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Dmitri Shalin Interview with Rodney Stark about Erving Goffman entitled "Goffman Was Trying to Get Away with the Descriptions of Those Fairly Sane People as He Laid Out His Notion of Mental Illness"

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Remembering Erving Goffman

Rodney Stark: Goffman Was Trying to Get Away with the Descriptions of Those Fairly Sane People as He Laid Out His Notion of Mental Illness

This interview with Rodney Stark, Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences and Co-Director of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, was recorded over the phone on November 25, 2008. Dmitri Shalin transcribed the interview, after which Dr. Stark edited 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: OK, I am putting you on speaker phone. Say something, so I can see if it records your voice.

Stark: OK, is this getting through to you?

Shalin: Yes, yes, now it is recording. Good. Let me run by you a few questions I have in mind and then you can see which ones you can answer. You can start by situating yourself at Berkeley, how you came to know Goffman and his wife, Sky, a few words about their appearance. I hear rather contradictory descriptions of Goffman's height, for instance. . . .

Stark: I enrolled at Berkeley in the fall of 1960. This was a very peculiar graduate school. When I was admitted there were 125 of us, the next fall there were 23 who came back from that cohort – quite a bloodbath.

Shalin: What happened?

Stark: Mostly they flunked out. They didn't get good grades and they left. In any event, I was singled out and given a research appointment at the end of the first semester. I went to the Survey Research Center, and eventually that became a full time appointment until the fall of 1971 when I went to the University of

Washington. So, I was there for almost all of Goffman's stay at Berkeley. I believe he was an assistant professor when I arrived, and then was quickly promoted. I never liked him, let's be honest about that.

Shalin: Did you have any preconceived notion about him before you met Goffman? Were you familiar with his scholarship?

Stark: I didn't know anything about sociology. I never had a sociology course, picked it up almost [ad hoc?]. I thought, "Well, you can do almost anything and call it sociology." I probably wouldn't have survived in any other graduate school. I didn't like college as an undergraduate, and I wouldn't have liked it as a graduate if they had wanted me to be a student. But [at Berkeley] they were stressing that you stop being a student and start being a professional, which suited me very well. I didn't know anything about Goffman. I read *Presentation of self in Everyday Life*, thought it was full of little insights and was fun, though I couldn't see what was all the shouting about. Then I read *Asylums* and it made me really mad. As a high school student I worked in the summer time at the North Dakota state mental hospital. Having read the *Asylums*, I thought, "Fine, he hangs out in the gym and the outpatient ward. Who do you meet there? Patients who get ground parole and who cannot be seen [as representative of the hospital population]."

Shalin: What does it mean "ground parole" – is it a technical term?

Stark: Oh, I don't know – it means that they were free to come and go and wonder around. Some of them even could leave the ground. It struck me that Goffman was trying to get away with the descriptions of those fairly sane people as he laid out his notion of mental illness, but he didn't have the guts to talk about the people in the back wards. . . . Later on, I jumped him about that, but of course he wasn't interested.

Shalin: You mean you confronted him about this issue?

Stark: Certainly. I wasn't bashful. I said, "Fine, you can go to any mental hospital and find fairly sane people milling around, but if you

go to the back ward, you know, you will find all those people who are just dreadfully incapacitated.” Now, these days drugs have come along and we can treat a lot of these people, or at least keep them from being. . . . Well, now we just call them homeless. . . . I thought he was dishonest about mental hospitals, or else incredibly ignorant. Yet I didn’t think the latter was really the case.

Shalin: So, when you asked him, he didn’t take you on and walked away?

Stark: He said that I was just like all the rest. . . . I said, “Well, this is a pretty narrow stuff.” I did a piece of research with [someone whom] Goffman treated . . . really badly. He would call [the person] on holidays and ask why [that person] wasn’t working. Anyway, this didn’t really bother me, because he didn’t have any effect on my life, nor did I have on his.

By the way, he was extremely short. I doubt that he was. . . . Maybe, maybe he was 5’1.

Shalin: Really?

Stark: Yes. He would never stand when he lectured, he would always seat behind the desk. I noticed that his feet didn’t quite touch the floor. That’s how short he was. Well, he was extremely touchy about that. I noticed that [Charlie] Glock mentioned that Goffman would slide [?] into you and keep people kind of backing off as he kept entering their space. . . . But, some of us just don’t back up. Once he did this to me and [was so close] that I said, “Shall we dance?”

[Laughter]

It was one thing for him to do it to people. . . . I mean he had to be the prince of the room. I wasn’t very royal [?] in my view. . . . In any event, Sky [Goffman’s wife] started doing work around the Survey Research Center. Can’t quite remember which project she was [involved with]. Anyway, I got to know her and started to worry if I could help her get her damned dissertation done.

Shalin: She was into that? She had some aspirations?

Stark: Hell, she was ABD. She would have had a Ph.D. from Chicago in anthro if she finished the dissertation.

Shalin: I didn't know that.

Stark: Notice that he didn't help her finish one. In any event, we were exploring this, but I discovered very quickly that. . . . There were times when this gal would get so high she wouldn't go to bed for days.

Shalin: "Getting high" – that can mean more than one thing.

Stark: I mean "going into the manic phase." She would want everybody to come on and party and what not. That sort of things. By the way, when she just began to work at the center, a bunch of people went over there on Friday night. Goffman came home and kicked them all out. Then Sky would go into those long absences, and during one of her absences she jumped off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Shalin: Richmond. . . .?

Stark: Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, Richmond California, across the bay area. It comes right by the big prison. One of my friends pointed out that the difference between the rich people and the rest of us is that she can jump off the bridge and leave behind the brand new Jaguar XKE with its motor running. The rest of us would have been content with [?].

Shalin: That's what happened?

Stark: She stopped, got out of the car, and jumped.

Shalin: That was in 1964, I believe.

Stark: Yes, that's about right. She. . . . She was a nice woman but she was badly impaired. Today, if she took her drugs, she would probably be pretty good.

Shalin: And her husband's attitude toward her. . . .

Stark: He would not admit that she got any problems.

Shalin: How do you know this?

Stark: I brought it up with him once. He got extraordinarily angry [when I said], "For somebody who doesn't believe in mental illness, you've got to look around your house." He was not a nice guy. He could be charming, but mostly. . . . He was kind of "a kiss up, kick down guy," if you know what I mean.

Shalin: You mean he could be charming when he needed. . . .

Stark: Oh, yes, sure. He could be quite charming.

Shalin: It is the first time I hear that Sky was not only an accomplished person with big plans but that she was also an intellectual with academic interests working on her Ph.D. in Chicago. That's where they met presumably.

Stark: Right, right. What happened, I think, was that she began her dissertation, and then Goffman got his NIMH grant supporting his work at St. Elizabeth's after the graduate school. She went along with him and got dislocated. And there were real problems. She would have normal periods as bipolars do. She had so many ups and downs that it was very questionable whether she would finish her dissertation, and she never did.

Shalin: Your impression is that she was smart.

Stark: She was smart. Hell, she was very smart!

Shalin: And you think that she helped Erving in some ways. . . .

Stark: We all took for granted that she was very active in his work. I think he was the one who let this impression exist.

Shalin: I don't recall Goffman giving her much credit in his books.

Stark: Well, I am not surprised. . . . Some people at Berkeley who knew [the Goffmans] kind of. . . . We all assumed that she was pretty active in his work, and it suited her. It was a very odd relationship, but I think that she much admired his work.

Shalin: So she was one of his admirers.

Stark: Well, yea. But she was there from the start, so she probably wasn't as taken as graduate students were or various people around him. . . . She would have liked his work a lot better if she didn't know Goffman. . . .

Shalin: You mean correlating the ideas and the flesh and blood human being might give you a second thought?

Stark: Yea, because there was so much styling going on, so much written for effect. I don't know, that kind of stuff always bored me.

Shalin: My interest in Goffman is inspired by our common roots. His parents came from Russia, as I did in 1976. There is a famous story written by Anton Chekhov, a Great Russian playwright and short story writer, titled "Ward No. 6" that contains descriptions of a psychiatric ward eerily similar to what we find in *Asylums*. I was struck by the parallels.

Stark: There might be.

Shalin: I am curious if Goffman knew the Chekhov's work.

Stark: He might well have. I would be very surprised if he didn't because he was very literary in his bent. He read hell of a lot more artsy stuff than he did of sociology.

Shalin: There is one thing that Charlie Glock mentioned, and I wonder if you had heard about that. It has to do with Flo Somers, a wife of another Berkeley faculty member [Robert Somers]. She committed suicide about the same time Sky did. Charlie said he didn't remember the details, but there was a sense at the time that

these two events were connected. Do you know anything about that?

Stark: I have no idea. I didn't know these two knew each other, but they certainly could have. Suicide is so common in the academic world. God knows now many people I'd known who had committed suicide. In that part of the world you can get away with having serious problems without anyone noticing. You don't come to work for two weeks and nobody notices. You can always go far, especially as a student.

Shalin: According to Mel Kohn, Sky was seeing a psychiatrist when Goffman was in DC, at Bethesda.

Stark: I am not surprised.

Shalin: And that is how Goffman's interest in psychiatry might have started. Mel indicates, or at least that was his impression, that Goffman was mad at psychiatrists. . . .

Stark: Yes. Goffman was going on with the labeling theory according to which there is no such thing as [mental illness]. . . . My experience is that the families deny mental illness as long as they could rather than quickly labeling the people, but the disease always wins out. Goffman's own life is the demonstration of that: he denied it, but it didn't go away.

Shalin: I did notice, however, that Goffman continued to evolve throughout his life, updating his views and theories. If you compare *Asylums* to "The Insanity of Place," the paper Goffman wrote after his wife's death, you will see that. This paper was clearly autobiographical.

Stark: I am sure it was.

Shalin: That is why what you tell me about Sky's symptoms is so important: I can compare the impressions she left on people who knew her with Goffman's account. *Asylums* and *The Insanity of Place* must be considered in tandem. In this latter work Goffman acknowledges that mental illness may have "an organic origin."

Stark: About the time he and all the idiots were writing up the labeling theory of mental illness, we were discovering the biology of the awful lot of mental illness, which made it implausible for them to argue any more. Really. Goffman probably was sane enough to realize this at some point. If drugs can make people normal – come on, we have a bit of a problem here! To say that they are acting out. . . . Maybe he finally faced it.

Shalin: David Mechanic reports in one of his articles that Goffman admitted to someone at a later point that if he'd written *Aylums* today, it would have been a different book. I contacted David to check the provenance of this remark, but he could not trace it to its origin.

Stark: I am glad to hear that.

Shalin: Now, I wonder if you ever encountered Erving's son.

Stark: No, I never met him. Don't know anything about him at all.
. . .

Shalin: One thing that intrigues me, that started me on this project, is that Goffman is a student of other peoples' backstage, yet he strove to protect his own.

Stark: Sure.

Shalin: On one hand, that's life, nothing is wrong with this attitude. On the other hand, you would think he might be more self-reflexive. I felt that Goffman's theoretical concerns might mirror certain biographical strains, reflect his embodied experience.
. . .

Stark: Yea. One of the reasons he was so concerned about the front and what not, was that it was almost autobiographical. He was desperately concerned with the front and appearance and impression.

Shalin: Could you elaborate on that a bit?

Stark: OK, at a cocktail party he was enormously aggressive. He would wonder around and pull his "stand-too-close" stunt on various people. But he would also be insulting.

Shalin: Like what?

Stark: You know. . . . Go after people, wonder why they were doing the sort of work they were doing, or whatever.

Shalin: Challenging them?

Stark: He would act as a prick. I think that was in many ways [an attempt to] compensate for the fact that he was looking up to everyone in the room. You know Gertrude Selznick? She was Philip Selznick's wife. She died a few years ago. In those days she would come to the Survey Center, her husband was of course a very prominent full professor at the sociology department. And I remember one day at a party she got smashed and yelled across the room, "Erving, you son of a bitch, you are right off the page of [Thomas] Hobbes – nasty, brutish, and short". . . .

Shalin: Who was saying that to whom?

Stark: She would get mad at him and call him nasty, brutish and – short!

Shalin: Oh, I see. And how would he take such an insult?

Stark: He was really offended. Someone was not intimidated by him, and he couldn't handle it.

Shalin: You mean, if someone stood up to him, he would back off. . . .

Stark: Oh, yea. Erving meant nothing to me, and consequently, I didn't take any crap from him at all. Before I went to graduate school, I was a newspaper reporter at *Oakland Tribune* and what not. I met lots of people, and Erving didn't intimidate me. I suppose if I were one of his graduate students, I would have to take a lot of crap, but I would have never done it. I signed up for a

course from Goffman during my second year of graduate school and dropped it after two weeks because he came utterly unprepared. He also was rude to everyone in the class and I could see no reason to put up with him.

Shalin: Do you know by any chance Greg Stone?

Stark: Yea.

Shalin: I hear some stories how these two were relating to each other, ribbed each other, even getting into [altercation]. Do you know anything about that?

Stark: I vaguely recall hearing that there was some encounter. Greg Stone was a real asshole, too. He would go to meetings and spend almost all of his time in the bar. He would seat at the booth and silly ladies. . . . God, what was her name? She got her a degree at Berkeley then was at Northwestern for years. . . . Anyway, they would drag people to meet Gregory Stone. He would kind of hold court, getting drunker and drunker. I went there once, and he was a pompous drunk. I am sure he regarded Goffman as a competitor, a rival. They both liked to do clever things and call it sociology, if you will. Stone was much less successful because he was drunk so much that he didn't get a lot of work done. But I understand that he could be very insulting, especially since I think both were very touchy about the similarities in their work. And Goffman was very aggressive little guy. Very, very small.

Shalin: Several people stressed to me this last point, some delicately, some forcefully, as if he had a Napoleonic complex.

Stark: Yeas. For example, he wouldn't stand up to lecture. . . .

Shalin: He didn't like to have his pictures taken.

Stark: Yea, I did an intro textbook many years ago, and the photo researcher told me she couldn't get a picture from Goffman. I said, "Fine, we don't need him." She had obviously written to him but he told her, "No."

Shalin: Ron, how would you describe the appearance of Sky?

Stark: Sky was a damn good looking woman. Something else you should know: Charlie [Glock] doesn't understand class. The Choats [Sky's maiden name was Angelica Schuyler Choate] were vastly more upper class than the Kennedys. They were part of the old New England Protestant establishment, real close in status to the Lodges and the Adamses and the Cabots [?]. Kennedys were late comers, the Irish trash that made money.

Shalin: How you pronounce her family name?

Stark: Cho-ates. There is an extremely expensive upper class prep school somewhere in New England named after this family.

Shalin: Interesting. Goffman's first major publication was "Symbols of Class Status" where he talks about people manipulating status symbols. This piece might also be autobiographical in some ways, given his connection to Sky and her family. . . . How would you describe her height?

Stark: I would say she was 5'6. She almost always wore heels, the high heels. So she looked taller. I don't know how to allow for that because I really didn't pay a lot of attention. I am a lot taller than that, so it is a bit of a problem for me to [judge her height].

Shalin: But relative to Erving, she was clearly taller.

Stark: Oh, yes. Sure she was taller. And as I said, she always wore the high heels.

Shalin: You mentioned that Erving treated his wife not much different than he treated other people. Did you notice anything in particular?

Stark: Yes, he was often unpleasant to her. Hell, he was unpleasant to anybody, except probably to deans and the university president and that sort of people. . . .

Shalin: Charlie told me that Sky left a will establishing a foundation.

Stark: Yea.

Shalin: Do you know anything about it?

Stark: All I know is what Charlie told me at the time, that he was to serve on the foundation board. I knew nothing else about it. It was none of my business, there was nothing for us to discuss.

Shalin: I would like to know the date of her will to see if she prepared it right before her death, if she committed suicide on the spur of the moment.

Stark: I think that she did. I don't know if she did it, you know, like the week she committed suicide or a couple of years before. My guess is that when she was down, she always thought about suicide.

Shalin: As part of her bipolar syndrome?

Stark: Right. Right.

Shalin: It would be important to check. The will might be in the public domain.

Stark: I don't know if the foundation still exists. Charlie would know that.

Shalin: No, no – it's gone. It went out of business once the principal was spent. There was a lot of demand for the foundation's grants and not that much money in it, Charlie said.

Stark: She probably left Erving a reasonable amount of money.

Shalin: That would be interesting to confirm. [I've heard] that Sky stayed behind in Bethesda when Goffman had left for Berkeley, and she joined him there about a year later.

Stark: That might well be true.

Shalin: And that that had something to do with the marital problems. . . .

Stark: The other thing is that she had enough money to do it.

Shalin: Maybe you could elaborate a bit more on how Goffman treated his students.

Stark: Yea, he bullied them. . . . His habit was calling them on holidays and berating them.

Shalin: For what?

Stark: For not working. I mean, just silly, juvenile stuff. You cannot take a day off.

Shalin: You don't think it was a kind of ribbing, mocking?

Stark: Well, he wasn't teasing.

Shalin: I mean, are you sure he wasn't just. . . .

Stark: He wanted to call them up and be nasty. And I could never understand why. I am not sure he wanted graduate students. . . . he didn't want [them] going around claiming that he was trained by Erving Goffman.

Shalin: Is this something you have heard?

Stark: I kind of concluded [that]. . . . As I search for motives why he [Goffman] did this to people who were his students, the best that I can come up with is that he wasn't really glad to have them.

Shalin: Charlie, who was a chair when the department lost Erving, reports that Goffman was willing to stay, and it wasn't so much the money that Berkeley would have to come up with to match the Penn's offer. He wanted his normal teaching schedule reduced in half. Charlie consulted the faculty, which included some famous people like Bendix. . . .

Stark: Kingsley Davis, for God's sake.

Shalin: . . . and the reaction was clear: “No way.”

Stark: Goffman used to say this: “Yea, but you guys get grants for your work and buy yourself out of the teaching, but I don’t have a grant.”

Shalin: Ah, that is interesting – that was his rationale?

Stark: He could have had a grant – he just didn’t apply for it. By then there were enough people at the NSF and what not who were his fans, so he could have had a grant, even though he wasn’t gathering data in a systematic way. That didn’t appeal to Erving. Of course, that’s the advantage of private university – they can cut deals like that, and Penn did.

Shalin: Goffman had grants from Harvard and other foundations.

Stark: Charlie didn’t tell you something that he did say to Erving [at the time]. In retrospect Charlie’s making it all seem very nice.

Shalin: Charlie is understated.

Stark: Charlie is a very strange man. He is often very rude even without realizing it. He is a wonderful philistine, if you will. He said, “You know, Erving, you better take this terrific offer at Penn while your work is still in high repute, cause you don’t know how long it is going to last.”

[Laughter]

Erving was not pleased with that. Charlie thought he was a fad; he should take advantage of it.

Shalin: Even though he said he did everything he could to keep Goffman. . . .

Stark: I am sure he did everything he could. . . . It was a bad time, and Berkeley was losing people. Not only Bendix and Trow switched to other departments – Kingsley Davis got up and left. . . . Let’s see, someone else very important left but the name escapes me now. And they weren’t doing so well with replacements.

Shalin: So, they were anxious to keep people like Erving.

Stark: Sure, sure.

Shalin: What were your impressions of Goffman's politics? I get conflicting views of that.

Stark: I have not the slightest idea.

Shalin: His views of the student movement?

Stark: I have no idea at all about that. Those around who were not party members thought that the student movement was a big pain in the ass, but that wasn't everybody.

Shalin: And Goffman could have shared some of that sentiment.

Stark: Yea, I am sure he could. I mean I don't think Goffman was very interested in causes other than his own. I certainly saw no sign of it. There were a couple of members of faculty who were very political – Erving wasn't one of them. . . .

Shalin: So far as you could tell, he wasn't very interested.

Stark: I think that is exactly right. This was a very well run department for many years because the people were very sane and very prominent. The history of the department might be worth mentioning.

Shalin: Yes, please.

Stark: There wasn't a sociology department up until 1957 or '58. It didn't exist. It was part of something called "Social Institutions," and it was all crazy. So they went out and hired Herbert Blumer and gave him a blank check, basically telling him, "Build the best sociology department in the world."

Shalin: Yes, Blumer went to Berkeley around 1957 [Blumer came to Berkeley in 1951], and he brought with him Goffman.

Stark: Yes, but more important than that, he went out and signed almost overnight Kingsley Davis, Seymour Martin Lipset, Philip Selznik, the whole host of guys. Then he brought in as assistant professors Erving Goffman, Neil Smelser, others of that quality. And for a short period, maybe for five years, it was the best department in the world. I mean, almost everybody was famous. They decided to have a Survey Research Center, and get Charlie to leave the Bureau at Columbia and start one at Berkeley. They really took out their checkbook and went out and bought the best department that there was.

Shalin: There was also Robert Somers, I believe.

Stark: Yea, but he was junior, a third echelon, a statistician of not very high quality.

Shalin: I am trying to find him. The connection between his wife and Sky intrigues me. But if you don't mind, I would like to return. . . . I don't mean to waste much more of your time. . . .

Stark: It's OK. I'm just sitting here and working on a book.

Shalin: Great. You mentioned to me [in the email] your impression that the quality of Goffman's writing, or the editing done on his work, declined after his wife's death.

Stark: A lot of people made this observation. Maybe we were all just wishing it were so, but I don't think so. I mean, he seemed to have lost focus. His work was not as well written.

Shalin: His latter work seems to have attracted less attention, like *Forms of Talk*. Then *Frame Analysis* received mixed reviews.

Stark: Yea, *Frame Analysis* was just a miserable reasoning by analogy, so far as I can see. It sounds like it must be like it is, you know. Who cares?

Shalin: Rod, all this is enormously interesting. I will transcribe the interview and send it to you. If you can think of any other names or come across some memento. . . .

Stark: I told you everything I know.

[Laughter]

Shalin: You wouldn't have any correspondence related to. . . .

Stark: No, no. I don't.

Shalin: Just to recap your relationship with Sky, she was around when you were at the Survey Center.

Stark: She would come to talk to me sometimes.

Shalin: She was friendly with people?

Stark: She was working in her office down the hall. I don't know what she did there. She used to come down my office and we would talk. When she was normal, she was a charming person, she was fun to talk to. And quite attractive.

Shalin: Any particular subject she liked to talk about? I've heard she had big ideas about the suffering in the world, philanthropy. . . .

Stark: No, we never talked about anything like that.

Shalin: Kind of small talk. . . .

Stark: Yea, small talk, semi-flirting. You know, that kind of things.

Shalin: Was she flirtatious?

Stark: No. I certainly have no evidence or reason to believe that she slept around or anything. But as a lot of pretty women at the time, her style with certain kinds of men was a little bit flirtatious. That wasn't unusual. . . .

Shalin: No particular rumors.

Stark: No, I would doubt that totally.

Shalin: Rod, I cannot thank you enough. If you can think of anyone I should contact [in connection with this project], please give me a word. I am trying to get a big picture and then interpolate Goffman's writings with the memoirs from those who knew him.

Stark: Well, let me see. . . .

Shalin: I contacted Philip Selznik but he told me that at this point his memories of Erving are vague.

Stark: Quite frankly, Phil didn't like him. It was his wife who called Goffman "nasty, brutish and short."

[Laughter]

Shalin: And he concurred.

Stark: Yes. I mean he [Goffman] was not a very pleasant person most of the time.

Shalin: His charm had much to do with his intellect.

Stark: Yea. . . .

Shalin: Would you care to comment how Erving acted when he was around women?

Stark: I don't really know. Of women who did social psychology who were kind of in tune with him, he knew how to flatter them, but I don't know where it went.

Shalin: Judged from some interviews, he treated his female students somewhat differently.

Stark: I think that's true. But given the sexual mores of the time, women didn't threaten him as much. They were already second class citizens.

Shalin: Of this he wrote himself in *Gender Advertisements*.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: So to sum up your impressions, he was a competitive, territorial male. He had to be the biggest. . . .

Stark: He wanted to be the big frog. Always. And it really bothered him when he wasn't.

Shalin: Rod, thank you so much. I will send to you the transcript.

Stark: OK. It was fun talking to you.

[End of the recording]

Part II

[Posted 12-20-10]

Shalin: Greetings Rodney, this is Dmitri. How are you doing?

Stark: Fine.

Shalin: Are you sure it is a good time to talk?

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: I want to ask you about Herb Blumer, how you came to know him, the impression he left on you as a person, as a teacher, and as a scholar. Just one second, I want to make sure you are on speakerphone. Can you hear me?

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: OK, now I think it's working. Let's see, today is November 25, 2008. I continue my conversation with Rodney Stark. So any memoirs of Blumer you can share.

Stark: First of all, he was a very very nice man. He kept hard candy in the top drawer of his desk for little kids who might be coming into his institute with their parents, or whatever. He was a grandfatherly type, I suppose. He was a very nice guy. As a scholar, he was two different people. He believed that you fought intellectual disputes in the journals, not in some back alley fights, not by not hiring people you disagree with. He went out and hired a whole faculty at Berkeley that he mostly disagreed with. He thought they were the best in their fields, and he brought them in. He brought in Kingsley Davis who was at the time probably the world's leading demographer and certainly the most theoretical one, and a more theoretical sociologist in general. He brought Davis in, he brought Charles Glock and started the Survey Research Center, even though he didn't think surveys were valid. So there is much to be said about him in that sense. As an intellectual himself, I don't think that he wasted to think after he took his courses from Mead. I don't think he ever had another thought, he simply repeated Mead for the rest of his life. Whatever class he taught, the name was different, but the content was always the same. He taught the works of George Herbert Mead, which is how he started teaching in Chicago – Mead died and they brought him in to finish the guy's course. You knew of course that he was a considerable football player.

Shalin: Yes, I've heard that he was quite good at it.

Stark: Yes, he was an all-American, I believe, at Missouri. And then in graduate school and after he was on faculty at Chicago he played for what then were the Chicago Cardinals. They later moved to St. Louis, and then had moved to Arizona, but they were in Chicago in those days. I even had a very good picture of him in his football helmet that I put in my textbook.

Shalin: I think I have seen this picture.

Stark: Yes, and he was just very gracious, very generous. It was impossible not to like him. My contacts with him were really not professional. I mean I would bump into him on campus or at a party, and we would chat about a lot of things, almost never about

social science [**laughing**]. We talked about the Oakland Raiders, the weather, whatever. He was easy to work with, quite the opposite of Goffman. He gave to people a lot of latitude when they worked with him as graduate students. He wasn't terribly dogmatic in working with students, even though in his own work he was totally dogmatic. So it's kind of a tribute to the guy. What he was really was an extremely good academic administrator.

Shalin: This is a very interesting dimension to Blumer, and a big part of his legacy. He managed to put together quite a department.

Stark: Yes. He is the guy who built up the *American Journal of Sociology* in the 1930s. He was an editor for years and years and years. He was a builder. The smartest thing the dean at Berkeley ever did was to hire Blumer as head of the department. Blumer once told me how glad he was that he'd come to Berkeley: "From November and through the end of April, I look at the paper and I see what the weather is like in Chicago, and I am so glad to be in California!"

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: The move was really good for him. And he came there around '57?

Stark: Yes, '57 would be right, as far as I can remember. It was before I was there. I think there was really only one person left over. What they had was the social institutions department. They basically cleared it out. They put a couple of people over in history, and they moved a couple of people to the University of California, Davis. They were people who did family stuff and they really belonged in home economics department. That's where they moved them. They had a textbook in marriage and the family. He basically had an empty slate, and he went out and hired Lipset, Bendix, and Kingsley Davis. He brought a demographer whose name was Peterson, who was very good, although he later left and went to Colorado. And of course as an assistant professor they hired Goffman.

Shalin: Smelser.

Stark: Yes, Neil Smelser.

Shalin: Also Trow?

Stark: Who?

Shalin: It is T-r-o . . .

Stark: Oh, Marty Trow. Yes, they brought him from Columbia. Trow was an odd fellow. He really belonged in the education school because that's the kind of research he did. He was a very charming guy. Bendix really belonged to the history department, because while he was supposedly big authority on Weber, he did not really do sociology. His work was purely descriptive. They also brought in a guy named Eberhart who was very very big on the sociology of Far East. He read Chinese and that sort of things. So they really had a very well known bunch of people. It was a great place for a while, and then of course the '60s did what they did and kind of messed everything up. It wasn't because . . . it was stuff going on in the general society that was causing the problem. It broke up the department.

Shalin: What was Blumer's take on the student movement?

Stark: I imagine that he disliked it. Most people did, unless they were trying to make a new career for themselves by leading it. There was a guy named Bill Kornhauser in the sociology department, and he was a kind of nonentity. He shouldn't have gotten tenure, he just snuck by. He was really big in trying to lead the student movement, but that's because he had nothing else going for him. That was pretty much true across campus. The third-rate Marxists got out trying to make new names for themselves by leading the students, but it was dismal time. During most of it I stayed home and wrote.

Shalin: So it was Blumer who built the Survey Research Center.

Stark: He was the one who decided that they needed one, yes.

Shalin: He took issues with quantitative methods.

Stark: Oh, absolutely. On the one hand, he said, "We are going to have the best department in the world, and to do that we have to do what sociology does whether I agree with that or not." And so he did, he succeeded, even though he spent most of his time in his classes attacking the intellectual foundation of what was going on in the department. But he never did it with any animus. He was always very gentlemanly, well mannered about it. He wasn't like Goffman who was just a nasty little fart. I mean Blumer was what you would really call "gentleman." He was a big man of course, too. There was something there as well. He was a star football lineman, a great big guy. He had that kind of confidence which kind of came with it. He never raised his voice, and he always seemed to be in a very good mood – he was cordial, he was smiling. And he made a terribly good department chairman in many ways because he got along with anybody. It was really impossible not to like the man. And of course everybody knew he was scrupulously fair.

Shalin: His reputation in this respect was unimpeachable.

Stark: Yes, he absolutely treated everybody alike. He got the best possible deal for everybody.

Shalin: Did you have a chance to take his classes?

Stark: I sat in for a couple of weeks. They were a set of lectures, and if you read any of them, you read them all. It was George Herbert Mead stuff, and it was mistaken in the sense that he thought, and many of his students repeated, that there was something called "symbolic interaction" that was by itself different from everything. But the parts of it that were of value were recognized and used by everybody. I mean we all knew that people's definitions of the situations mattered. As you are trying to figure out people's motives and what they thought the situation was. It is pretty obvious, there is nothing to argue about. The idea

that those of us who believed there was such a thing as “attitude” or what not were somehow against the idea . . . well, it was all silly. . . . To me Blumer was very old fashioned.

Shalin: Goffman also kind of questioned the utility of this label and the field of symbolic interactionism.

Stark: I agree. I mean there are these guys like Norm Denzin and what not who made a kind of religion out of it, as if it had all these unique insights. The only stuff that is unique is obviously silly [**laughing**], and it will always be unique by being silly. If I say that all world is made of rotten squash, I am certainly unique, but it doesn't get us anywhere.

Shalin: And in class Blumer essentially did straight lecturing, not much discussion.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: He just lectured on Mead.

Stark: Right. He knew the lectures backwards and forwards, he didn't need any notes. He just came in, went to number 23, and turned it on.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: He treated everybody with courtesy, including students.

Stark: Yes, very much so. He was nice to everybody, but especially nice to students. For the time, I think, it was a bit unique because he was as nice to female graduate students as the male graduate students without flirting entering into it. I mean he was just a very fair guy. There were a lot of people who didn't want female graduate students. By the way, in their defense, so many of them don't finish, even now. Back then, it was a very high leve who dropped out. I mean you put a lot of time into a student and then she suddenly says, “Well, I am leaving now. I am going to get married and have kids.” And you'd think, “Well, why did I waste all that time?” [**laughing**].

Shalin: So your skepticism about women graduate students had to do with the fact that they were not as reliable in finishing their graduate work.

Stark: Oh, I think that's very very true! Women may have had barriers at that time as well, but . . . OK, let's turn around now. I started a graduate program at Baylor in 2004. We have been extraordinarily lucky in the quality of graduate students we've attracted, OK? It took about four years. We wanted to keep it small, very elite. We had three students quit – all three were women.

Shalin: How many students do you have?

Stark: It was four years [ago?], so I'd say 16. Out of 16 students three quit, all three were women. Well, guys don't quit for the same reason. Women quit over personal reasons – two of them got married and one of them got divorced. When guys get married, they don't quit graduate school.

Shalin: Was Blumer around the department on a regular basis, would he come only on certain days?

Stark: Well, Blumer had an institute. There was a whole row of former fraternity and sorority houses, mostly fraternity houses, along Piedmont Avenue, right across the football stadium.

Shalin: What was the name of the institute where Blumer worked?

Stark: There were about five sociological institutes along that street. There was Law and Society which was Selznick's, and then there was demography which was Kingsley Davis's. I just don't remember what Blumer's was called, but was there in that row. He kept pretty rigorous office hours there. That was another thing about Berkeley, you could go down to the sociology department and look in most professor's offices and find nothing but dust. There were no books, there wasn't anything there. They were never there, except once in a great while, perhaps for an office hour or something. Most of them didn't even have office hours down there,

they had them up in the institute. That's where everybody lived, that's where their books were, and that's where they were. And Blumer was very regular at his institute, and I'd bump into him in the parking lot area behind these places, because I was about four doors down in the survey center, and I'd bump into him in a parking lot or walking Piedmont Avenue down to the faculty club, which was at the center of campus. That's where you bumped into people all the time. He was not at-home-and-work guy. He was on campus. Now, I was on campus as little as possible. I stayed at home. That's how I got a lot of work done. I still stay home. I have this full time appointment at Baylor, but I live almost eight hundred miles from Baylor.

Shalin: How do you travel?

Stark: Oh, I go over five-six days a year [**laughing**]. I do it all by phone and email.

Shalin: And they let you do that?

Stark: They knew that when they hired me.

Shalin: That was the deal.

Stark: Yes, that was the deal.

Shalin: Did you observe or hear about the interaction between Goffman and Blumer?

Stark: I'd like to say that Goffman was hostile, but that's not saying anything because he was hostile towards everybody.

Shalin: And Blumer was no exception in this respect

Stark: I think he felt a little more threatened by Blumer because people kind of paired them up because of their sociological approach. Goffman didn't like that. Of course Goffman wouldn't have liked that about anybody but especially about Herb Blumer. You couldn't imagine the greater contrast. I mean Blumer

was for that era a great, big guy. I imagine he was my height, oh, say, 6'2, 6'3, probably weighed 240-250, full head of white hair around that time, very ruddy complexion. And here is Goffman, damn near short enough to be . . . he wasn't quite a midget, but he really was getting close. I mean he was a really tiny guy, and bitter about it. I don't think that Blumer paid much attention to Goffman. Goffman was just another guy on the faculty.

Shalin: But he must have appreciated Goffman scholarship, otherwise he wouldn't have brought him to Berkeley.

Stark: I think maybe there were other people on the faculty who made that decision. Certainly Selznick and Lipset and Davis, they were all full professors. It would have to be a consensus. But hell, who wouldn't have hired Goffman after *Presentation of Self*, he had been extremely lionized! There is this little guy, and you can hire him. He came with assistant professorship, remember. He didn't come with tenure.

Shalin: And senior people like Lipset and Bendix, they were there from the start.

Stark: Right. Within a year Blumer had hired probably Davis and Lipset and Selznick, for sure. And he already had a huge amount of firepower. Lipset, I am sure, was responsible for bringing Trow. He was probably responsible for bringing Bendix in, because they ended up collaborating.

Shalin: You are talking about Lipset or Blumer?

Stark: Lipset. Blumer wasn't publishing.

Shalin: That is something I want to ask you about. He didn't publish a single monograph during his lifetime.

Stark: I don't believe so.

Shalin: Toward the end of his career he published a slim volume of his article. He didn't seem to be driven in this respect.

Stark: I'll tell you what he was, and that's why he was hired to build the department – he was an administrative type all along. At Chicago he was a guy who helped to run the department, who took all the responsibility for the journal. It is a big job, and he did it year after year after year, and he did a good job. He was reliable, he knew everybody, partly because he was an editor all these years. And he was well informed. You should remember something else – in those days not everybody went to the national meetings—very few did. The meetings were attended by what you'd call a "national crowd," and they always went. They were the big names. The other people who attended in any given year were locals from the immediate area around the city where the meeting was held. I had something pointed out to me by a very famous sociologist of the 1940s and 1950s who was at the University of Washington in Seattle, that the meetings were usually someplace like New York or Boston or Washington, once in a while Chicago, but it took him five days on the train to go each way to the sociology meeting!

Shalin: You couldn't go by plane.

Stark: That's right. In those days planes were small and very expensive. You went by train. So, only some really big time guys went, it wasn't worth all the hassle. Blumer of course was one of those guys who always went, so he knew the entire elite, if you will. He didn't go out and try to hire the old guys, he didn't try to hire a Merton or a Parsons. What he took was the next generation, people in their thirties and early forties and brought them to Berkley. And that was a big coup. He offered them promotions if they were not yet full. He offered them big salaries, and he offered them an awfully nice place to live. He basically stole the heirs apparent. He really gutted Columbia.

Shalin: [Laughing]. He was an institution builder.

Stark: Right. I think the least important thing about Blumer for most of his career was his intellectual work and his positions.

Shalin: Even though he had followers.

Stark: Right.

Shalin: He gravitated to talent rather than orthodoxy.

Stark: Right. In his inner intellectual life he was an ideologue of George Herbert Mead, nothing else, but he didn't impose it. There aren't too many people who could be who he was. There were a lot of open-minded people and a lot of people who are real ideologues, but you don't find it in one person very often, and there he was. Sometimes I wonder if it wasn't his sport's background a little bit.

Shalin: He was good at getting into the academic huddle.

Stark: Yes, he was accustomed to conflict, and I suspect that he was personally very confident. He didn't feel he had anything to prove.

Shalin: A nice trait if you could master it [**laughing**]. I left Russia in 1975 and spent a few months in Rome waiting for an American visa, and while I was waiting, I wrote to Blumer, telling him I was interested in his work, asking if there was a chance to study with him. He wrote to me something to the effect that "Sure, you can come here, but I am no longer at Berkeley. I am an emeritus now." He just moved to American University, if I remember it right.

Stark: I don't know.

Shalin: He must have left Berkeley around that time.

Stark: Yes, he might have. I had no idea that he left Berkley. I mean I knew that he had gone emeritus.

Shalin: I imagine he had an appointment for a few years in a place on the West coast.

Stark: Well, just a second, American University . . . there is Pan-American in Texas, there is an American University somewhere in DC.

Shalin: I assumed it was on the West coast, but I very well may be wrong.

Stark: Yes, I think so.

Shalin: So Blumer wrote me back in response to my inquiry, "Sure, you can come here and work with me, but you must be aware that other places will have a better face value of diploma." I also wrote to Merton who knew my Russian mentor, and to George Homans.

Stark: Well, that's typical of him. You see, he was not concerned to get another student but that you get a good degree.

Shalin: Interesting. But there was no scholarship money available at his place, so I ended up at Columbia which offered me a fellowship and student housing. It was there that I stumbled into Merton's seminar on sociology of science and made a presentation on the institutionalization of Soviet sociology. Merton said something complementary, hinting that that was fine topic for a dissertation. Nothing came out of it, as I didn't want to become an expert on Russia in the US, insisting on pursuing my studies of Mead and pragmatism.

Stark: The thing is, if you had worked with Merton, lord knows if you would have ever gotten your degree. His students rarely finished their degrees.

Shalin: I never finished my thesis at Columbia.

Stark: You know why – because he never damn got around reading their dissertations! And then after two-three years sitting there, you know, he'd say, "I don't like it." I mean I knew two or three people who ended . . . I had a very strange encounter with Merton when I was starting to do my intro text. I was doing it with

Harcourt Brace, and he was their advisor, OK? And I started to submit chapters, and I started getting those really long long long letters from Merton that were almost totally autobiographical. And I realized he wasn't writing to me – a copy was going in his file for his biographer to find. And it was very very strange. The only problem he ever had with my manuscript – he kept pushing like mad to get his people cited. I didn't like his work.

Shalin: When I came to see Merton regarding my dissertation and told him I would like to continue what I had started in Russia, he didn't say anything, but I could tell that he was disappointed. When I submitted to him the first of my dissertation, he wrote to me frosty comments, which made it clear that I wouldn't get far with this project. Years later, when I was on a sabbatical leave from Southern Illinois University, I met Allan Silver who queried me about the fallout with Merton and helped me get a Ph.D. from Columbia *extra muros*. Columbia offered this option to those who completed their graduate work and did their comps but instead of a thesis submitted their publications. Otherwise I wouldn't have had a degree from Columbia.

Stark: Where are you now?

Shalin: I am at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas.

Stark: Oh, you are in Vegas!

Shalin: Yes, so if you are in town . . .

Stark: I travel as little as possible [**laughing**].

Shalin: For a reason?

Stark: No, I just like being home working on my books. I mean when I can get out of travel, I do. I have an honorary professorship appointment in China, and in October I managed to get out of going there being sworn in [**laughing**].

Shalin: You must enjoy where you are.

Stark: We live in a little village, we have four acres, a house, and everything I want is right here – the phone, the internet give me the rest.

Shalin: I like to hike. Once you are out of Vegas in a place like the Red Rock Park or in Utah, I am in my elements.

Stark: Yes, sure. I am in desert too, but the difference is that my desert is 6,000 feet up, consequently, it is dry, it has cold nights, and it has very, very nice weather.

Shalin: Coming back to Blumer and Goffman, you can't think of Blumer's take on Goffman as an intellectual.

Stark: No, I don't even recall seeing them together.

Shalin: OK. And you aren't certain when Blumer moved to the emeritus status.

Stark: No, because in 1971 I managed to get out of Berkeley, thank god!

Shalin: Why so? You say it was a good department.

Stark: The town had become intolerable, and it has gotten worse and worse and worse. It's just not a place where I would like to be.

Shalin: Did it have to do with the student uprising?

Stark: Yes, that. But no, it's the town. Everybody who flunked out of graduate school stayed in town. It's a crazy crazy . . . OK, four years ago, that recently, their school board voted unanimously to require all high school seniors to have one week instruction in – guess what? – draft resistance. Can you imagine that! There hasn't been draft for 20 years but it was still the 60s in Berkeley. They never tire of picketing recruiting stations [**laughing**]. It's just bizarre.

Shalin: You mentioned a few professors you didn't care about, but there must have been teachers you admired, modeled yourself after.

Stark: No, I modeled myself after me. The professor I admired most was Kingsley Davis. He was a mean bastard and I really liked him.

Shalin: Unlike Goffman whom you didn't.

Stark: No, no. Davis was tough, stern, high standards, but very fair.

Shalin: OK, demanding and expecting a lot.

Stark: Yes, he expected a lot and he got a lot. No, I liked him. I pretty much went off on my own very very early. There are people who think I worked with Charlie Glock but I really never did. I hardly ever saw him. I just wrote some books and he got his name on them.

Shalin: Oh, you have co-authored books with Glock?

Stark: Yes, four books. Some of them he read, but that wasn't the deal. The deal was that he would provide the money, I would write the books, and everything was fine.

Shalin: With the credit going to both of you.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: No other professors or classes you found influential.

Stark: No, I enjoyed Lipset. He was utterly unprepared. He would come and ask which class it was.

Shalin: [Laughing]

Stark: OK, and then he would stand there for a minute or two thinking and then just start talking. What was interesting was that he was talking about whatever the hell he was thinking and working on at the moment. It was marvelous to watch his mind work. I mean he was very very very bright, enormously well read, and very amiable guy. He was very pleasant, good sense of humor, and as he lectured, he would pick up pieces of chalk and put it in his ear, and pretty soon he would have a piece of chalk sticking out his ear, and he wouldn't know it.

[**Laughter**]

Shalin: A classic absent-minded professor.

Stark: Always.

Shalin: And easy to deal with.

Stark: Oh, he was a very nice man. . . .

Shalin: I suppose you are a classic case of prolific academic.

Stark: [**Laughing**]. You know, the funny thing is, when I found out what academics did for a living, I decided to stop being a newspaper writer. All they do is stay home and write.

Shalin: I hope you are paid well for your effort.

Stark: I'm being paid very, very well.

Shalin: Lucky you.

Stark: Yes. I have a website that Random House has made me put up when I brought out a book called *Victory of Reason*, and I have been keeping it up anyway, so if you want to check anything on me, it's rodneystark.com.

Shalin: It's your personal website.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: I'll check it out. You mentioned Harvey Sacks, did you know him?

Stark: Oh, I knew him very well.

Shalin: He seemed to have had an encounter with Goffman who wouldn't let him proceed with the dissertation defense. That's what Manny Schegloff writes. According to his account, Erving disagreed with something in Harvey's dissertation and would not accept it. The rest of the committee disagreed, but Goffman would not go along.

Stark: I thought he did the same thing to Manny Schegloff.

Shalin: Schegloff describes what happened to Sacks.

Stark: I don't remember.

Shalin: And then, according to Schegloff, Cicourel asked Goffman to step down from the committee, which Goffman did, and that's how Harvey completed his dissertation.

Stark: Schegloff would know, I wouldn't. Harvey and I came to graduate school together, and we were pretty good friends the first couple of years, and then he drifted away and went to . . .

Shalin: Conversation analysis.

Stark: Yes, mainly [with] Garfinkel, and I didn't. Harvey wasn't interested in sociology. Harvey was an intellectual to the nth degree.

Shalin: Perhaps you can say a few words about Harvey.

Stark: I mean he was very bright, and he was a nice guy. He had a good sense of humor, we used to tease each other a lot. He had that little apartment, actually it was part of a house, first floor. I remember all he had in a large living room were two lawn chairs

with nylon straps and aluminum tubing, a little end table by it, and a lamp. That was the only furnishing in the room [**laughing**]. You know what happened to him, don't you?

Shalin: He died early at the age of forty or something.

Stark: Maybe even earlier. He was subject to seizures, and he insisted on driving. This happened when he was driving. He ran into a pole or a bridge [?].

Shalin: I knew it was a car accident, I didn't know that he had seizures.

Stark: It was one car accident, fortunately. And there was really . . . shortly before that, he really changed his life. He used to claim he was an animal, he lived like an animal. He met a girl, got married, and he started dressing very nicely. He changed his life, and it was too bad that he didn't have longer to live.

Shalin: He was a talented man.

Stark: Yes, he was. He was a fun guy, and I quite liked him. And yes, he was one of the smart ones. I always was sorry we lost him to Garfinkel, but . . . anyway.

Shalin: There is a postscript to the Goffman-Sacks story. When later on someone mentioned to Goffman Harvey Sacks as his student, Goffman drew himself up and said, "What do you mean? I was his student."

Stark: Yes. Goffman was a very strange man. You never knew what he was doing for effect and what he was doing for conscience, what was really going on in his life.

Shalin: You mentioned that he could get angry on occasion, how did his anger manifest itself?

Stark: Well, for example, once Sky brought a bunch of people home from work, and when Erving came home, he freaked out and

harassed her, running around the room and kicking furniture and telling everybody to get the hell out.

Shalin: Did you hear about it or saw it?

Stark: It wasn't the only time he did it. I saw one little piece of it once.

Shalin: He could get violent.

Stark: Well, he didn't kick people, and that was probably because even most women were bigger.

Shalin: That's cruel, Rod [**laughing**].

Stark: I mean he was really tiny!

Shalin: Although he was sporty; somebody told me he was a gymnast, he trained.

Stark: Yes, but he still probably weighed a hundred pounds, that doesn't make up for it [**laughing**].

Shalin: So his anger wasn't just passive-aggressive.

Stark: It was mostly verbal stuff. He was just a real jerk around a lot of people.

Shalin: He would use verbal wit.

Stark: He would downgrade people.

Shalin: Now, you also knew Manny Schegloff.

Stark: Sure, he was about a year ahead of me. He was another bright guy who, maybe too intellectual. So when Garfinkel came along, and Manny and Harvey found this intellectual game irresistible, conversation analysis and what not, "Let's go back to basics, let's start from nothing."

Shalin: He converted to Husserl's phenomenology.

Stark: That's right, and it has never gone anywhere. I mean they still don't know how it is possible for us to talk.

Shalin: You are not particularly impressed with ethnomethodology.

Stark: Well, in the same sense that a certain kind of medieval theology is impressive, but is beside the point.

Shalin: It's being insular . . .

Stark: No, I just see it as a kind of marvelous and pointless intellectual game.

Shalin: That's what intellectuals do. Some spend life playing glass bid games, as Hermann Hesse would say.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: And as a person, Manny was approachable.

Stark: Oh, he is a nice fellow. I liked him. He was just . . . yes, he was a really a decent guy. He was pleasant to be around, he was polite, he was friendly, he didn't put a bunch of airs or anything. He was just a good guy. I don't know what he thought of Garfinkel.

Shalin: In his intro to Harvey's lectures Manny writes that today we read Oedipus Rex as a story of patricide and forget that it was Oedipus who left his infant son to die. He goes on to say that it was Goffman who wouldn't let us be, that we had to stand up to him. This wasn't because we were after our intellectual father but because he was on our case.

Stark: That's right. Who needs to put up with the guy like that! My whole life was, "Do your thing and to hell with it." I

wasn't about to put up with crap. I was very lucky. Glock left me alone, I couldn't learn anything much from him, and I really trained myself.

Shalin: You taught yourself.

Stark: Yes, but anybody who gets somewhere does teach oneself.

Shalin: It sounds odd, in a way, but it is almost impossible to teach someone.

Stark: That's right.

Shalin: You will use whatever tools and insights are available, but to make them work, you have to assemble them on your own and experiment.

Stark: Yes, these can save you some time.

Shalin: Right, in the end you will have to discover on your own, how grammar works, how rules hang together, why certain phrasing is superior.

Stark: Exactly. You learn how to write by writing, not by being taught how to write.

Shalin: Did you know Aaron Cicourel?

Stark: No. I don't know him.

Shalin: Art Garfinkel?

Stark: A-h-h, I saw him a couple of times. He was very strange.

Shalin: What are your impressions of him, because he is also a stuff of legends?

Stark: Y-e-eh, I kind of thought he was a conman. I suspect that of a lot of people.

Shalin: [Laughing]

Stark: It was so important to him to get a movement started instead of just doing his thing. I don't know. I am not that social [laughing].

Shalin: But it's interesting that you see a conman in a lot of people, because this is what Goffman saw. I see an odd kind of connection here.

Stark: Yes, I don't know. I mean it was odd. I don't know why he was trying to recruit them. I guess there are a lot of things I don't understand. I have changed to sociology of religion almost totally, and I've never been particularly interested in recruiting. I had some good students, very good students, but I haven't recruited them.

Shalin: Incidentally, my wife knows your work. Her thesis at Cornell was on the Hasidim of Borough Park Brooklyn. I mention talking to you, and she said, "Oh, Rodney Stark, sure!"

Stark: Is she on faculty?

Shalin: No, it's one of those things when she followed her husband and took odd teaching jobs where I had an appointment, but getting dual appointments at the universities is hard to arrange.

Stark: Yes, I know that.

Shalin: So, she had gone through law school and is now working as rights attorney.

Stark: I met my wife at Berkeley. She came there from Stanford. She was the youngest faculty member on the Berkeley campus when I met her. She quit, she went to Washington with me, and then she started a publishing company. She had a lot of fun with that, sold it and then we left Washington and came out here. And Baylor then talked me into . . .

Shalin: . . . starting this program.

Stark: Yes, I mean we really started it. This worked. We did a big survey of religion in China last year, 7500 interviews, a national sample. So I am having a lot of fun. They basically let me sit here at home and write my books, as long as I put their name on it.

Shalin: They welcome your productivity.

Stark: The provost says, "What we like about you is your visibility." Well, it's fine with me [**laughing**].

Shalin: Coming back to Garfinkel, do you feel he was a school builder?

Stark: He came to Berkeley on a recruiting mission, and that's when he recruited Harvey and Manny Schegloff and a couple of other people. I mean it seems like such a big insider joke. The idea was that we are the only ones who know something and everybody else is misguided, everybody else is doing work that doesn't matter.

Shalin: Right, but such an attitude may help start a movement, the insularity, the feeling of being chosen.

Stark: Yes.

Shalin: I can understand that.

Stark: Part of it is that you can't join it.

Shalin: Yes, if you are on the outside, you feel like you were not invited.

Stark: Well, I am sure I could have been invited in ten seconds, anybody could have.

Shalin: You weren't interested.

Stark: I mean it struck me that people who were most vulnerable to the claim that communications were problematic were the people who I knew had the most trouble communicating [laughing]. Garfinkel when he gave a public lecture, he had a tendency to put his hand over his mouth.

Shalin: As an involuntary gesture of . . .

Stark: He kind of stood there with his hand over his mouth half the time. I think he was not really conscious of it.

Shalin: You mentioned Norm Denzin.

Stark: I knew Norm pretty well when he was at Berkeley.

Shalin: And Norm was at Berkeley.

Stark: Yes, and he was turned down for tenure.

Shalin: Oh, he taught there!

Stark: Right.

Shalin: Was he an assistant professor?

Stark: Assistant professor.

Shalin: What happened?

Stark: They didn't like his work. There was lots of it. Blumer liked him, Blumer hired him. I think Blumer hired him without consulting with anybody.

Shalin: Was it mid-'60's.

Stark: Yes, I'd say middle '60s.

Shalin: Blumer brought him in, but that didn't work out.

Stark: Senior faculty thought that he was just a little Blumer.

Shalin: Which mean they were not that impressed with Blumer's scholarship.

Stark: No. That was a concern of theirs, his mannerisms. But no, I don't think that there was anybody who paid much attention to Blumer's symbolic interactionism.

Shalin: How was Denzin as a teacher, as a colleague?

Stark: Well, Norm is a nice guy. But he was drinking a lot in those days, and I think that interfered with him quite a bit. He wrote a book on joining AAA. Norm never met a thing he couldn't write a book about.

Shalin: [**Laughing**]. That takes some talent.

Stark: Anyway, he is a very nice guy. And then every ten years I bump into him at a meeting, and he continues to be a very nice guy. He was just as much of a doctrinaire symbolic interactionist as Herb was, but just like Herb he is open-minded, very agreeable.

Shalin: Maybe a couple more questions and we can wrap it up. Where did Goffman live when he was at Berkley?

Stark: Yes, he lived on the north side of the campus, which is away from Telegraph Avenue, a different area over there, with more faculty. He wasn't living up in the hills but it started to go up a little bit, it was an apartment house.

Shalin: Apartment house?

Stark: It was a new one, and it probably had six units.

Shalin: He was living there with his wife and son.

Stark: Right.

Shalin: I discovered a notice published in *Oakland Tribune* about the funeral services after Sky's death, I think it was April 30, 1964, and they mention 8505 Hilgard Str., or something like that. It seems close to campus.

Stark: Yes, I am sure that's the correct address. It's on the north side, slightly uphill. Berkeley goes uphill all the way from the Bay.

Shalin: I googled it, and it doesn't look like the apartment house has survived. There seem to be individual homes now.

Stark: I am not surprised. It's been a long time. It would have been expensive property. They had some bad fires, it's possible the place burned down.

Shalin: You mentioned that Angelica jumped off the San Rafael-Richmond Bridge where the prison is, right across that spot.

Stark: The bridge passes the prison and ends right close by it, yes.

Shalin: Is that the famous prison on an island?

Stark: No, no, no, that's Alcatraz. San Quentin Prison is at the end of the bridge..

Shalin: It is not on the island.

Stark: No, it's county.

Shalin: And her Jaguar . . .

Stark: It was toward the middle [of the bridge].

Shalin: With Google Earth you can visit almost any place, and I was mesmerized by the aerial shot of that spot. Well, Rod, thanks for humoring me again.

Stark: OK, I enjoyed it.

Shalin: As you can see I am obsessing a bit collecting all this lore. I will send you the transcript. I remember the part you designated as off the record, and I will mark it that way. Did you happen to see on the web the first part of our conversation?

Shalin: No, I haven't.

Stark: OK. Send me again [the link] and I will take a look.

Shalin: Sure. If you come across typos or . . .

Stark: I think there are a couple of places where the wording isn't quite right. I don't think you quite got it.

Shalin: I know. That's why I put question marks in the text, counting on my interlocutors to make corrections.

Stark: I'll point it out.

Shalin: Yes, you can clean it out. You mentioned the Jaguar she had, for instance, and I didn't catch the model. It was something like X . . .

Stark: XKE.

Shalin: OK, OK. If there is anything that needs to be changed, please do so. It's hard sometimes when I am going over the recording.

Stark: All right, listen, it's been fun.

Shalin: Thank you so much.

Stark: Bye.

Shalin: Bye-bye.

[End of the recording]