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A Small Unassuming Man Walked up to Me, Shook My Hand and Told Me, “I Really Enjoyed Your Paper”

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During my last year of graduate school, in 1977 or 1978, I presented a paper on phenomenological sociology at a conference in Boston. The session was chaired by Larry Wieder, a prominent ethnomethodologist. Once the presentations concluded, a small unassuming man walked up to me, shook my hand and told me “I really enjoyed your paper. It was very clear.” I thanked him and he then turned toward Larry, whom he seemed to know, and said “Larry, I didn’t understand a word you said.” Wieder, being the kind fellow that he was, simply chuckled and said, “Well, Erving, I’m sorry to hear that.” I still had no idea who the stranger was but, as he turned and walked away, Larry looked at me and said, “you should be very proud, that was Erving Goffman.”