

11-7-2007

Goffman Turned to Me and Said With Some Surprise, “You like doing fieldwork?”

Ruth Horowitz
New York 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

Horowitz, R. (2007). Goffman Turned to Me and Said With Some Surprise, “You like doing fieldwork?”. In Dmitri N. Shalin, *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives* 1-2.
Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/goffman_archives/36

This Correspondence 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 Correspondence 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 Correspondence 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 Erving Goffman

Ruth Horowitz:

Goffman Turned to Me and Said With Some Surprise, “You like doing fieldwork?”

Dr. Ruth Horowitz, Professor of Sociology at the New York University, wrote this memoir at the invitation of Dmitri Shalin and gave her approval for posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives.

[Posted 11-07-07]

November 2007

New York was the site of my second ASA meeting and was the end of my third year in graduate school. Fred Davis of UCSD invited me to have a drink in the Hilton bar where a number of people I knew by name only were gathered by the window. After about a half an hour Erving Goffman got up to say he had to leave. I immediately rose to move my chair so that he could leave the cluster, but to my surprise before I could move the chair he stepped on it and agilely jumped over the back. “Erving,” I demanded, “come back and wipe off the chair so I can sit down.” He turned, stared at me, whipped out a handkerchief and made a production of wiping it clean. Before he took off he made a statement in the form of a question, “You’re a graduate student?”

That evening Fred invited me again to join him and several other people for dinner in what I recognized as a fancy Chinese restaurant with white table clothes. The center of the round table revolved where the waiters put all the dishes so that all could reach each one by spinning the disc. I was seated next to Professor Goffman. In the middle of my fieldwork I told him excitedly about my findings and adventures. He turned to me and said with some surprise, “You like doing fieldwork?” I remember being a bit taken back as I thought everyone who did fieldwork liked doing it. Adept at using chopsticks (he did not comment upon my less than fortuitous use but clearly noticed), he was less agile when it came to lighting cigarettes. A woman on the other side of the round table that sat eight took out a cigarette. He immediately took out a lighter, leaned across the table, nearly upsetting all the dishes in the middle and lighted her cigarette.

The following day I bumped into him in the hotel lobby. I was wearing what was then a popular style- a shirt tied slightly above the waist of my pants. He stared and informed me that I couldn’t wear that. I pointed to a woman I understood he knew wearing a similar style. He explained, “She is a Professor.”

Several years later I arrived in Toronto for the ASA meetings on a flight that also carried Goffman and my dean at the time, Helen Gouldner. As we descended from the plane, she spotted Goffman and asked him if he would like to join us in a taxi ride to the hotel. He did. Helen began to introduce me to Goffman. He interrupted, "I know her."