studied may require the revelation of information damaging to individuals or sub-groups. In this instance the scientist himself is likely to be the best judge of the need for his data. If he understands and accepts the basic values of the group and takes his obligation to the group seriously, he may find it imperative to disclose such information. Since he cannot plead ignorance, and since there is no demand from competent higher authority, the responsibility for the assessment of urgency rests squarely on the scientist.

Finally, even though neither the higher authority nor the representatives of the group studied place any demands upon him, he may become aware of facts which are vitally needed by the social group studied or by the society. In such cases he must not only accept the responsibility for violating the rights of individuals and groups, but also must arrive at his decision with very little outside aid. In clear-cut instances where the comparison and balancing of the rights of the various claimants can be easily accomplished, the decision may be easily reached. But it is certainly in this area that the researcher will be forced to consider most thoroughly the importance which he, himself, has placed on the value of the information in its relation to the needs of the group.

The complexities exhibited in the discussion of the four central variables indicate that the problem of ethical limitations on sociological reporting cannot be reduced to a simple either-or proposition of a conflict between the scientific objectivity of a research report and the ethical inhibitions of the person who writes the report. It is apparent that the sociologist must act simultaneously according to a highly developed procedural code for scientific reporting and a code of ethics based on the belief that the objects of his study are also subjects. These codes are not irreconcilable, but the resolution of specific conflicts between them may be a very complex task, involving the claims of many groups and the interrelationships of the four variables. Yet the sociologist must resolve them. If there is a tendency for the sociologist to become more scientific, he must also become increasingly sensitized to the rights, feelings, and needs of the people he studies. Treating them as subjects means that to the best of his ability he will treat them with justice, understanding, compassion, and, in the last analysis, love.

NOTE

[1] "Science after all is only one of the games played by the children of this world, and it may very well be that those who prefer other games are in their generation wiser." Carroll C. Pratt, *The Logic of Modern Psychology* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 57.

CHAPTER 24

Comment on "Initial Interaction of Newcomers in Alcoholics Anonymous"

Fred Davis

In their article "Initial Interaction of Newcomers in Alcoholics Anonymous," (Fall, 1960) John Lofland and Robert Lejeune report on an "experiment [which] consisted in sending six male agents [sic; graduate students in sociology] to A.A. open meetings where they posed as alcoholic newcomers" (p. 103). Several pages further on (pp. 107-08) the authors, demonstrating a keen sense for methodological specification, describe in detail the careful plans and elaborate pains they took to insure the successful perpetration of this ruse upon the membership of several A.A. branches in the New York area. Whereas Lofland and Lejeune appear, judging from the text of their article, blandly indifferent to the professional and ethical implications of their "research design"—indeed, there is nothing to suggest that they were perturbed by anything other than its possible methodological shortcomings—I am certain that many readers of Social Problems will feel impelled, as did I, to take a decidedly different view of the matter.

There is little need to dwell on the more narrowly professional issues occasioned by research strategies of this genre (i.e., those political ones having to do with the power and repute of sociologists to command access to persons and organizations in furtherance of scholarly objectives). Suffice it to say that the leaders and members of no corporate group, especially one imbued with a reformistic spirit of mission, can be reasonably expected to view such acts of premeditated deception with, to understate the case, indifference. To the extent to which A.A. is involved in broad scale, popular undertakings to ameliorate the problem of alcoholism—and its involvement is obviously considerable—Lofland and Lejeune have done a potential disservice to all future investigators who in the course of their investigations may want to enlist the cooperation of this organization. In short, their actions threaten to seriously contract the zone of research accessibility to an important social problem. And, needless to say, the fact that the authors appeared to have been much

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less concerned with alcoholism or A.A. than with questions of social class interaction, in no way absolves them from the responsibilities owed colleagues who are and will be working in this area.

Beyond these practical considerations however, there looms the more cogent issue of the character and extent of the sociologist's license to exempt himself from the expectations, common reciprocities and *modus operandi* of the persons and organizations to which he attaches himself in his role of participant-observer. I can only raise again the same kinds of disturbing, yet ever relevant, questions that many have raised before me. Is such license complete or partial? Enduring on all occasions, or terminal according to time, place and circumstances? Contingent when studying "good" causes and institutions, but uninhibited when studying "bad" ones? Equally applicable in whatever degree to the powerful and powerless alike or, as a matter of expedience, of differential applicability? (A colleague has ventured the disquieting allegation that while sociologists are as a rule scrupulous in setting forth their research auspices and purposes when making first-hand studies of such powerful groups as the military, labor unions and liberal professions, they tend to be a good deal less conscientious on this score when studying such powerless groups and aggregates as isolated religious cults, deviants of various kinds and anonymous respondents at every twenty-third household.) Convincing and unequivocal ethical standards of research conduct for our discipline do not easily follow from the mere posing of these questions. But it is with reference to them that actions of the type engaged in by Lofland and Lejeune must somehow be weighed if sociologists are ever to knowledgeably effect a moral integration between their roles as members of society and participant students of society. Otherwise, the delicate and inescapable intertwining of these roles in field studies can too easily fall victim to accident, ignorance, opportunism and misappropriation by those outside the scholarly community who seek only to further private ends.

More in an inductive spirit therefore, and without presuming to speak in behalf of formalized codes or widely accepted principles of research conduct—neither of which seems yet to exist—let me set forth the counts upon which I find this type of deception repugnant:

1. *The Total Denial of Voluntaristic Rights.* Neither the A.A. branch members nor their leaders appear to have been given any choice in deciding whether they did or did not wish to participate in the experiment. They were simply used. Not only were the concrete purposes of the study kept from them, but no attempt appears to have ever been made to enlist their consent through such doubtfully venial appeals as "helping science" or "helping graduate students get through their assignments."

2. *The Tacit Disrespect Shown for A.A.'s Values, Modes of Operation and Mission.* We know enough about A.A., its ideology and the deep anguish

of many of its members to, I would assume, recognize that "posing as alcoholic newcomers" (e.g., to feign "looking tense and uncomfortable," to jiggle with hidden stop watches when spoken to by a branch member, etc.) constitutes a travesty upon the organization's identity. This is not to say, of course, that the sociologist is compelled to accept as truth the ideology by which the organization represents itself to outsiders. But, it is a far cry from intellectually detaching oneself from an organization's values to engaging in acts which effectively make a mockery of them. And that these were open meetings of A.A. does not, in my estimation, justify treating so lightly the motivational and situational terms upon which A.A. recruits its members.

3. Last, there is what some may treat as only a sentimental objection, but one which despite its elusiveness, I feel, comes closest to the heart of the matter. That is, in field situations in which the sociologist (or anthropologist) openly represents himself to his subjects for what he is (i.e., a person whose interest in them is professional rather than personal) he unavoidably, and properly I would hold, invites unto himself the classic dilemma of compromising involvement in the lives of others. Filling him with gossip, advice, invitations to dinner and solicitations of opinion, they devilishly make it evident that whereas he may regard himself as the *tabula rasa* incarnate upon whom the mysteries of the group are to be writ, they can only see him as someone less detached and less sublime. There then follows for many a fieldworker the unsettling recognition that, within very broad limits, it is precisely when his subjects palpably relate to him in his "out-of-research role" self (or "presentation," depending on one's disassociative bent) that the *raison d'etre* for his "in-role" self is most nearly realized; they are more themselves, they tell and "give away" more, they supply connections and insights which he would otherwise have never grasped. (One is tempted to conceive of this moral paradox as sociologist's original sin, although happily the benign interpositions of area sampling, pre-coded questionnaires and paid interviewers now spare more and more of us from suffering its pangs.)

It is in large measure due to this ineluctable transmutation of role postures in field situations that, when he later reports, the sociologist often experiences a certain guilt, a sense of having betrayed, a stench of disreputability about himself; these, despite the covers, pseudonyms and eletions with which he clothes his subjects. (Or, have I alone heard such "confessions" from fellow sociologists?) In an almost Durkheimian sense, I would hold that it is just and fitting that he be made to squirm so, because in having exploited his non-scientific self (either deliberately or unwittingly) for ends other than those immediately apprehended by his subjects he has in some significant sense violated the collective conscience of the community, if not that of the profession.

Now, the resort to calculated and whole-cloth deception of the type discussed here does not of course escape the final terms of this dilemma

which may unalterably be our lot. It does, however, escape the intermediate ones: the discovery that *in vivo* the participant research role becomes something, both more and less than itself; the conscious opening up of self to the possibility of rebuttal, disaffection, divided loyalties, compromising attachments and difficult disclosures; the price of engagement as opposed to that of mere doing. And, it is ultimately in this sense that such actions strike me as less than human, and hence unworthy of a discipline which, whatever else it represents itself as, also call itself by that name.

In closing, may I suggest that it would be wholly fitting for a future issue of Social Problems to devote its pages to an airing of this, the sociologist's, social problem.

CHAPTER 23

Reply to Davis' Comment on "Initial Interaction"

John Lofland

Mr. Davis' letter is written in response to an experiment reported by Mr. Lejeune and myself, but it relates less to our work than to some general moral problems of performing sociological research. I will therefore address my comments to the broader argument in so far as it is possible to separate it from its confusing entanglement with his personal response to our report.

If I may, there is one question specific to the experiment on which I would like to comment first. Mr. Davis writes that A.A. members will possibly be unhappy with our experiment and as a result make it difficult to get their cooperation in future research. This is a conceivable outcome in any field research, and one upon which we always take a chance. Mr. Davis' statement, in this case, assumes two things, both of which are unlikely. First, that A.A. members will read the report and second, that they will be unhappy about what is reported. Concerning the former, the article was not written or reported to facilitate viewing by A.A. members; it is presented in scientific writing and appears in a professional journal, both of which very effectively limit its audience. As to the latter, if some members do read it, it is not evident that the reaction will be "indifferent," or as Mr. Davis means, hostile. In fact, personally, quite contrary to Mr. Davis' personal feelings, I judge the experiment to be favorable to A.A., and do not think that members will necessarily judge it any differently. In his concentration on method, Mr. Davis apparently failed to see the moral and ethical implications of the findings, which I personally regard as gratifying. Of course, my suppositions on this point may be incorrect.

Moving to the more general issues, Mr. Davis is concerned with the character of sociologists' obligations to the science and profession and most

This chapter was originally published by the Society for the Study of Social Problems in *Social Problems,* 8: no. 4, 365-67. *John Lofland no longer subscribes to the argument he presents here. His current position is in essential accord with the views developed by Kai Erikson in "A Comment on Disguised Observation in Sociology," pp. 252-60 of this volume. Professor Lofland's most recent statement on these matters appears in his book, with the assistance of Lyn H. Lofland,* Deviance and Identity *(Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 299-301.*—W.F.