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4

Ethical issues in the qualitative study of deviance and crime

Erich Goode[1]

What constitutes unethical practices in qualitative research methods? Who decides what they are? And is the investigator of deviance and crime obliged to follow the same ethical guidelines to which the scholar of more conventional, law-abiding behavior should adhere?

Should a researcher, illegally, vote multiple times in a single election for a local political boss (Whyte, 1943/1993)? Have sex with informants to be accepted as a member of the community under study (Wade, 1993)? Become a juvenile gang leader for a day to determine how gangs operate (Venkatesh, 2008)? Reveal confidential salary information to an influential inside figure to ingratiate oneself with him, to more effectively gather information (Dalton, 1959)? Crawl into a space next to a freeway, enter a "shooting gallery," and watch junkies "fix" heroin into their veins (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009)? Social scientists have engaged in these courses of action, and many more like them, even admitting them in print, but such methods would and could not be endorsed by current institutional review boards (IRBs)—panels whose members decide on the acceptability of programs of research. Indeed, many innovative investigators find human-subjects restrictions burdensome and unreasonably confining, making, they say, original contributions very nearly impossible. Jack Katz (2006) argues that, to effectively study their chosen subject, fieldworkers may have to become "IRB outlaws"—in effect, apply for grants that spell out a conservative, straight-laced protocol, and then conduct studies that violate their own explicitly stated methodology. To do inventive, productive research, the scholar may find it necessary to deceive human-subjects committees.

In social psychology, several now-classic experiments seriously violated what have become established IRB ethical requirements and would not receive institutional approval today. Asch (1955) placed genuine research subjects on panels with pseudo-subjects, the latter insisting that lines displayed on a board were of a length different from what they were, thereby putting social pressure on the real subjects to make the same inaccurate estimates. Milgram (1974) instructed subjects to administer bogus shocks to pseudo-subjects; these participants heard them scream and watched them writhe in pain, the study's objective being to determine whether most people would follow orders, even when these orders appeared to be harmful to others. Rosenhan (1973) told psychologically normal individuals to pretend to be mentally disordered by claiming to staff to hear voices uttering the words "empty," "hollow," and "thud," thereby gaining admission to a mental hospital. Zimbardo (1972) installed real subjects in a pseudo-

prison, designed by the investigator, in which he asked pseudo-guards to act as if they were real guards; his guard-subjects so mistreated and brutalized the prisoner-subjects that he was compelled to cancel the experiment after 5 days, rather than the 2 weeks he had planned. These four investigators engaged in blatant deception by misrepresenting their research objectives, failed to observe basic human rights, never told subjects what difficulties they were about to endure, and forced unwitting participants or informants to undergo difficult, even threatening, conditions. By contemporary standards, the methodologies of these studies are unethical in the extreme.

Most qualitative work is spontaneous, unpredictable, evanescent, and substantially sub rosa. Because of the special characteristics of the methodology they use, ethnographers, especially participant observers, face ethical challenges and dilemmas that differ in crucial respects from those of more quantitative investigators, such as experimental psychologists and survey researchers. Intimacy tends to yield inside information that informants do not necessarily want revealed to outsiders; put under an ethnographic microscope, participants are often discomfited, sometimes angered, when they read what sociologists write about their intimate lives, even if the author adopts pseudonyms for them, and even if their behavior is legal and conventional. When William Foote Whyte, author of *Street Corner Society* (1943/1993), revisited the community he studied, years later, some of his informants criticized him for his frankness in print. One informant told him, "It's a true picture, yes; but people feel it's a little too intimate" (1943/1993, pp. 351, 352). In an even stronger vein, the subjects of Vidich and Bensman's study, *Small Town in Mass Society* (1958/1968), were so outraged by what they read that they held a demonstration in which they hanged the authors in effigy, charging them with being "manure spreaders." Moreover, the administrators of their home academic institution, along with fellow sociologists, condemned them, both face to face and in print (1958/1968, pp. xxxi–xxxiii). Sociologists who portray the behavior and the subjects they study, "warts and all," may be puzzled or frustrated by such responses, concluding that the actors they describe would be satisfied only with a categorically favorable portrait.

How does the sociologist study and reveal details that are shameful, wayward, or illegal? How do investigators solicit discrediting information, knowing that revealing it may cast a dark shadow on their participants' character, disgrace or humiliate their community, or even risk their participants' arrest? And how do qualitative social scientists obtain revealing and *interesting* information in a moral, ethical, and civil manner—without offending their study's participants?

Perhaps the best-known research project that exemplifies putatively unethical qualitative methods is Laud Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade* (1970/1975). Humphreys observed homosexual encounters in public restrooms and interviewed the men who engaged in such behavior. Humphreys' research was, and still is, widely considered unethical. He watched tearoom sex take place and posed as a "watch-queen" or lookout to warn the men engaging in oral sex in public urinals that intruders were approaching, thereby misrepresenting his true purpose. Humphreys did not offer informed consent to his subjects. Moreover, he recorded the license plates of the cars on the street adjacent to the park in which the public urinals he monitored were located and got in touch with an acquaintance at the motor vehicles bureau, who tracked down their owners' addresses and revealed them to Humphreys. Humphreys then contacted his subjects at their homes, claiming that they were members of his sample in a "public health" survey, thereby engaging in both covert and overt deception. The chancellor at Washington University, where Humphreys received his PhD, informed him that, because of his unethical research procedures, his degree "may have to be revoked." This administrator also attempted to prevent the publication of the book by contacting Aldine, his publisher, informing its executives of Humphreys' dishonest practices (Galliher, Brekhus, & Keys, 2004, p. 27). Both attempts failed. And, though *Tearoom Trade* ignited a firestorm of controversy and criticism, and textbooks on

qualitative research do not defend the author's right to pursue this line of research (p. 45), the volume won the prestigious C. Wright Mills award, and it remains an extremely frequently cited work—a model of sociological and micro-interactional analysis.

IRBs: ethical guidelines versus pragmatic realities

To observers not knowledgeable about the problematics of studying a particular scene, group, or community, the principles that qualitative methodologists spell out might not seem unduly restrictive. But, as judged by struggling investigators, such ethical guidelines may restrict access to crucial information from recalcitrant subjects concerning sticky and theoretically important matters and, hence, seem meddlesome, parochial, and frustrating. A perusal of the ethical codes of professional organizations in criminology and sociology alert the scholar that such codes promulgate vague platitudes rather than detailed or useful specifics. General principles never apply in detail to any and all concrete situations, and the investigator often finds it necessary to circumvent the principles that representatives of professional institutions have formulated. The alert scholar distinguishes principles that represent ideals—which may not be applicable to certain conditions—from those that seem sacrosanct and universally applicable, presenting investigators with dilemmas, conundrums, and quandaries.

Moreover, the critical investigator is likely to conclude that the primary function of the IRB is less to proffer protection to subjects than to protect its parent institution—or the IRB itself and its constituent members—against lawsuits in which plaintiffs seek compensation for supposed damages, presumably caused by the research in which they participated. Biomedical and pharmaceutical research prompts the vast majority of such lawsuits; social science investigation relatively rarely causes recognizable, actionable harm. Still, IRBs have attempted to block a not-inconsequential number of projects for fear of frivolous lawsuits claiming imaginary harm. As a consequence, in 2005, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) articulated a declaration on the infringement of IRBs on academic freedom. Administrators are "risk averse," the AAUP stated, fearing that researcher innovation might open the door to lawsuits that universities "would otherwise be safe against." In 2013, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) offered courses and modules to researchers and subjects to protect against potential lawsuits. The restrictions CITI would impose on investigation, however, are so detailed and confining with respect to informed consent, deception, confidentiality, distressing subjects, and so on, that, if they were strictly followed, researchers would become virtually powerless to gather data or test theories.

The AAUP details several cases in the humanities and social sciences where the "unchecked power granted to IRBs" has generated "horror stories" for investigators and resulted in unnecessary restrictions on academic freedom. IRBs have blocked or delayed research by: requiring a linguist who proposed "studying language development in a preliterate tribe" to get the participants to "read and sign a consent form before the study could proceed"; demanding that a political scientist who "purchased a list of names for a survey of voting behavior" get "written informed consent from the subjects before mailing them the survey"; informing a doctoral student that he could not interview African Americans for a study of the impact of ethnicity on career aspirations "because it might be traumatic for them" to be interviewed by a white person; blocking the publication of an English faculty's essay "that drew on anecdotal information provided by students about their personal experiences with violence" because they "might be distressed by the essay"; and attempting to deny a student her Master of Arts degree for not obtaining IRB approval "for calling newspaper executives to ask for copies of printed material" that were already publicly available.

The AAUP report (2006) recommends that all studies that consist entirely of data collected by conducting surveys and behavior in public places "be exempt from the requirements of IRB review." Only studies that rely on information recorded so that human subjects "can be identified, directly or through identifiers, linked to the subjects," the disclosure of which "could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation," should be included. Unfortunately, rather than human-subjects committees focusing on real harm or potential risk, the AAUP report argued, "a breach of confidentiality has been swept into the ambit" of the IRB's jurisdiction—an unnecessarily restrictive interpretation.

A code of ethics for the qualitative researcher?

What would a reasonable code of ethics, governing the methods that a qualitative researcher should pursue, look like? Can we spell out ethical dos and don'ts of fieldwork that all investigators should follow? Social investigators have distilled research principles into a delimited set of *dimensions* that grapple with certain issues but do not definitively answer these questions; 10 of the most frequently enunciated such dimensions include the following.

Informed consent

Every professionally recognized scholar agrees that no investigator should browbeat, coerce, pressure, or *force* people into becoming research subjects; perhaps that is the bedrock of ethical research. And—subjects not competent to grant consent aside—what exactly are informants consenting *to*? The investigator and the informant probably have very different interpretations of the compact between them. Nonetheless, is the investigator allowed to study people's behavior without their knowledge? A great deal of social science research—especially qualitative work, and most particularly participant observation—can *only* be conducted by ignoring informed consent. In participant observation, investigators cannot, and probably *should* not, announce to everyone beforehand that they are willy-nilly engaged in a research project. Qualitative investigators may observe countless individuals with whom they never verbally communicate; should each one be taken aside and briefed? Such a disclosure would interrupt the flow of social interaction in a given setting, not to mention throw a roadblock into the path of ongoing investigation. And, in investigative settings in which many participants routinely engage in illegal and seriously unconventional activity, such a request would cause some to flee the scene. Moreover, obtaining informed consent in a research setting in which dozens, hundreds, or thousands of participants are in attendance—even when they know they are being observed—represents an obvious absurdity.

Deception: is lying acceptable?

Research codes of ethics prohibit or discourage dissimulation of one kind or another. However, many of the most influential research projects in the history of the social sciences have employed deception; lying, by commission or omission, enables the scholar to obtain information not accessible by any other means. All investigators know that, to justify deceit, they must demonstrate that benefits outweigh risk, but what if the benefits—the findings of the study itself—exclusively serve other researchers, never accruing to deceived subjects? Is this acceptable? Yes, according to Richard Leo, who studied police interrogation on the sly (2008), arguing that, without such a ruse, certain areas of potentially rewarding inquiry are forever closed off.

Likewise, Erving Goffman (1961) engaged in a study of a mental institution without informing staff or inmates that he was conducting research. However, the staunch ethicist is likely to argue that such a tactic is never justified and should not be practiced (Erikson, 1967). Margaret Mead agrees (1961, p. 63): engaging in concealed observation, "violates the conventions of privacy and human dignity, and casts scientists in the role of spies, intelligence agents, Peeping Toms, and versions of Big Brother." Yet many classics of participant observation have been conducted by adopting a covert or secret role, and social science would be immeasurably impoverished had such studies not been conducted.

However necessary outright deception might be to a research endeavor's goals, it is likely to be met with a letter of rejection and reprimand by virtually any IRB, such as the one I received when applying for a human-subject exemption to conduct a study that involved placing bogus personal ads in newspapers; I conducted the research anyway, without IRB approval (Goode, 1996). The contribution that research based on unconventional, edgy, even questionable protocols makes to a cultural and ideological atmosphere and ongoing scientific dialogue that sometimes becomes cantankerous and intemperate may be of intellectual and scholarly benefit only to intellectuals and scholars. Still, such dialogue thrives in democratic societies, and is almost invariably banned by authoritarian regimes—hence, in principle, it would benefit everyone who values freedom. In any case, IRBs should continue to protect the rights of human subjects, and investigators should continue to test the limits of deception. Participants may seem pawns in these proceedings, but, ironically, most of them manifest relatively little concern about the process; typically, only a tiny, vocal, minority complains.

Confidentiality: violating anonymity

To my mind, investigators are virtually *absolutely* bound by the promise of anonymity to their participants. Short of facing long-term imprisonment, the researcher, particularly of criminal and deviant behavior, should *never* breach confidentiality. Rik Scarce (2005) chose to spend 5 months in jail rather than provide evidence of the illegal actions of the radical environmental movement organization he studied; very few sociologists are willing to go that far. The problem with absolute confidentiality is that the source's identity cannot be protected when the community, group, or social circle under study is small, and most members know and recognize one another, even by sketchy descriptions. The most circumspect author, who tries to protect informants by providing bogus names, clues, and identifiers, will inadvertently provide hints that allow members to determine who's who. Hence, even when particulars are disguised, *some* betrayal of intimacies is inevitable. This dilemma may be insurmountable; the choice boils down to generating a spurious report—in effect, a work of fiction—or sticking to inoffensive topics, or risk embarrassing one or more informants.

Exploiting participants

"Exploitation" is something of a buzzword that touches off alarm bells in a certain swathe of our profession but that, in reality, is difficult to pin down. Research assistants should be paid a fair wage; to fail to do so would constitute exploitation. Likewise, as I said, no one involved in the study should be pressured or coerced into participating. What about quid pro quo arrangements that involve dispensing the favors that a dominant party possesses in exchange for a weaker party's participation? A nominal sum of money seems to be a common inducement in many experiments, less so in qualitative work—though Duneier (who received most of his data through years of participant observation) gave his subjects, mainly homeless street vendors,

$50 on a one-time basis for a life-history interview (1999, p. 12). For them, this seemed just compensation for the afternoon they spent with him. What about course grades for participation in a study? It is much more common in social psychology, not as much in fieldwork. Instructors conducting research should not require that their students/participants/subjects/research assistants perform menial tasks, such as washing their car or performing chores such as housekeeping, shopping, or walking the dog. Demanding sex in exchange for academic and job favors is universally frowned upon as unethical; all parties should avoid such an arrangement. It's necessary, however, to keep in mind that exploitation is a conceptual construct, subject to interpretation; what counts is that the participants in a given study not *feel* that they are exploited and that the researcher not *seem* to exploit subjects, according to the interpretation of key audiences.

Causing harm

Inflicting physical harm in a study is, to virtually all social and behavioral scientists, beyond the pale of ethical conduct; likewise, participants should never be exposed to the *risk* of physical harm. But what about discomfort, unpleasantness, stress, and/or distress? And how *much* discomfort should IRBs allow? Like exploitation, stress is constructed—experientially rather than ontologically or essentially real; how does the investigator anticipate and weigh its degree and extent on subjects? Though it recognizes that some data cannot be obtained any other way, the British Sociological Association sets forth a code of ethics that warns its members that certain research conditions may be "disturbing" to participants. Is this a loophole or a barrier? It seems that it's up to researchers to decide. Researchers anxious to steer a research protocol through IRB approval will attempt to minimize the distress of their participants, but a certain measure of discomfort may be necessary to obtain pertinent data.

Condoning harm

The opposite side of the coin of causing harm is *condoning* or *tolerating* harm that participants inflict on other subjects, or on researchers themselves. How much harm should researchers condone, and what should they *do* when it occurs? Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000, p. 12) argue that the "safety and well-being of the researcher should always be placed as equal to protecting participants." How do we factor this equivalency into the real-world equation? Participant observers have written extensively about danger in the field, which can be extreme. Myrna Mack Chang, who studied displaced people in Guatemala, was murdered by henchmen closely allied with the military. In Chang's case, her relatives lodged charges against the responsible parties, and a court convicted her murderer and his accomplices (Baluarte & Chlopak, 2003). However, "Eva Moreno," a pseudonymous anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Ethiopia, was sexually harassed for months by her research assistant, an Ethiopian. He desperately longed for a "foreign lover," European women are promiscuous, he believed, and she had had sex with "multiple" partners, he claimed—now it was his turn to ravage her. One day, at the point of a gun, he raped her. The community was mostly sympathetic to her plight, though the assailant disappeared, never again to be seen. Villagers advised Moreno not to go to the police because they might also rape her, and Ethiopian law does not recognize rape unless it is against a virgin (Moreno, 1995, pp. 242, 248). The question of research ethics never entered into the picture, and the anthropologist simply had to walk away from her abuse. Codes of ethics lean toward seeking justice, but, for the vulnerable researcher in a dangerous field setting, justice in the Western sense of the word may be elusive.

Participating in and condoning illegal behavior

Patricia Adler (1993) observed the "wheeling and dealing" of an "upper-level drug dealing and smuggling community." She could not have obtained the information she generated to write her monograph on drug selling in any other way. Direct "personal observation, interaction and experience is the only way to acquire accurate knowledge about deviant behavior," Adler (1993, p. 11) declares. "Investigative techniques are especially necessary for groups such as drug dealers and smugglers because the highly illegal nature of their occupation makes them secretive, deceitful, mistrustful, and paranoid." How about observing criminal gang behavior and keeping it secret from the police? "James Patrick" (1973) is a pseudonym for the researcher who hung out with a Scottish gang and observed the members' delinquent behavior firsthand. At least one member became suspicious when Patrick did not carry a weapon and held back in violent confrontations. The author's findings made a major contribution to an understanding of gang behavior, and yet the research would have come to a screeching halt had the investigator attempted to abort the ongoing illegal behavior. Was it worth the risk? The pseudonymous authorship of the book indicates the sincerity of the writer's attempt to protect his sources—but what about his victims? We have to draw a line here—but where? What if the gang's crimes included rape and murder? Patrick's gang didn't, but, if it had, presumably the researcher would have halted the research process, and the crimes of the offenders. Ditton (1977) worked in a bakery while observing theft, pilferage, and embezzlement; again, calling attention to these petty crimes would have terminated his research. Klockars (1974), a criminologist, witnessed and was told about multiple illegal transactions taking place between a "fence"—a receiver of stolen goods—and thieves selling their loot; none of this could have been recorded in his book, had the investigator not condoned such behavior in the name of social science. Was such tolerance worth it? Evidently, some sociologists of deviance and crime believe so, but IRBs would most certainly not.

Sex with participants

Anthropologists have filled multiple volumes with admissions that they engaged in sexual liaisons with their informants while conducting fieldwork (see Kulick & Willson, 1995; Lewin & Leap, 1996; Markowitz & Ashkenazi, 1999). The narrative of a fieldworker who engaged in a homosexual relationship with a disturbed young man—who eventually assaulted him and tried to burn down his house (Wolcott, 2002)—illustrates the dilemmas of such a tactic. Anthropologist Jacques Lizot (1985) reportedly engaged in sexual acts in exchange for gifts with numerous adolescent Yanomami boys (Tierney, 2000), a serious violation of local custom, and Kenneth Good describes marrying a 14-year-old Yanomami girl, a violation of Western custom (Good, 1991). Anthropologists typically live far from home and, hence, are strongly motivated to seek sexual and emotional companionship among the people they study, which helps explain these unconventional involvements; and, for a time, their strongest close relations are with the people they study, and to some degree they become socialized in their folkways.

Sociologists have written far less than anthropologists about sexual liaisons within the context of research. Critics sharply criticized Erich Goode's (1999, 2002) admission of participation in sexual activities with informants; the editors of the journals in which his articles appeared regarded his revelations as so controversial that they included critics' reproaches in the same issues of the journals that published his disclosures. Most supervisors would strongly advise young investigators, graduate students, and untenured faculty not to enter into such relationships. As one observer said about the work of Tobias Schneebaum (1988), the anthropologist "breaks the ultimate taboo by being explicit about the fact that he had sex with the natives," which

makes his research, one debunker says, "a dirty joke." His sole motive, another claims, "was to get screwed." To these critics, such a preoccupation was "sufficient reason for dismissing" Schneebaum and his work (Wafer, 1996, p. 264). More important than sex itself, scholars should *never* engage in sexual harassment, which is the importuning or coercion *by* a party in a superordinate position, *of* a party in a subordinate position, to engage in unwelcome, unwanted sex.

Situational ethics: the relativity of ethical standards

David Calvey, a British sociologist, served as a nightclub bouncer, engaging in fieldwork on a site in a covert capacity; he never told his informants, the people he worked with and studied, about his true motives—that he was a sociologist studying the interaction between bouncers and customers. Was Calvey's tactic justified? Was it ethical? Today, IRBs, universities, and research agencies strongly discourage conducting covert research; Calvey sought neither institutional funding nor IRB approval, but he conducted his study anyway. His reasoning for not disclosing his research role? "I feared recrimination by the door community if my research role was discovered" (Calvey, 2000, p. 41). Does the fact that bouncers themselves engage in unethical, illegal, and violent behavior *justify* that deception? The author believes it does, and so do some of his colleagues (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000). Wallis (1977, p. 144), a sociologist, studied Scientology, an organization that has issued explicit statements ("The Ethics System") to the effect that anyone saying anything negative about the group, its aims, or its members, is "fair game" and may be "tricked, sued, or lied to or destroyed" or "deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist." How does the sociologist study such a group? In a word, deception—there is no other way. Does the group's promulgation of unethical practices justify the sociologist's relaxation of ethical standards? Does it come down to situational rather than absolute ethics? Some researchers believe it does.

The experience of various scholars seems to argue for an ethical ideal for research conducted under the best of all possible conditions and a more pragmatic ethical standard for sticky, problematic, real-life research settings. What appears to be fair, just, and ethical in one setting may not work in another. Under difficult circumstances, the choice seems fairly straightforward: Abandon the study or engage in practices that bend the rules. Sociologists interpret deception, normally considered an unethical practice, as acceptable—indeed, necessary—under certain conditions. "Do what you think is best, but keep your eyes on the prize"—the data—seems to be the investigator's watchword. But don't *egregiously* violate ethical guidelines, standards of decency, or human rights.

Spoiling the field

No ethnographer wants to walk away from a locale that he or she has made unresearchable by later students. However, in the history of qualitative research, doing something that engenders such a reaction is probably fairly rare, and it's not clear to what extent participants have communicated toxic experiences to subsequent potential subjects. It's possible that commentators have stressed the point overly much. Participants should at least know what investigators had in mind in conducting their research, and why they did what they did. Moreover, although social scientists do not stand outside the law, their legal violations should make sense to the audiences with which they communicate, and that includes their research participants. Getting involved in social research, willingly or inadvertently, should not leave a bad taste in participants' mouths, and sociologists should take every precaution to help make subjects, informants, and

interviewees feel positive about their role in the process. Still, investigators owe an obligation to their colleagues and to the society at large for creating and supporting a climate of inquiry that makes the disorderly and disparate enterprise of qualitative research on deviance and crime possible.

Summary and conclusions

In the social sciences, numerous research protocols that passed muster in generations past are now deemed unethical and unacceptable. An irony of this shift is that many past studies that are held up today as exemplifying unethical practices are also regarded as classics, ranking among the most influential and frequently cited works in the history of sociology and social psychology—possibly chief among them, Laud Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade* (1970/1975).

Absolutism argues that ethical standards are intrinsically right or wrong, good or bad, according to certain intrinsic or innate standards, whereas situationalism or constructionism holds that ethics are judged by audiences and reacted to accordingly in specific contexts, within identifiable social circles. One of these audiences is made up of the IRBs of the institutions that employ the scholars and investigators who conduct research; another is constituted by those scholars and researchers themselves. IRB requirements have become increasingly restrictive, making it necessary for investigators to present an unrealistic ideal in their grant proposals, yet engage in research that yields the maximum pay-off—in effect, to lie about how their study is to be conducted. Constructionism adopts the position that what's ethical or unethical is a matter of debate and can never be definitively resolved; situationism argues that the ethics of behavior are determined *in context*, and contexts are constructed according to time and place. Treating IRBs as an audience that must be placated for an instrumental purpose—to conduct a study— solves the dilemma of unrealistic expectations. In all likelihood, the growing importance of the Internet as a site for qualitative research on deviance and crime will raise even more ethical issues and dilemmas.

Ethical codes represent ideals that practitioners should pursue but that may be impractical under certain circumstances. Rather than conforming to a rigid ethical code that details specific guidelines, it may be more productive for scholars to consider *dimensions* that they should address and grapple with. They should inform subjects that they are engaging in a study, but that may not always be workable; they should not deceive subjects, unless they cannot gather crucial information in some other way. They should grant subjects the right to confidentiality, but anonymity is probably impossible for the members of small social circles in which everyone knows everyone else. They should not exploit subjects, but exploitation is a largely constructed notion, open to interpretation. Researchers should not harm the researched, but, although physical harm is strictly off limits, they may expose some subjects to stressful or disturbing experiences. Although the investigator should never condone harm, the *researched* may harm the *researcher*; probably both are in need of protection. Social scientists should avoid sex with participants, but such practice is fairly common among anthropologists, less so—and discussed far less frequently— among sociologists. In any case, sexual harassment—putting pressure on someone to engage in undesired sex acts—is forbidden under any and all circumstances. Ethical standards seem to be relative to research situations and contexts, varying according to exigencies, power hierarchies, and the setting or group the social scientist studies. However, a core set of ethical guidelines with which *all* audiences in the drama of qualitative research—from IRBs to investigators to participants—agree comprises the following principles: Don't coerce potential subjects into becoming research participants; don't physically harm subjects; don't sexually harass anyone; avoid acts everyone agrees constitute exploitation; don't engage in seriously felonious behavior;

try to conceal the identity of your sources; and don't spoil a research site for future investigators. In the end, it's probably a good idea to leave behind a legacy of a few good deeds.

Note

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