceptions of prestige and pleasantness, specifically the latter (Levon et al 2019). Research by Levon et al published in November 2019 showed that Southern Irish accents were ranked 12th (out of 38) placing them above any regional non-standard British accents, Northern Irish accents, however, were ranked in a similar range (22<sup>nd</sup>) to British regional accents in respect of both attributes cited

above placing these accents in the range occupied by British regional varieties (e.g. Cardiff, Nottingham, Norwich) but above both urban (Newcastle, Manchester) and ethnic (Afro-Caribbean, Indian) accents (12<sup>th</sup>). Those interviewed for this study reported an ambivalent relationship with their Irish accents. For example, Eimear adopted a number of tactics to be accepted in her new host country. Following her move to the 'mainland', she shifted how she characterised her socio spatial identity from city (Dublin) to national (Ireland): 'it was very strange when I came here first. People said to me "Where do you come from?" I always said "Dublin". I never said "Ireland." That's strange, isn't it? Now I say "I'm Irish"'. Eimear reported how, to be understood, she felt compelled to assume a new vocal aesthetic. 'I had to change my accent. 'Cos you had to. Otherwise people wouldn't have known what you were talking about. And they'd say: "Where are you from?" Eimear's experience evokes the incongruity reported by those in the Poster (2007) study whereby acquiescence with directives to modify accent by employers signified a betrayal to one's own culture. Interestingly, some of the Irish immigrants' stories revealed an innate desire to maintain their accent. Evoking Bourdieu's (1977) reflections on manifestations of cultural capital, Peter considered his accent to be an integral part of his Irish sociocultural identity: 'I never lost my accent. Why should I? Any working class person man or woman would be proud of their roots. You don't forget your roots and your feelings. That's the way I look at it anyway.' At times, however, speaking with a discernible Northern Irish accent engendered rage amongst fellow Irish immigrants from the Republic. Seamus, from Co Armagh, experienced sectarianism on his first night in England spent in a Leicester boarding house: 'And I'm lying there (in bed). And they said "Who are you?" And I said "I'm from Northern Ireland." And they said "You're a bastard orange man." And I said: "I'm not no orange man. And I'm not a bastard either."' In some cases, the Irish immigrants were denied the use of their voices entirely by those in control of their working environments. Mairéad explained how in the Catholic boarding school for boys where she worked as a domestic, any verbal communication with the teachers, monks or school boys

was strictly prohibited, compounding her sense of Otherness:. 'We couldn't speak to these boys. We would have been sent home in disgrace.'

Names may be construed as a social variable which informs how our sociocultural identity is constructed by both ourselves and others (Goffman 1964). Following emigration, the interviewees described how their Irish names were often mispronounced or replaced by the stereotypical 'Paddy.' Even Irish women were reportedly called 'Paddy'. Eileen described the nature of her social interactions with colleagues when working as a domestic in a Manchester hospital: 'They didn't want to speak to you. And some of them who did speak to you were calling you "Paddy" all the time. "Are you alright, Paddy?" "How are you doing, Paddy?" For some of those interviewed, feeling part of the community in England took time. Dómnall reported how he felt belittled by his fellow workers during his early years as a construction worker in Leicester: 'They (the English) gave you the impression that they were giving you something and you were living in their country 'cos they'd let you come in. It was that type of thing with them.' The English had that snobby way of telling you "Oh, they're Irish". You got that feeling. They didn't want to associate with you. You couldn't get on with them.'

Many of the Irish men and women interviewed found themselves challenging the spoiled identity others had preassigned to them. Stivers (2019) account of how the drunk Irish stereotype evolved over time helps to contextualise the interviewees' relationship with alcohol and, more specifically, how it shaped their everyday interactions with others. For many Irish immigrants, the consumption of alcohol simply was not as option due to lack of disposable income. Contrary to the stereotype, Padraig reported how the men with whom he shared digs would seldom frequent the pub due to lack of money: 'There was a sitting room with a fire and a table where we had the meals and we'd be smoking, nobody would be

having any money to go out for any beer cos they'd spent it all over the weekend but they sent it home to their parents, as I used to do.' Significantly, however, interviewees reported incidences whereby prejudices fuelled the cultural stereotype resulted in them being denied access to both economic and cultural capital. Seamus recalls: 'So I went to see them (the building society) when I picked this house which was close to the British Shoe Corporation. So I went down to the Temperance Building Society. During our conversation, she said to me, she said: "Mr McNamara, are you Irish or Scottish?" And I said: "I come from Northern Ireland. I'm Irish." She goes into another room and she came back again and said: "Mr McNamara, we cannot let you have the loan because you are Irish and you people are renowned for drinking. And this is a Temperance Society." They wouldn't do it today, would they?'

The varying degrees to which Ireland was framed as an irredentist nation by members of the English population (according to those interviewed) was instructive. Respondents spoke of how members of the Irish community reacted to them following the IRA terrorist campaigns in England. Siobhán recalled the **solidarity** her husband's work colleagues showed him following the IRA Birmingham pub bombings in November 1974: 'You know my husband worked with all English fellas and you remember the Birmingham bombings... well on the paper, my husband used to work for GEC and they looked after the workers and they had cabins and they were heated for when you had a break and they all used to take the papers out and have a read and a cup of tea. But when this Birmingham (pub bombings in 1974) thing happened, it was 'the Irish bastards' on the headline of the paper they use to get, I think it was 'The Mirror' or something. He said not one of them opened the paper. I never seen a man so emotional. He couldn't get over it. They did that for him.' Conversely, others were treated harshly by those they encountered in England. Conversely, in the wake of the Birmingham bombings, Gerard described how one customer in the football club where he



worked as a barman accused him of performing the role of the benign Irishman: 'Yer man said to me "I don't, I don't ever again want to see you for what you've done." I looked at him and I says "I've done nothing. What are you on about?" "Well", he says, "You're like 'em all", he says, "You just pretend." '

Crucially, the research has also revealed instances whereby members of the Irish community were treated with respect and compassion by neighbours and colleagues alike. The financial and emotional support Seamus received from his work colleagues after his house was burgled two weeks before the birth of his first child forced him to reassess the negative views he had formed of his Coventry work colleagues: 'Well, I got egg on my face alright. And I'm thinking "I'm the boy who didn't like English." These were brilliant people.'

## Concluding Reflections

Erving Goffman's preoccupation was to show how identity was performed and managed in everyday life through the medium of impression management. Those interviewed slipped between front and backstage performances, the former perhaps most in evidence in the work place and the latter when they were aware from the gaze of those they believed would judge them unfavourably. Actions, therefore, were at times intended to deflect anticipated negative reactions of others following presentation. Efforts to restore self took place elsewhere. Significantly, in some cases, the back stage arena held restorative qualities enabling Irish men and women to reclaim cultural pursuits, social practices and reunion with self(selves). Furthermore, the importance of visual and aural cues in understanding Irish men and women's experiences of immigration to the 'mainland' during the 1950s and 1960s has been highlighted. Specifically, the analysis reveals the importance of sensory and temporal aspects of impression management for Irish immigrants as a means of fuelling the sociological imagination. Home as phenomenologically experienced in both

Ireland and England evoked strong reactions from those interviewed. Some formed an instant connection with their new 'scene' that they did not countenance returning to Ireland at all. For others, immigration breached their strong attachment to Ireland as place and created a yearning to return to an Ireland which never was. The reimagined Irish landscape, notably the lure of the rugged Atlantic coastline and the potent aroma of smelling turf, exemplified the enduring importance of 'home.' Equally, the sensuous nature of bodily movements enshrined in dance, music and song all and engagement with leisure activities in England intended to replicate the dance and song of Ireland, moved beyond mere reminiscences. These experiences enabled those interviewed to reconnect with their land of birth on existential, psychological, cultural and emotional levels.

Broadly speaking, Goffman positioned himself beyond a microsociological level of analysis. Yet the oral histories reviewed here allowed for a hermeneutically informed analysis which revealed these more reflexive and metaphysically shaped 're-presentations' of self congruent with the social and moral order. When viewed collectively, these technologies of selves provide a conceptual conduit between micro and meta narrative representations of the Irish immigration experience in England. The findings here reveal the interface between citizenship and sociocultural identity exemplified by both props (corporeal modifications) and accents as sign vehicles. The analysis shows how many fundamental facets of 'performative Irishness' have been modified or eradicated altogether to the point where the essence of identity is contested or indeed appears to have been vanished entirely. Furthermore, the props used by interviewees were not extravagant in nature. Nor were their everyday behaviours laden with grand gestures in an effort to assert their sociocultural identity. Rather, the analysis here reminds us of the potency of modest corporeal accessories, notably sunglasses, coats and jewellery, in counteracting discursive pressures experienced upon immigration. If taken on face value, these props communicated little to the impartial observer.

Yet they were laden with cultural potency for the wearer. Passports held a particular symbolic poignancy for Irish men and women as they both asserted citizenship but accentuated Otherness. Furthermore, the sign vehicle of accent proved contentious. For some, being born in Northern Ireland proved a double edged sword. If they self presented as British, their assimilation may well have been faster in their new host country. But speaking with a Northern Irish accent risked provoking a sectarian reaction from fellow Irish immigrants who spoke with an accent associated with the Republic. Either way, despite the increasingly pluralist nature of English society at the time, it was accent which often first signalled difference between the Irish immigrants and people in their host country. The evidence suggests that those interviewed pre-empted an adverse welcome and sought to minimise the impact of this by dressing up when necessary or, more frequently, took the path of least resistance by occupying the shadows of citizenship. Ultimately, this review of identity work shows the enduring importance of Goffman's work in revealing previously undisclosed aspects of Irish sociocultural identity. When framed as such, oral history as a distinct method itself becomes a rhetorical revolving door which enables the narrator to consider both front and backstage behaviours. Whatever the relative emphasis, the freedom to recount one's story of immigration enables the narrator to assign meaning to their experiences and feelings with impunity thereby facilitating the reconstruction of a fluid and authentic sense of both self and selves.

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