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Whenever I teach introductory sociology, publishers are quick to send me copies of their latest textbooks. Not too long ago, I received an examination copy of *Sociology* by David Ward and Lorene Stone (West Publishing, 1996). One way I evaluate the quality is to read how topics on gay men and lesbians are presented. It is not uncommon for texts to leave out such issues or, at most, include a token mention or paragraph. Typical of many, the Ward and Stone book devotes a "Social Diversity" half-page sidebar in "The Family" chapter on gay and lesbian families. That's really about it for this 500-page text, except for a half-page titled "Invasion of Privacy" under the "Ethical Issues in Sociological Research" section of the chapter on doing social research.

Once again, Laud Humphreys' infamous study on "impersonal sex in public places" has made the cut. Alas, like many textbooks that discuss his research, the focus is on the ethical questions raised by his methodology. Only two sentences are devoted to mentioning what the study actually discovered sociologically about the men who participated in sexual activity in a public park toilet. (A "tearoom" in American slang or a "cottage" in British slang is a public toilet where same-gender sexual acts occur).

How is it that this book, more than twenty-five years later, could still be used as an exemplar of ethically problematic research? What is it that made this study so scandalous? Debates arise about Humphreys' "voyeur-lookout" or participant observer role in the tearooms, his recording of the license plate numbers of the participants, his search for their home addresses and names through public records, and his interviews a year later with fifty of them while posing as a survey researcher for a study on mental health. What some have described as an ingenious way to uncover difficult-to-study forms of hidden behavior, others have attacked as unethical and an invasion of privacy.

When the study appeared as the lead article in *Trans-Action*, a monthly sociology magazine (now called *Society*) edited by Irving Louis Horowitz, it

was denounced in a January 1970 *Washington Post* column by Nicholas von Hoffman as immoral and a violation of the participants' basic human rights to informed consent: "No information is valuable enough to obtain by nipping away at personal liberty" (reprinted in Humphreys 1975: 181). Sociologists Irving Louis Horowitz and Lee Rainwater jumped to the defense of Humphreys' work and methods in a May 1970 editorial in *Trans-Action* (reprinted in Humphreys 1975). They strongly stated their belief in the research and "in its principled humaneness, in its courage to learn the truth and in the constructive contribution that it makes toward our understanding of all the issues, including the moral, raised by deviant behavior in our society" (Humphreys 1975: 185).

Horowitz and Rainwater responded that the behavior of tearoom participants is not private but public behavior; that full disclosure of the purpose of the follow-up interviews would have compromised the findings and research; and that the researcher's intentions in this case do matter ("the pursuit of truth, the creation of countervailing knowledge, the demystification of shadowy areas of human experience," Humphreys 1975: 188).

Yet Humphreys himself later had doubts about one portion of his methodology. Although he felt that observing tearoom behavior was not a violation of privacy or unethical since it occurred in a public place, he did come to believe that tracing license numbers and interviewing participants in their homes may have placed his respondents "in greater danger than seemed plausible at the time" (1975: 230). If he were to do the study over, Humphreys wrote, he would spend more time cultivating additional willing participants for the interviews.

However, rather than endlessly argue about these ethical and methodological issues, let the following excerpt of his study reclaim what has been lost over the years, namely the important sociological findings about the participants and what the research has taught us about the social organization of same-sex sexual encounters in public places (see also Nardi 1995). Humphreys often stated that he wished "other sociologists would give more attention to some of my substantive findings that I believe provide an increment of understanding of social behavior in our society" (1975: 231).

Sociologically, Humphreys' research contributed several key findings, as will be seen in the selection that follows. One finding was the structure of the collective action in the tearooms. Humphreys found that maintenance of privacy in public settings depends heavily on the silence of the interaction and on a special ritual that must be both noncoercive and noncommittal. Making analogies to Goffman's work on games, he analyzed the encounters in terms of the flexible roles and standard rules that characterize a game. Humphreys illustrated the collective actions of positioning, sig-

naling, maneuvering, contracting, foreplay, and the payoff. Since there is such an elaborate social structure, he concluded that being propositioned against one's will or recruited into homosexuality in public restrooms—as some antigay rhetoric proclaims—is an unlikely occurrence.

A second important finding from Humphreys' work was that many of the participants in tearoom sexual encounters were married (54%), were Roman Catholic (42%), and were politically and socially conservative (32%, as measured on a social/economic liberalism scale). In addition, based on their appearances and demeanor during the interviews, Humphreys (1975: 135) concluded that most of the participants put on a "breastplate of righteousness"—"a protective shield of superpropriety . . . [with] a particularly shining quality, a refulgence, which tends to blind the audience to certain of [the wearer's] practices." The participants—especially those who were married or were closeted single men—engaged in various forms of minimizing revelations about themselves through a strategy of information control designed to misdirect from their behaviors. Many of these men took a defensive shield by advocating moral crusades, endorsing vice squad activities, and creating a presentation of self-respectability.

Another important sociological conclusion was Humphreys' discussion about why people engage in public sex and what the costs are. Just as games of chance attract and thrill participants, so also does the kick from risk-taking behavior, as we see all too well today among those knowingly taking a chance with unsafe sexual acts. But Humphreys went beyond simple psychological explanations and noted the importance of certain structural reasons: the availability, invisibility, variety, and impersonality of tearoom encounters. Finally, he raised important theoretical and sociological questions about the social control of sexual behavior and public policy. The real harm of public sex, Humphreys felt, was putting these men at risk for blackmail, payoffs, and destroyed reputations at the hands of the police. This was a strong statement to make in its day—perhaps even to this day—when entrapments were a routine method of police work.

It is especially important to remember when this book was written in order to understand fully the reasons for its notoriety. *Tearoom Trade* was first published in 1970 as a revised version of Humphreys' 1968 Ph.D. dissertation at Washington University in St. Louis. Relying on the classical sociological theories of Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, and Howard Becker, Humphreys developed a proposal to study the social structures of sexual interaction in a public place and the social characteristics of those participating in the behaviors. When he began collecting his data in the mid-1960s, there were no "gay studies programs," only a few publications

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in sociology and anthropology focusing on homosexuality, and certainly very little by openly gay men and lesbians. Psychoanalytic publications were also widely available but, typically, these pathologized homosexual behavior. Furthermore, media information and the public's attitudes about gay men and lesbians were almost all negative and erroneous. And the militant resistance to routine raids by the police on gay bars had only just begun: the "Stonewall" rebellion occurred a scant six months before publication of the book, and about a year after completion of the dissertation research.

In such a climate, Humphreys' thesis became a minor scandal. It was opposed by Alvin Gouldner, a noted professor in Washington University's now-defunct sociology department, which resulted in some physical shoving between him and Humphreys (see Goodwin, Horowitz, and Nardi 1991). There was an attempt by the chancellor of the university to revoke his Ph.D. degree on the grounds that Humphreys committed a felony by observing and facilitating fellatio; after that failed, an agreement was reached to keep the dissertation from being published for at least a two-year period. However, the book version, published by Aldine in 1970, was awarded the C. Wright Mills Award by the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Two years later, Humphreys left his position at the State University of New York, Albany, and joined the sociology department at Pitzer College, one of the Claremont Colleges located near Los Angeles, where he remained until his death in 1988 from smoking-related lung cancer.

More than twenty-five years after its publication, *Tearoom Trade* continues to provide a strong foundation and framework for any research done today on public spaces and sexuality. Humphreys' work raises the kinds of questions that queer studies pose today about what it actually means to call someone "straight" or "gay." For example, other studies in recent years on sex in public places have confirmed some of Humphreys' findings. Desroches (1990) analyzed Canadian police case materials and interviewed officers about arrests in shopping mall restrooms and also found that the interactions were silent and impersonal, were not coercive, and involved married men in 58 percent of the cases.

An unpublished report from the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Police Advisory Task Force in 1992 estimated that about half of those arrested for "lewd conduct" in a public park were heterosexually married men, although only 24 percent of those completing the survey were married (around 75% of those arrested did not complete the survey). And in Australia, where public places for sex between men are termed "beats," Moore (1995: 324) wrote that "Brisbane-based surveys from the 1990s show that the majority of men who cruise urban and highway beats are ostensibly het-

erosexual married men with families, the same pattern uncovered by Laud Humphreys in his 1960s study from America, *Tearoom Trade*."

Such is the legacy and the enduring power of quality academic research and why the following selection is included in this collection. Humphreys' work, for all the controversy about its methods and findings, remains a salient part of the international gay studies canon and a pioneering model for all those who continue to do research about the diversity of human sexual behavior.

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