

11-25-2008

Remembering Gregory Stone

David Franks
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Franks, D. (2008). Remembering Gregory Stone. In Dmitri N. Shalin, *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives* 1-7.

Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives/24

This Interview is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Interview in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Interview has been accepted for inclusion in Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Remembering Gregory Stone

David Franks

This interview with David Franks, professor emeritus of sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University, was recorded at the ASA meeting in Boston on August 2, 2008. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Dr. Franks corrected the transcripts and gave his approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information appears in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as "[?]". The interviewer's questions are shortened in several places.

[Posted 11, 25-08]

Shalin: Today is August 2, 2008. David Franks has kindly agreed to share with me some interactionist lore. I am intrigued by what you said about Greg Stone. Apparently you had some memorable encounters with the man. How did you come to know Stone?

Franks: I was teaching at the Mankato State College. Important to the people close to me was the fact that I was from the South and that there was such a thing as a Southern liberal. I experienced people characterizing this both positively and negatively. At any rate, I ended up at the graduate school of sociology at the University of Minnesota. Can't remember exactly how I first. . . . Well, by that time everybody read *Presentation of Self*. . . .

Shalin: When was that?

Franks: The year was 1963-1964 – no, the year was 1964, for sure. At the time, I was older than most people at the graduate school. One time, I cannot remember how or why, I encountered Gregory Stone in the hall. I knew his name. I knew students who knew him and felt comfortable with him. I stopped to say something, but I cannot remember what it was. He asked me if I had an appointment, making abundantly clear that I was not to bother him with some formal introduction. I have never really resonated very well with authority, especially coming from the south where there was so often little to look up to, so this [encounter] put a bad taste in my mouth, for sure. Also, what predisposed me to be suspicious of Greg – and I was suspicious – was that I come up from the South where I knew many tyrants. Somehow that was always in the back of my mind then. That is how I interpreted things. Greg reminded me a little of these tyrants who like to put people down.

That was the first time [we met]. The next time, I remember we were at the roof-top of some restaurant in Minnesota. Harvey Farberman, Dick Travisano,

and maybe Bill Yoels were also there. These were graduate students who would go out with Greg to have a drink on Friday night. Greg was a pretty heavy drinker. I was new on the scene, and he asked me about my wife. People don't usually just start asking you about your wife in physical terms about body parts, but he did. And he asked if she was good looking. I said, "Well, I think so." And I just couldn't believe anyone would just say what he did then, because these were not modern times when the language is the way it is now. He said something to the effect that he was interested in having sex with her and I exploded. I mean, you wouldn't even say f--k in public back then. This was a private thing, and he said this about my wife! I couldn't believe it. I said, "What in the world do you think you are saying?"

Shalin: So you really confronted him.

Franks: I jumped up and actually was going to smack him. . . . Ah, but that is [another part of the] story, you know – Southern honor, violence, ugly things. I was brought up in the Deep South, and believe it or not, once believed [in those things]. When I was in grade school if anybody called me "son of a bitch," I would hit him. I'd feel like I *had* to hit him. It's a terrible thing, but anyway. . . . Yea, that had a lot to do with what it was all about. Harvey grabbed me and told me to calm down, which really sent me in a rage, 'cause to me all justice in the world had been broken. This was apocalyptic to me. And for Harvey to tell me to sit down after what Greg just said – I couldn't believe it. Whatever happened after that, I didn't hit Greg, thank God. I think they let it pass and [didn't go after me] because I was from the South and I think they just saw it as cultural.

Shalin: They cast you as a kind of. . . .

Franks: Yea, "Jonny rebel" – the term that I absolutely hate. At any rate, all that in Minnesota worked in my favor. I got invited to all sorts of places to give talks, got big money to tell them that they were not that different from the Mississippians, and then they wouldn't want to pay me. Later, Greg was very interested that I was a liberal Mississippian and wanted to write with me about being from the south – or so he said. It [was all] resolved. I felt he was really seductive, but when it came down to [collaborating], he really didn't want to do it: didn't have time for it, didn't remember, or something like that.

Shalin: Did he respond to your outburst?

Franks: He probably laughed it off. I don't think he even remembered it.

Shalin: Did you patch the relationship with him? How did things evolve between the two of you after this episode?

Franks: As I said, he was a little seductive.

Shalin: Was he a charmer?

Franks: I imagine you might say that. I think he tried to be that way. He wanted students, he wanted me to be one of his students.

Shalin: So you worked with him.

Franks: No, I never worked with him. I never would have – absolutely not.

Shalin: Yet, he wanted you to be his student.

Franks: He kept asking me. He wanted me to write about the South.

Shalin: A study?

Franks: It was kind of complementary for a graduate school to be asked to write by someone from the University of Minnesota. It could go to your head. People didn't publish that much when they were in graduate school back then. But there was no way I would have ever worked with him. He made me extraordinarily nervous. A friend of mine told me, "David, it is Greg's problem, not yours. He breaks rules that you honor – that's why you are nervous." That was really helpful. The guy's name was Denny Brissett. It was nerve-wrecking and that helped.

What happened later – maybe a year and half later or something like that – Greg called me up and wanted to go fishing. Now, with Greg you never knew what he would be like. He could be loving – well, not loving, but he could embrace you one minute, and then he would be angry with you the next. I think that's fair to say.

Shalin: Running hot and cold?

Franks: Yea, but you have to be careful when you are talking that way. I cannot remember specific cases, but that's how I remember things. So he wanted to go fishing. He wanted to go fishing in the boundary water in the deep lakes. When he talked to me on the phone, I had an image in my mind of a big aluminum round bottom fishing boat that capsizes very easily. And Greg was bound to be drinking an awful lot and he would be problematic and I wasn't good at talking my way out of those situations.

Shalin: He was a heavy drinker?

Franks: Yes, very much so. He published with Harvey and Ed Gross, for example, because he drank too much to do it by himself – or that was my impression. When I knew him he really didn't publish that much. Sensing that I would perhaps end up challenging him one way or the other, [for he had] a kind of love-hate relationship with me, I was not about to get into [a boat with him]. My wife says we talked for about an hour. I would say, "No, I don't want to do it." He would say, "Why not?" I cannot remember now why I didn't tell him to ask Harvey to go [fishing] with him. But he kept asking me. I told him I was working on a paper for his class. He told me to forget the paper, not to worry about it. He wanted a fishing partner.

Shalin: How was he as a teacher?

Franks: He had his charisma, he cast a spell on at least some graduate students, certainly his followers which he did indeed have. He would say things like "the unconscious is always in the mind of another observer." People thought that was brilliant. Well that's true, but that doesn't mean it's not there. I remember some students complaining that they couldn't dialogue with him because of his drinking. He had a reputation of sexually exploiting female students who felt he was very powerful. [In this respect he was] very different from Goffman, as Gary [Fine] kept saying [in another joint interview]. You really need to talk to Gary about some of these things, because Gary knew him after that. I was an Episcopalian minister's son. I certainly had to be somewhat naive, and I think I got kidded about that. They tried to set me up with seductive women to see if I would take the bait.

There was a guy – I cannot remember his name – Ray Oldenberg. He ended up an administrator in Florida, but he was very close to Greg. Some students were very close to him. Greg would get drunk at faculty meetings and not do a good job representing them, as I remember and this happened to Ray. There were a lot of people he didn't come through for. But Harvey remained very faithful to him. Harvey's take [on Greg Stone] was that this guy got traumatized in Second World War, and we should honor that and understand that. For whatever reasons, this did not wash with me. Now that I am older and have War veteran friends who have been traumatized and suffer – being obsessive, telling the same stories over, but they don't bully people like Greg did.

Shalin: But students liked working with Greg.

Franks: They liked working with him?? They wanted to *have* worked with him maybe but he was difficult. I think many people were frustrated with

him. A lot of [students] are frustrated with their advisors but Greg gave them real reason. I wondered if Greg was trying to out-do Goffman sometimes in being frustrating and rude to those he considered intellectual underlings. Greg likes to experiment with breaking rules in public like getting into long conversations in elevator door-ways which held every one up as tedious minutes went by.

Shalin: Part of it must be the nature of a student/teacher relationship that has a built-in status inequality, the inevitable mixing of signals. . . .

Franks: Right. Harvey was always very upset that I never accepted Greg.

Shalin: Did he take it personally?

Franks: That's a good way of putting it. He told me one time: "Remember that there is a limit to our friendship because of your feelings against Greg." But I liked Harvey even though I didn't understand why he was so faithful.

Let's see – there were a couple of other things about Greg: It would be good for you to talk to Dick Travisano, 'cause he did end up with a more balanced view. He did his thesis with Greg, a very good thesis on how people change their identities. Immediate experiences – I forgot the word for it. . . .
. Everybody knew about Dick's thesis back then. Dick was a rising star with Harvey. We spent a lot of time at Greg's house. There were a lot of parties at his house and things like that. It seemed to me that several times his wife would go in her room and cry. His drinking worried her. It made me feel like things were a little sick.

So who was I going to take as an advisor? Elio Monachesi did a lot of work with MMPI – Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test. [He was] a traditional positivistic guy. I had a number of methods seminars with him. We agreed that it takes different types to make a world. There were things I liked about Elio as a person. There were things I shared with him and he shared with me. But we were totally different sociologically.

There was also Roy Francis, but he left. So I did my Ph.D. with someone [coming from] a totally different perspective than I was – namely, Elio. I was not going to get embroiled with Greg Stone. I didn't think I had sophistication to handle Greg. I knew enough not to get into it and that was enough. . . .

Shalin: Sounds like you had some incompatibilities. . . .

Franks: Well, I was shockable, and he loved that. He would put me on. I gave a talk at a meeting one time where they presented Greg with some kind

of a necklace from the South Pacific and gave him a guru status. I thought that was ludicrous. My paper was on the objective reality of perspectives or something like that. Greg broke into the talk, huffed and puffed, then said, "I have to take a leak," and left the huge audience. Then he came back and said, "There was a reality – I had to take a leak," something like that. The sociology in that escaped me, but his fans loved it, and that really burned me up!

Shalin: Would he use obscene language?

Franks: I don't remember. Maybe not so much in a public forum, more like in a restaurant.

Shalin: Did you ever observe Erving Goffman?

Franks: No. We had one of the first emotion sections at the Easterns [Sociological Association] . . . but we didn't see him because he never showed up for the meeting in his honor.

Shalin: That was about 1979?

Franks: No, that had to be the early 80s. 1979 was the very beginning of the sociology of emotions. Harvey put on the first conference on emotions at Stonybrook then. A couple of classic articles came out in 1979.

Shalin: The whole meeting was in Erving's honor?

Franks: I can't remember whether it was the whole thing or . . . but our session was on [Goffman]. My memory could be faulty as to the date, but I expected Goffman to show up, a bunch of us did. Typically – by then we should have known that he wouldn't [show up].

Shalin: Was he supposed to be on the panel?

Franks: No, he wasn't on the panel, but it would have been nice.

Shalin: So no promises broken on the part of Goffman.

Franks: No. I was just a speaker on the panel. There was Harvey Farberman, Perinbanayagam, Stone, Scott, and Lyman. Lyman gave a passionate talk, Scott gave a beautiful talk. There was a lot of heartfelt discussion and some real laughs. Lyman called Harvey a Jew – or was it a Christian?? Much to everyone's surprise and puzzlement, Robert said he was innocent because he was a heathen. But that is beside the point.

Shalin: The session was on Goffman, though.

Franks: Yea. My paper was published somewhere in a German journal. I was somewhat critical. That just showed how sophomoric I was, I guess.

Shalin: Do you know Marvin Scott?

Franks: No. I had met him, but it was long ago. Marvin published in one of our very first books, the series that I had on emotions. [His talk was on] transference, and it was very good. So that's all I know.

Shalin: It is most appreciated. Thank you very much.

[End of the recording]