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Remembering Erving Goffman

Thomas Scheling

**If There Were a Nobel Prize for Sociology and/or Social Psychology
Goffman Would Deserve to Be the First One Considered**

Dr. Thomas Schelling, professor emeritus at Harvard University, wrote this memoir at the request of Dmitri Shalin and approved posting the present version in the Erving Goffman Archives.

[Posted 08-18-15]

July 25, 2015

Dear Dmitri Shalin,

I've never written anything about my relation to Erving. But I take every opportunity to call attention to his work. I've read, I think, all of his books--I have eight of them--and I consider him one of the two or three greatest social scientists of his century. I've often remarked that if there were a Nobel Prize for sociology and/or social psychology he'd deserve to be the first one considered. He was endlessly creative.

I met him when he was at the Institutes of Health in Washington. He approached me, I visited him and we talked, and I think he gave me reprints of "Facework" and "Cooling the Mark Out," which I've always loved. Sometime in the middle 60's I invited him to Harvard's Center for International Affairs, at which I had some Ford Foundation money for bringing scholars to Harvard, and he spent a year, finishing one of his books; I don't remember which one. Some time later his son, Tom, came to live at my house for a while. He was a very assertive young man and taught my kids how to make explosives out of the chlorine powder that my neighbor used for his swimming pool.

When he was my guest at Harvard we didn't become close friends. He was very distant. I later learned, when I visited Pennsylvania, that he wasn't much liked there. I was told that at

dinner parties he interrogated guests in unfriendly ways.

Now that I'm retired I sometimes think of rereading all of his books, if I get the time. I think it would be a pleasure just to read again such perceptive thoughts so well expressed.

Thanks for sending me your paper. I certainly recognized Erving in your essay.

Sincerely,

Tom Schelling

* The Erving Goffman Archives (EGA) is the web-based, open-source project that serves as a clearing house for those interested in the dramaturgical tradition in sociology and biographical methods of research. The EGA is located in the Intercyberlibrary of the UNLV Center of Democratic Culture, <http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/archives/interactionism/index.html>. Postings on the website are divided into several overlapping sections: "Documents and Papers," "Goffman's Publications," "Goffman in the News," "Biographical Materials," "Critical Assessments," and "Comments and Dialogues." For inquiries regarding the EGA projects, please contact Dr. Dmitri Shalin, shalin@unlv.nevada.edu. When you cite the materials collected for the EGA, please use the following reference: *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives*, ed. by Dmitri N. Shalin (UNLV: CDC Publications, 2009).