

Letters

Social Science Research Ethics

Constance Holden (News and Comment, 2 Nov., p. 537) raises many important contrasts between research standards in the 1960's and those in the 1970's. . . . Her discussion of Laud Humphreys work is, however, misleading. As a member of his dissertation committee, I can attest to the deep and profound concern Humphreys feels for his human subjects—a concern that has persisted and deepened over the years. . . .

If "the Humphreys experiment was mentioned repeatedly at a recent 2-day conference on the ethics of social science research held at the Joseph and Rose Kennedy Center for Bioethics at Georgetown University," would it not have been entirely appropriate to invite the object of such criticism to defend his research (which he did quite eloquently in the postscript "A question of ethics" to his book *Tearoom Trade*) (1)?

Or do "ethics" not extend to that courageous band of scholars who continue to believe that research priorities and protection through discussion have their own moral imperatives?

As the publisher (in magazine form at least) through *Trans-Action/Society* of controversial writings of Philip Zimbardo, Stanley Milgram, as well as Laud Humphreys—all mentioned in Holden's article—I quote Kai Erikson's famous statement in *Wayward Puritans* (2) that "Men who fear witches soon find themselves surrounded by them; men who become jealous of private property soon encounter eager thieves. And if it is not always easy to know whether fear creates the deviance or deviance the fear, the affinity of the two has been a continuing course of wonder in human affairs." Those "moral hard-liners" anxious to "outlaw all deception in social science research" might best start with purging their own thinking of so much self-deception.

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References

1. L. Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Aldine, Chicago, 1975).
2. K. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (Wiley, New York, 1966).

The question of ethics in social science research is complicated by the fact that a journalist or reporter is permitted to do many of the things that social scientists have been criticized for doing in the gathering of behavioral data. An accredited reporter or even a free-lance "stringer" may join a cult, a religion, or a social organization in hopes of getting a story. The reporter is paid to do so, the stringer hopes to be paid for doing so, and the newspaper or magazine expects to sell copies at a profit. All this is sanctioned by the First Amendment and the tradition of the Freedom of the Press.

In the field, anthropologists are at times in competition with journalists, not bound by restrictions set by funding agencies, editorial review requirements, or informed consent. The results are often misleading. But a press card has its magic, and no committee on ethics intervenes.

Since social scientists do their work with the intent of publishing, it is difficult to understand why they should have fewer rights than journalists similarly bent. Is the right to publish more sacrosanct for a supermarket tabloid than for a sociological, psychological, or anthropological journal?

Having worked for three decades in situations where my "subjects" were often my neighbors, or at least long-term participants in ongoing studies, I have not been able to pose as an insurance investigator or claims adjuster or market-survey investigator. I have objected to studies where college students completed psychological tests disguised as placement procedures.

But I do object to a dual system of ethics, one for social science professionals and another for journalists or would-be reporters. The next time I am interviewed by a newspaper I will demand (i) a subject fee; (ii) a detailed description of the purpose of the interview; and (iii) an

informed consent form. What is sauce for the scientists should be sauce for the journalists and vice versa.

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Linear Programming Discovery

The article by Gina Bari Kolata (Research News, 2 Nov., page 545) emphasizes that the American mathematical community was ignorant for months of the important discovery in the theory of linear programming published in Russian by L. G. Hačijan (Khachian). It is unfortunately true that because of the language barrier American awareness of the Soviet mathematical literature is in general low. In an effort to ameliorate this situation the American Mathematical Society operates an ongoing project of translation of the principal Slavic journals and other selected publications. A translation of Hačijan's article has appeared in *Soviet Mathematics Doklady*, volume 20, No. 1 (1979).

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Those who also wish to obtain a copy of the report (CS 750) by Gács and Lovász can write the Computer Science Department, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305.

—GINA BARI KOLATA

I observe an article in the 2 November issue entitled "Mathematicians amazed by Russian's discovery." L. G. Khachian is Armenian—not Russian.

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[Erratum: In the report "Homoeologous heterozygosity and recombination in the fern Pteridium aquilinum (15 June, p. 1207), the address given for the second author is incorrect. Edward Klekowski, Jr., is a member of the Department of Botany at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst 01003.]

[Erratum: In J. T. Edsall's review of Otto Warburg by Hans Krebs (27 July, p. 384), the date given for the birth of Emil Warburg is incorrect. The correct date is 1846.]

[Erratum: In the article "Ethics in social science research" (News and Comment, 2 Nov., p. 537) several errors appear. Ruth Macklin is incorrectly identified as Ruth Warwick; Alexander Capron is on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, not Harvard; and Laud Humphreys did his doctoral work in sociology, not social relations, at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, not at Harvard.]

[Erratum: William A. Lochstet (Letters, 9 Nov., p. 637) is a member of the Department of Physics at Pennsylvania State University, University Park 16802, not the University of Pennsylvania.]