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## Dmitri Shalin Interview with Robin Room about Erving Goffman entitled "Only Someone Who Had Trouble with Sociability Would Be So Keen an Observer"

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## Remembering Erving Goffman

### Robin Room: Only Someone Who Had Trouble with Sociability Would Be So Keen an Observer

This conversation with Robin Room was recorded over the phone on July 16, 2009. Robin Room is a Professor in the School of Population Health of the University of Melbourne and the Director of the AER Centre for Alcohol Policy Research at Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia. <sup>1</sup> After Dmitri Shalin transcribed the conversation, Dr. Room edited the transcript and approved posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives. Breaks in the conversation flow are indicated by ellipses. Supplementary information and additional materials inserted during the editing process appear in square brackets. Undecipherable words and unclear passages are identified in the text as “[?]”.

[Posted 07-29-09].

**Room:** Hello, it's Robin.

**Shalin:** Greetings, Robin. This is Dmitri. How are you?

**Room:** Good.

**Shalin:** I understand it will be fine if I record our talk and send you the transcript for further work.

**Room:** Sure.

**Shalin:** Great. Did you have a chance to see any of the materials posted in the Goffman archives? Do you have any idea what we are trying to do?

**Room:** No, all I have is the email from Sherri Cavan, just a couple of paragraphs on [exploring] Goffman, but also people around him, particularly the connection I had with Sky Goffman.

**Shalin:** Yes, that's what we do. We have a few dozen conversations and memoirs about Goffman and people of his era, his colleagues and friends. There is no overarching plan; each conversation follows its own trajectory, so you can take it wherever

you want. You can start with yourself, for instance, your path to social science, how you encountered Goffman.

**Room:** Sure.

**Shalin:** When did you first hear about Goffman and read his works?

**Room:** It's hard for me to remember that. Basically, I came to Berkeley in 1960 as a graduate student in English literature. I was in the department of English lit, which in those days was very much new criticism. I took a course in sociology of literature that was taught by Leo Lowenthal, and it wasn't until later that I figured out this wasn't really sociology. I figured that it wasn't literature out rather quickly; it wasn't literature that he was teaching; he was basically teaching intellectual history [**laughing**]. That was sort of my bridge to sociology. Then I took a graduate course in how to be a grad student in sociology, which in those days was a year of survey research, and then transferred into sociology as a grad student. That was in 1962, roughly speaking. I didn't really have much connection with Goffman himself. I never took a course from him. I must have read *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and so forth in that period. The main connection was that on the strength of the survey course I took for a year I got a summer job at something called "The California Drinking Practices Study." I was actually hired by Walter Clark who actually was one of Erving Goffman's students, and Genevieve Knupfer was his boss. So I started as a very young research assistant in summer of 1963, in June of '63.

Sky Goffman was already there as a research assistant or associate or whatever they would have called her. She was just a very friendly and helpful person who was into everything in the office. At that point in the game, they had done the survey in San Francisco of the general population sample, and then six months later decided that it was going to become a longitudinal study. Another guy and I were set to the task of finding out who it was that had been interviewed six months before in a particular household, for we had the addresses. And of course you find a lot of dirty linen in the survey research fieldwork at that point. Interviewers get tired of

sitting around, waiting for the right person to come out [**laughing**], and so forth. Sky was really into everything around the office, doing editing of papers, helping us with the fieldwork stuff, and so forth. She was really a kind of mentor to me in that job. What I knew about her was that she was a daughter of a newspaper owner. She was quite vivacious, took to urging us to come up to their house for drinks on Friday afternoons, and so forth. Of course, Erving himself was fairly . . . not a very sociable person [**laughing**]. This clearly was rubbing him the wrong way, from what I could see as a young innocent. And eventually people would say Sky was bipolar, a manic-depressive. At some point, I remember, Erving came to us on one Friday occasion and sort of saying urgently, "Can't you see my wife is a sick woman? Will you please leave?"

**Shalin:** And that happened at their house.

**Room:** Yes, up in the Berkeley Hills. So I was up at that house, oh, maybe four or six times altogether, you know, always in the context of workplace parties where Sky had gathered a few folks. What I know beyond that, basically. . . . Well, Genevieve Knupfer was a psychiatrist; I don't know how much she was involved in Sky's treatment; probably not. Sky was away for a while, off sick, then when she was coming back committed suicide, jumped off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. Genevieve, who knew much more about that stuff than I did, said, "Often what happens when people come out of the depression, they get energy together to commit suicide." That is, basically, my connection with Sky, in the workplace as a very junior person. I had a very positive experience with her.

**Shalin:** You mentioned your colleague who knew more about psychiatry.

**Room:** Genevieve Knupfer – K-n-u-p-f-e-r. She was an overall boss of the project. She had a Ph.D. from Columbia where she worked with Paul Lazarsfeld, and she also then went to medical school and got qualifications in psychiatry.

**Shalin:** I see. I don't think I've heard that name.

**Room:** She is dead now. She lived in Palo Alto and had a practice there, and as well she worked half time as the head of the Drinking Practices Study. There was a real friendship network that included Ira Cisin – did you run into this name? He was a statistical sociologist.

**Shalin:** I think I've heard this name.

**Room:** He and the Goffmans and a couple of other people used to go up to count cards at Lake Tahoe casinos, and they made a lot of money. I remember Sky came back after one weekend with a bright red Jaguar XK-E which was the proceeds from counting cards in black jack at Reno, or actually at the Tahoe casinos. I think eventually they got barred from the casinos, because once they caught you counting cards, they consider that unfair [**laughing**].

**Shalin:** Which is a funny thing, really. It's like telling to a chess payer you cannot count ahead too far.

**Room:** Yes, exactly. That was a period in which Goffman and the other guys were making quite a lot of money doing that.

**Shalin:** This is very interesting. I am jotting down some questions, but please go ahead, say whatever comes to mind. I'll come back to it later.

**Room:** Well, Genevieve was not part of that. She was hired by Ira Cisin, who had been the original head of the California Drinking Practices study and then went back to George Washington University. But Cisin and Goffman, and I think Sky, knew each other well. Genevieve had quite a collection of old friends in Palo Alto, and then there were people like Dean Manheimer, who ran a parallel project to ours [that had to do with] drugs, drug medications, actually, psych medications. They were all sort of lefties in the 50s. Some of them, like Dean Manheimer and my later boss Don Cahalan, got blacklisted from working on government-funded research. They did market research work and so forth. So there was a network that I knew a little bit about, but basically I was from a much younger generation.

**Shalin:** If we could go back to your first contact with Schuyler, how would you describe her appearance, manner of dress? For instance, how tall was she?

**Room:** My impression of her was that [she was] slightly taller than Erving.

**Shalin:** How tall would you say Erving was?

**Room:** God! [**laughing**].

**Shalin:** I know it might be hard to judge.

**Room:** I am 5'9, and my impression was that he was a couple of inches shorter.

**Shalin:** I see.

**Room:** Schuyler might have been about my height, 5'8 or 5'9. She wasn't really tall, you know. She was quite thin. I am the last one to ask how people dress. My impression was that she wore casual clothes but actually dressed pretty smartly. Certainly, she did not stand out.

**Shalin:** I have heard that she had a smart car, something like Jaguar.

**Room:** Well, yes. The Jaguar I know about [**laughing**] – and there might have been other [cars]. The Jaguar I know about was the one from the winnings from Lake Tahoe.

**Shalin:** Did they win a car prize or buy it from the earnings they had made at the casino?

**Room:** I think they probably bought the car with the money [they won].

**Shalin:** Do you know that Erving might have trained to be a dealer?

**Room:** Aha!? No, I didn't know that.

**Shalin:** I heard this from Mel Kohn who had answered a letter from the Las Vegas sheriff inquiring about Goffman.

**Room:** [Laughing]

**Shalin:** Back to Sky, she was a smart dresser, had a taste in cars. How did she present herself in public – was she likely to take center stage, was she retiring?

**Room:** She was neither of those. I mean, certainly not retiring. I thought of her as very down to earth and straightforward.

**Shalin:** Confident?

**Room:** Um, in ordinary interactions she was confident. I am not sure how confident she was of herself as a researcher.

**Shalin:** Was she serious about her professional interests, her research, or was she just glad to be part of a team?

**Room:** I am thinking about it.

**Shalin:** Because she finished all but dissertation at the University of Chicago. She wrote a Master's thesis that one of her teachers wanted to publish, some chapters from it.

**Room:** M-m-m.

**Shalin:** You knew nothing about that.

**Room:** I knew nothing about that. . . . I think she liked the process of research. My impression of her was that she wasn't a natural born scholar, you know, the kind locking herself in the library. I really don't have much of an impression beyond that. Writing that she was part of at the Drinking Practice Study was collective work. I don't think she was doing the first draft, you know.

**Shalin:** Right. But her name shows up on some papers put out by the group.

**Room:** Right.

**Shalin:** You wouldn't happen to have a reference to that paper? I saw it mentioned somewhere on the web, but it looked like it might be hard to get a hold of.

**Room:** Yes. You can get it at the library here at the ARG. I think [it must be] Report No. 6 of the old drinking practices study [**laughing**]. I can send you the reference if you want.

**Shalin:** I would appreciate that. Of course, one cannot be sure which part of the report she contributed to.

**Room:** It was actually finished right when I arrived at the office around '63.

**Shalin:** Now, you said that Sky . . .

**Room:** When did she die?

**Shalin:** She committed suicide in April of 1964.

**Room:** So it was not very long after [I arrived]. I first met her in June '63.

**Shalin:** You knew her less than a year.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** You said she would go through certain periods – did you spot anything unusual in her behavior?

**Room:** Well, the only thing I ever saw was that she was a little bit hyper.

**Shalin:** How did it manifest itself?

**Room:** The main thing I remember is her pressing us all to come up and have a drink on Friday afternoon up in their place, which was bit beyond what we would have expected.

**Shalin:** And that struck you as odd, even though on the surface it might have looked benign.

**Room:** Yes. It may be that I am thinking retrospectively, you know, after Goffman came up and growled at us to get out.

**Shalin:** Was she insistent that her colleagues come over?

**Room:** Yes, she was insistent.

**Shalin:** Who would show up at those gatherings?

**Room:** Certainly, Walter Clark.

**Shalin:** By the way, is he still around?

**Room:** Yes, he lives in Mendocino County.

**Shalin:** Do you know how I can contact him?

**Room:** I was meaning to ask before you called, but I haven't. There is someone here who is a good friend of his. He would be a good person for you to interview, because he was a Goffman student. He got most of the draft of his dissertation done, and then he threw it in a fireplace.

**Shalin:** Really!?! What happened?

**Room:** He got a writing, getting-it-out block. He did really an excellent piece of work going around with Berkeley police, essentially.

**Shalin:** Under Goffman's supervisions?

**Room:** Under Goffman's supervision, yes.

**Shalin:** And never defended.

**Room:** Never finished it.

**Shalin:** And the reason was the writing block, not anything that had to do with his committee.

**Room:** I think it was writing, whatever you want to call it. He was a perfectionist and wouldn't let it out.

**Shalin:** I see. Just couldn't live up to his own standards.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** So Walter, yourself – anyone else would come to those parties?

**Room:** There was Peter Chroman, an anthropologist, C-h-r-o-m-a-n. I don't know where he is. If Ira Cisin was in town, he would be there. . . . He is dead. Who else was there?

**Shalin:** Does the name Rodney Stark ring any bell?

**Room:** Yes, I know him otherwise, but I don't know him through this connection. . . . I knew him in several ways. He was at the Survey Research Center, which was important on that end of sociology. But, no, he was not in that group.

**Shalin:** He had some interactions with Schuyler and knew about the parties at her house, but I don't think he took part. One thing he mentioned was that Schuyler helped Erving with his work, with editing. You don't have any insights on that score.

**Room:** No. I mean, it's believable, but I don't have any knowledge, really.

**Shalin:** So she would invite her coworkers, and would Erving be around during those get-togethers?

**Room:** I am remembering the total of, probably, three times. I think he usually was there, but he wasn't visible. We would carry on at the party, and he would be somewhere else.

**Shalin:** He wasn't sticking around.

**Room:** That's my memory. It is a bit shaky.

**Shalin:** And the party itself involved small talk . . .

**Room:** Yes, we would sit around, look at the view, talk, and then within a couple of hours people would take off.

**Shalin:** And how was Schuyler at those parties?

**Room:** Well, she was a gracious hostess, really vivacious.

**Shalin:** If you don't mind asking me, was she attractive?

**Room:** Yes. She wasn't flirting, you know. But she was an attractive person. . . . Their kid was around. They had a kid who was about ten.

**Shalin:** Tom Goffman

**Room:** Uh?

**Shalin:** Erving and Schuyler's son?

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Have you ever met him?

**Room:** In those contexts, yes.

**Shalin:** Do you remember him?

**Room:** He was just a kid on the edge of things.

**Shalin:** No memorable interactions.

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** So one day Erving came in and told you to take off?

**Room:** That happened once. [He did it] out of Schuyler's earshot and vision, sort of.

**Shalin:** He was not confrontational.

**Room:** No. Just, "Can't you see my wife is a sick person? Will you please leave?"

**Shalin:** Was Erving calm, was he angry?

**Room:** Urgent.

**Shalin:** And you got the sense you might be out of place.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Did you see that he had a point?

**Room:** Um . . . it's really hard for me to remember what my frame of mind was then. My wife at that time, who actually came to work at the Drinking Practices Study, I think she may have been there at least one time. . . .

**Shalin:** Sorry to interrupt you, do you think she may remember something?

**Room:** I'll ask her, but I very much doubt it. . . . My memory is that when Goffman said that [to those present], we looked at each other and said, "Look, we really have got to go."

**Shalin:** Sky may not have even realized that Erving interfered.

**Room:** No, she might not have.

**Shalin:** Somebody mentioned that Schuyler might have been a patient at St. Elizabeth's when Erving was doing research there.

**Room:** I have no idea.

**Shalin:** Jordan Scher who worked at the NIMH at the time said in his memoir that Sky tried to commit suicide in the 1950s. It is easy to read symptoms into a person once you learned she had committed suicide, but so far as you can tell, were there hints at Sky's mental health issues when you'd known her?

**Room:** The only thing that I have is this kind of hyper [attitude] when she insisted on our coming up on Friday evenings, and that one time when Goffman – which must have been the last time I went there – telling us to leave. That’s the only thing. And then I knew somehow that when Sky was off work – which must have been after Christmas in the beginning of 1964 – that was [because of] depression. I didn’t ever see anything that looked to me like depression, but that’s what I’d been told.

**Shalin:** I see, somebody told you that. And when Sky committed suicide, that seemed more than plausible.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** You had a chance to observe Erving as well, at least fleetingly?

**Room:** In a very general way, because I was a sociology student. These were the 60s, after all, and sociology was generally on the side of the Free Speech Movement and all the stuff that went on shortly after that. I was involved with student politics at Berkeley in the period before the Free Speech Movement. He [Goffman] probably knew of me vaguely because of that. Now, another memory I have of Erving is the year when Jackie Wiseman won whatever prize she won.

**Shalin:** The C. Wright Mills Award?

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** For *Stations of the Lost*, the book that came out of her dissertation.

**Room:** Right. There was a dinner at the American Sociological Association the night after she won the award, or the night she won the award. There was a celebratory dinner with all of Goffman’s students there and Goffman sitting at one end of the table. Somehow I ended up at the other end of the table, even though I wasn’t one of Goffman’s students [**laughing**].

**Shalin:** Any memories of Goffman at this gathering?

**Room:** Y-e-e-e-s. He was in very good spirits, very celebratory, not only of Jackie but all his students, so to speak. But he kind of disconcerted them because he said, "Well, we had our innings. This was our big moment" [**laughing**].

**Shalin:** Did he mean, "You cannot do any better than that"? [**laughing**].

**Room:** Yes, it was like at the moment of a triumph for the movement, for their point of view. This is as far as we can go, so to speak. And several people at the table – Lofland was there, I think

. . .

**Shalin:** John Irwin?

**Room:** Yes, he was there too. I remember it was Lofland or someone or other who was quite disconcerted that Goffman had seen it so much in the light of history.

**Shalin:** You wouldn't remember when it was? It is probably easy to find out.

**Room:** It is easy to find out. That's when Jackie won C. Wright Mills award. It would have been the late 60s, I think.

**Shalin:** Right, right.

**Room:** He wasn't at Berkeley then.

**Shalin:** Erving left Berkeley in 1968.

**Room:** Yes, it was after that.

**Shalin:** So the mood was festive, he presided over the gathering. Was it a formal ceremony or an informal dinner?

**Room:** Someone organized it, but it wasn't formal.

**Shalin:** And there were mostly Erving's students.

**Room:** I was friends with a couple of them, including Jackie Wiseman, and thus was included.

**Shalin:** Do you remember how the news about Schuyler's suicide was received?

**Room:** I was shocked. We were . . .

**Shalin:** It came as a surprise.

**Room:** All I remember was Genevieve Knupfer, the psychiatrist, saying that when people are coming out of depression, they get the energy together to do something like that.

**Shalin:** That's when they can fly off the handle for good.

**Room:** Yes. That's the only thing I remember anyone around saying at the time.

**Shalin:** You were not in a position to observe Erving's reaction.

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** Anything else about Erving, his self-presentation style that you remember?

**Room:** There were grad students' stories about him. . . . I remember someone – and I can't vouch for the truth – he wasn't terribly approachable as a professor. He husbanded his time. Someone at his class asked him about his office time which professors were supposed to have. And he said, "Oh, office hours. Well, I guess we can take an hour off class meetings and make it into an office hour."

**[Laughter]**

And that was as far as he was willing to bend on that.

**Shalin:** I've heard that he would meet graduate students at his home.

**Room:** Yes, I wasn't up in that circle to really [be there].

**Shalin:** Any other tales of Goffman?

**Room:** No, probably Walter Clark could help you with that.

**Shalin:** On the gambling ventures, you say Erving and Sky were good at it.

**Room:** Oh, yes. They were counting cards back in the days when that was a relatively new phenomenon.

**Shalin:** And you know about this second- or third-hand, right?

**Room:** Y-e-e-e-h. Somehow I knew that there was a group of four of them that went out to Tahoe. Ira Cisin was one of them. He would go there on a particular weekend.

**Shalin:** And it was known that they were good at it.

**Room:** Yes. I mean I knew that they could regularly win against the casinos playing black jack.

**Shalin:** And the house eventually got their number and put them into the black book.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** In Reno or throughout Nevada?

**Room:** I don't know. I think it was casino by casino. I don't think there was any general thing.

**Shalin:** Now they have a state-wide bar.

**Room:** [In those days] if they were barred in one place, they could go to another.

**Shalin:** They would go to Reno and Las Vegas?

**Room:** I think they were going mostly to Tahoe.

**Shalin:** It was closer.

**Room:** That's right.

**Shalin:** Did you have any other interactions with Erving besides that C. Wright Mills award dinner?

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** You have lost track of Erving, and know nothing in particular about his death.

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** Robin, I am grateful for your time and will let you go soon. If I may, I would like to ask your opinion about Erving's self-presentation in light of his research on presentation of self. Once he discovered the con-artistry at the core of our existence, this might have posed a dilemma for him on how to behave in public, how not put up a phony front. I am wondering if Erving's abrasiveness might have been a response to this dilemma, if his refusal to put the conventional foot forward was his way of remaining authentic in the world where everybody was anxious to put the show on and come across as a conformist. See what I am getting at?

**Room:** That is not what I thought at the time – and I am not saying you are wrong. My conclusion, and again I am not sure if that is what somebody told me or I reached this conclusion myself, was that he was an extremely asocial person, a person that had a lot of trouble with sociability, and that only someone who had a lot of trouble with that would be so keen and detailed an observer. So, my theory was almost the other way around [**laughing**]. Being sociable is not something that came to him naturally. So what ordinary people would do as a matter of fact and without thinking, he had to . . .

**Shalin:** He had a handicap of sorts which he mastered by becoming a keen observer.

Now, much of Erving's writing, it seems to me, was autobiographical, beginning with his early writing on manipulating symbols of class status, adapting to a loss, cooling the mark out, then on to *Asylums* and *Stigma* and beyond. Just think about Sky's treatment as a mental health patient and Erving's interest in psychiatric institutions.

**Room:** Right. There is a very long essay . . .

**Shalin:** *Asylums*?

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** "The Insanity of Place"?

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** This essay was written after Sky committed suicide. Goffman no longer places mental illness in quotation marks in this paper the way he did in *Asylums* where the focus was on the person trapped in a mental institution. Now we learn what it is like to live with a genuinely disturbed person, someone who could grab the knife, run out the house, fly off the handle at any moment.

**Room:** Right. Absolutely.

**Shalin:** So it makes sense to you?

**Room:** Yes. [I felt] that particular essay was written out of experience. . . . I don't know, I cannot help you much on that, except that my impression of him was that of a person who was quite awkward in ordinary social interaction.

**Shalin:** With time, as he became better known, he might have overcome some of that awkwardness.

**Room:** When I knew him, he already was one of the two or three stars in the department.

**Shalin:** And yet, you saw him as someone who didn't get along easily with others, didn't have an easy time fitting himself into the interaction order.

**Room:** Right. That was my impression.

**Shalin:** He had a genuine handicap.

**Room:** No, not handicap. It's just how he was [**laughing**]. That's how I saw him.

**Shalin:** Anything else you have to add, Robin?

**Room:** No, I think we've [covered it pretty much].

**Shalin:** To conclude with Sky – she was bright, hard working . . .

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** She didn't have much of a research agenda of her own.

**Room:** That is a good question. Our office in that period had a problem, and I didn't realize it until later. Genevieve Knupfer wrote herself into a hole. It was a new field, alcohol studies; people were grappling with it; it took awhile before people learned how to be productive and get things written. This is not about Sky any longer. . . . Then Don Cahalan came along in 1968, the new boss. The thing about Don was that he was a newspaper man, and if there was a deadline, he would meet it. He didn't know whether what he produced was good or bad, but he would produce something. Even though we young Turks were dismissive of him, we learned a lot from him.

**Shalin:** This is Don?

**Room:** C-a-h-a-l-a-n. He was part of that public opinion research [scene] -- the American Association of Public Opinion Researchers, the professional group that would have included Ira Cisin and Genevieve Knupfer and all the Lazarsfeld people – neither of the Goffmans had any connection with that, so far as I know. But that was one of the circles in the background here.

**Shalin:** You wouldn't know much about the department of sociology and how Erving fit in there?

**Room:** No. Probably someone like Rod would know that.

**Shalin:** Just a few more minutes, Robin, and we will be done. Which of your teachers made an impression on you? For instance, what was Lowenthal like as a teacher?

**Room:** Lowenthal was a middle-European intellectual. I don't think I ran into anyone like that before. He was a very broad intellectual. Actually, his stepdaughter, Carol – worked for the Drinking Practices Study too. She was a coder there. . . . When I took Lowenthal's course, I really was burning out on New Criticism, that insisted on you paying no attention at all to the times in which something was written or the context of the writer. You were supposed to look only within the work itself.

**Shalin:** Formal school.

**Room:** And Lowenthal was the antithesis of that [**laughing**], and that opened up my horizons. The other thing was that when I took the course in survey research it was from Hanan Selvin and Charles Glock, and you know, they had quite an influence on me in their own ways. Selvin was a survey research guy. He went off somewhere else after '62-'63 -- in a couple of years he had gone somewhere else. He actually went blind, I think, and still kept teaching. And then Charles Glock who was head of the Survey Research Center for a long time – it's not that I learned a whole lot from him intellectually, but they certainly taught me the rudiments of survey research, which is how I have earned my living.

**Shalin:** Right, it's a craft.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** So Lowenthal was an impressive teacher.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** Do you have any memories what kind of grader he was?

**Room:** Um, all I remember is that when I switched from English to sociology . . . in English there was a strong tradition of grad students taking upper-division undergraduate courses, and they were graded separately and therefore on a separate curve by the professor rather than by the teaching assistant. In sociology it was very unusual for the grad student to be taking undergraduate courses. So in sociology I was graded enormously hard by my co-students, by teaching assistants [**laughing**]. And in fact, those undergraduate upper division sociology courses I really was quite unimpressed by. They seemed to me, quote, "one idea per hour." None of the folks teaching them were terribly good at it. They hired very good researchers at the Berkley sociology department, the whole crew that they brought in the 50s and early 60s, but they were not hired for their teaching.

**Shalin:** Did you take any classes from Blumer?

**Room:** No, I didn't, actually. But obviously Blumer was the one who did much of the hiring – mostly of folk he totally disagreed with. He built a great department, but I had very little interaction with him.

**Shalin:** What about Philip Selznick?

**Room:** I had good interactions with him, but more about student and campus politics than around actual sociology [**laughing**].

**Shalin:** Any impressions about him that you care to share with posterity?

**Room:** I had a very positive view of him, even when he and I didn't see eye to eye in terms of campus politics. Were very courteous across the barricades, so to speak.

**Shalin:** He was on the other side of the barricades?

**Room:** I am speaking metaphorically. He had an administrative role; I don't remember what it was; and it was within that role that we were defined as adversaries.

**Shalin:** No student-teacher interactions.

**Room:** No, I think I took an undergraduate course with him, but I didn't have much interaction with him.

**Shalin:** Did you take classes with Bendix?

**Room:** I didn't have much contact with him. I had very good [rapport] with Ken Bock who never made a huge name for himself, but he was quite important in several of our student careers.

**Shalin:** What is his name?

**Room:** Bock – B-o-c-k. His specialty was social Darwinism. He was really a deep thinker, I think.

**Shalin:** Did you encounter David Matza?

**Room:** Yes, sure. We had very positive interactions, but we never did anything together.

**Shalin:** Neil Smelser?

**Room:** Yes. He and I had respect for each other. Again, we were on the opposite sides of the barricades, because he was in an administrative role in that period. But he treated me with respect.

**Shalin:** Any classes you took with him?

**Room:** No.

**Shalin:** And Shibutani left before you came in.

**Room:** Yes, I never met Shibutani.

**Shalin:** Anybody else you remember?

**Room:** Oh, I had a little bit of interaction with John Clausen, the guy in the sociology of mental health. It was the closest anyone in the department came to alcohol studies.

**Shalin:** What was your overall impression of Berkeley and the department as a place to study? Did you have great experience there, an ambivalent experience?

**Room:** In the 60s Berkeley was, what should I say, a territory that formed me. I am a product to that era in terms of my way of looking at life, my politics, and the fact that I am a sociologist. It was an exciting time and an exciting place, but my view of it is broader than the sociology department.

**Shalin:** You were part of the Free Speech Movement, campus politics.

**Room:** Right – through SLATE, the campus political party that I joined in the summer of 1961.

**Shalin:** That was probably the major part of your experience.

**Room:** I am not sure about the major part, but I always say that I have learned to write by writing leaflets.

[Laughter].

**Shalin:** It's not a bad way to learn how to write. Wish more people had that kind of schooling. Robin, I am so grateful that you found time for this exercise. If you could help me track Walter, that would be great.

**Room:** Yes.

**Shalin:** And you mentioned one other person.

**Shalin:** Peter Chroman, but I have no idea how to find him. You can probably find him. He was a relative, something like a second cousin of the Swigs, who owned the San Francisco Fairmont Hotel.

**Shalin:** Robin, thank you so much.

**Room:** Sure.

**Shalin:** Bye bye.

**Room:** Bye bye.

**[End of the recording]**

1. After 18 years as a graduate student, Robin took a PhD in sociology in 1978 from the University of California, Berkeley. By then he was the Scientific Director of the Alcohol Research Group (ARG) in Berkeley, which was the successor to the California Drinking Practices Study of this memoir. He was at ARG and eventually an adjunct professor at the School of Public Health, UC Berkeley until 1991, and then the Vice-President for Research at the Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario, Canada, from 1991 to 1998. From 1999 to 2006 he was a professor and the founding director of the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs at Stockholm University. He has worked on social, cultural and epidemiological studies of alcohol, drugs and gambling behaviour and problems, and studies of social responses to alcohol and drug problems and of the effects of policy changes.