

## Ethics & Medical Research

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### Deception & Humphreys' Ethnography of the "Tearoom Trade"

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

#### Readings

- Laud Humphreys, "The Sociologist as Voyeur" (PDF on webpage).
- Alan Elms, "Keeping Deception Honest" (PDF on webpage).

#### Questions

1. What phenomenon is Humphreys examining? What are the protocols he uses? What forms of deception did this ethnographic study involve? Why does Humphreys believe all this was both scientifically justified and ethically permissible? Do you agree? More particularly, did this study allow subjects to give valid informed consent for their participation? Did they show a general respect for the subjects?
2. Reread the section of the textbook on ethnographic methods from Levine and Skedsvold's "Behavioral and Social Science Research" (pp. 347–348). Given the risks associated with such a methodology, does Humphreys try to minimize them?
3. Reread the section of the textbook on authorized deception from Wendler and Miller's "Deception on Clinical Research" (pp. 320–321). Could Humphreys' ethnographic study been as scientifically effective if it had instead employed authorized deception?
4. What are the various harms and wrongs of using deception in research that Elms considers? What conditions does Elms specify for morally permissible deception? How are these supposed to adequately respond to the harms and wrongs of deception? Do Milgram's obedience experiments satisfy these conditions? Does Humphreys' ethnographic study?