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ON SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLOITATION: WHY THE GUINEA PIG SOMETIMES BITES*

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Resistance to community research is growing, in part, because applied sociologists have not delivered the answers sought by their clients. Current analyses of this phenomenon are too simple because they overlook the setting in which the client-practitioner transaction takes place. The situation is complicated by "role strains" felt on both sides. An overlooked component of this is the exploitation of subjects and applied research by the reformulation of projects in "scientific and respectable" terms. One possible structural change at least to lessen this pattern and hence bolster the contract between applied sociology and its clients is suggested.

It is not uncommon for a sociology department or an individual researcher to be called upon to deliver certain "services" to a community. A department may be asked by local leaders to offer courses in "race relations" or "law enforcement" to aid the community. Likewise, researchers may be asked to undertake the evaluation of municipal

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services or an investigation of underlying tensions in a community. Urban universities, in particular, are asked to undertake research activities that can have important influence on social policy in their community. For example, a local welfare agency may contract for a comprehensive program of evaluative research on its services to "welfare recipients." As Spiegel and Alicea (1970) have indicated a "gain-gain" relationship is evolving in which both the university and the community it serves are cooperating in achieving some shared goals. The "course" services seem a relatively simple matter—fitting rather clearly into the educational functions of the university. The "service oriented" or "applied" research, however, introduces a number of issues.

Community or urban research always has raised the problem of intrusion into peoples's lives. This issue, generally, has been one of protecting the anonymity of respondents (see Vidich and Bensman, 1968:397-475; Rainwater and Pittman, 1967). A new problem seems to have developed with the complaints by people, particularly low income or powerless citizens, that all the research being done is an affront because it treats them like "guinea pigs" and merely provides the researcher with another stepping stone in the building of his career. In my own experience a Model Cities agency was unable at one point to undertake a program of survey research called for in its comprehensive plan because the elected Neighborhood Representatives said they were tired of being used as something for "professors to experiment with so they can write books about poor folks."[1] Spiegel and Alicea (1970:488) report a case where researchers were asked to leave a Model Cities meeting because "they had nothing to offer the community." Josephson (1970) has chronicled his experiences with a project in which survey research was "resisted." Etzkowitz (1970) has outlined this problem quite dramatically with his description of increased refusal rates, etc. He argues these events indicate a rejection by "subjects" of researchers' prerogatives. In such cases the populations are usually low income, therefore, his call for "institution formation sociology"—based on the dictum that "sociologists undertake the responsibility to bring about social reform as part of their sociological work" (Etzkowitz, 1970: 120)—seems applicable. A black student in an urban sociology course echoed these thoughts:

> In attempting to interview residents on an informal basis I received little support, which is understandable considering their environmental living condition (sic) and their state of mind. Many are withdrawn and have given up hope of bettering their condition. Their state of mental, economical (sic) and racial depression permits no reason to give information to a "nebby (sic) Black woman doing the white man's work." This comment was made to me by a female Hill (A Black ghetto) resident. However I did receive help from *some* blacks in better economic conditions, however they resented "blacks being used as guinea pigs for research." After talking to several residents I began to sympathize with them because it is easy for me to understand their resentment of research. The white democratic system places my people in this environment and now they record studies of their adjustment to the environment. It is therefore easy for me to understand why they would give incorrect information because in this environment they feel they are nobody.

The picture seems clear. Researchers have invaded the community and particularly the "ghetto" for some years—

[1] This comment was made to me by a member of the Pittsburgh Model Cities Board of Neighborhood Commissioners.

after all, there is research money and hence potential career advancement in poverty—with a few visible "benefits" to the "objects" of the research. It seems easy to acknowledge, therefore, a strategy such as recommended by Etzkowitz, i.e., sociologists forming new institutions in these areas and then studying them—albeit in "unobtrusive ways." However, the temptation to regard all kinds of people—no matter their place in the socioeconomic hierarchy—as "objects" is great. A student doing research in an upper-middle class area adjacent to an urban university reports: ". . . the upper class people and the older people seem suspicious of such a survey and one woman felt that the University . . . has been sending too many interviewers to the neighborhood." A community easily can become saturated with researchers and the ethics of using a group of people as "objects of study" are more complex than most methodology courses or textbooks lead one to believe. Even a short interview represents a substantial portion of the subject's time. Allowing for those subjects who "want to be interviewed" still leaves a large pool of responders who would prefer to spend their time in ways other than answering a questionnaire. The presence of observers in a neighborhood does not go undetected. Multiple interviewers or observers present the danger of interference with normal social activities.

It is not clear when this "intrusion" becomes exploitation[2] even if there are "results." Josephson (1970) reports on a demonstration where the issue was evident on a placard which read "we need hospitals, not surveys." Many subjects are apprehensive when approached and are not hesitant to ask who is providing funds for the research. While the issue might be clearer if advanced by a lower-class citizen, it is still a legitimate concern of all subjects. One might ask, from the perspective of the "objects" of study, "What do I get out of this?" Unfortunately, the answer to the question more and more seems to be "Nothing!"

Denzin (1970) has described this non-delivery phenomenon and attributed it to the nature of the client-practitioner relationship implied in much research. The results of non-deliverance in client-centered research can be breaking of the "implied contract" upon which most research is based.[3] Today we find the predictable response. Inter-city residents refuse to be interviewed or simply "put the man on." Those that "cooperate" may be another case of "creaming the poor" (Miller, 1970). They are able to identify with the researcher enough to look beyond their immediate group interests; hence they are not representative. Working class whites respond to survey questions the way they think they are expected to answer, conceal their true feelings from interviewers, or give essentially rote and thus "meaningless" responses. For example, in the racially divided city of Gary, Indiana working-class whites gave vocal support to civil

[2] By exploitation I mean the use of an applied research situation for a primary goal of individual career advancement or institutional financial benefit rather for the primary goal it presumably carries, i.e., deliverance of certain necessary information for policy reformulation and development.

[3] In applied research activities there are really two contracts. One is the legal and formal document between the researcher and the funding agency setting out the goals of the research, terms of payment, etc. The other contract is the "implied" one through which the "objectives" of the research are accepted as legitimate by the constituency upon whom and/or for whom it is to be performed.

rights activities at the same time they supported secession from the city to "escape" a black mayor (Vargus, 1969). Students report purposely distorting questionnaires they are asked to fill out. "After all," they say, "what difference does it make to me if some professor writes a book." Some fear their responses will somehow be used "against them." Still others delight in faking responses to "beat the system." One student expounded with some pride and in some detail to my urban sociology class his "lies" on the census forms for the 1970 census. Broader social development intrude upon this issue also. A concern for privacy has achieved prominence. National news magazines, for example, have featured cover stories decrying the demise of privacy in our society. A national data bank is practical, but its potential surveillance use overshadows for many its value as a research aid.

All this suggests that social researchers have "lost" part of their "implied" contract with clients or at least with those in whose name most research is conducted. No matter what agency or foundation funds the project, it is justified, after all, because it serves the interests of certain citizens of the United States, "science" or all mankind. It seems at least two of these constituencies no longer are interested in cooperating in research that does not minimally appear to deliver rather immediate benefits. Denzin (1970), in his discussion of the relation between applied and basic research, has phrased this issue as one of "who leads" our research enterprises, society or science. Since we have not "delivered many answers" in the "applied" area, and the likelihood of doing so depends as much as on plain politics as anything else, he calls for a return to activities in which sociology is considered a *scientific* activity. The position is too simple. Not only has Denzin narrowly defined applied sociology—he seems, for example, to overlook contributions made in more common-place areas like market research, public opinion polling and so forth—but he has misrepresented somewhat the nature of the client-practitioner relationship. He has shifted much of the "blame" to the client when some, at least, should fall on the practitioner.[4]

The simplicity of Denzin's analysis and the simplicity of Etzkowitz's recommendations result from avoiding three major issues—the degree and form of "intrusion" allowable into any community no matter its place in the power hierarchy as discussed above, the role of existing institutions in funding and formulating community research and the university's role in sanctioning community studies and implementing the client-service relationship implied in such research. In particular, the last two issues suggest that current models of the client-service pattern have been simplistic and have overlooked the "institutional filters" that influence most "applied sociology." Overall, the "institution-formation" recommendation by Etzkowitz still does not prevent the unethical utilization of data or situations, i.e., sociological exploitation.

The argument has been made often that the unique situation in applied

[4] The client can exploit applied research. For example, Goldner (1967) reports on a situation where research findings were "exploited" within an organization in order to advance individual careers. Agencies use evaluational studies to buttress their budget appeals. However, the principal concern in this paper is with the professionals who selfishly utilizes a research opportunity involving a relatively powerless subject population.

sociology is that the sociologist works for a client who may dictate the terms of the professional's involvement, the pattern of research, and so forth. Gouldner (1965) has suggested that "good" applied sociology comes when the practitioner does not assume the role of the engineer but, in fact, adopts a role much like that taken by a psychoanalyst—that of treating a patient. The point is made again and again that the constraints placed upon the practitioner in the client-practitioner relationship are such that applied sociology as an activity frequently has been less than satisfying both for the practitioner himself and for the development of social theory. Miller (1965: 444) has indicated the issue from the client's side: "Social usefulness has frequently been subordinated to sociological respectability." Others have suggested that a simple client-practitioner exchange model is misleading (Lazarsfeld, 1967: iix-xxx). In fact, the constraints upon both the client and the practitioner in the applied research operation are very great because of their involvement in wider institutions. The applied sociologist faces a number of role choices in his stance toward research. He can choose to be, at the least, a "social engineer," a scholar, an employee, or Gouldner's "psychoanalyst treating a patient." The client's representative faces another set of role choices. He can choose to be, at the least, an "agency bureaucratic," a community representative, an employee "on the way up" or a "professional" intent on producing useful data for policy formulation and implementation.[5] The situation becomes a case of role strain for both. Consider, for example, the following situation: of sociologist, a member of the faculty of a university, attempts to secure a contract for some research with the local Model Cities Agency. He usually deals with one or two people of that agency finding out what kind of research it is that they want done and so forth. Presumably he makes the contact because he suspects his research interests will match some

[5] An interesting example of how these roles can change comes from my experience in dealing with the Pittsburgh Model Cities agency. After lengthy negotiations I was awarded a contract to research "neighborhood attitudes and concerns" but because of the "anti-guinea pig" attitudes described above I was restricted to using "unobtrusive measures" except for a small sample of neighborhood leaders that I was authorized to interview. About one year later, and about the time my contract was finally approved, the same people I had worked with were requesting City Council to approve expenditure of enough funds to employ 45 Model Neighborhood residents to carry out an attitude study of a 15 percent sample of the Model Neighborhood. The changes resulted because the agency found itself with two "new problems" involving unexpended funds and pressures from the regional office to do an attitude survey. The citizen inputs were thus counterveiled by higher organizational pressures and the oligarchical tendencies generated by the long term interaction of the agency staff. In fact, the "new project" was presented to the Neighborhood Commissioners as jobs for 45 people rather than as research. The "trade-off" or "gain" aspects were, thus, accentuated. Interestingly, the local press editorialized against any further research for Model Cities, suggesting that action was needed rather than more "definitive studies." "Citizens of deprived areas have been surveyed to death and are sick and tired of it and want action. Taxpayers are equally fed up with survey after survey which only seem to spread the green among consulting agencies rather than among the people who need help." See "$177,000 in Model Cities Requests: Why?" Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Thursday, February 25, 1971, p. 14. A third party apparently has entered the negotiations between client and practitioner. In this case it is the audience or general "public" as represented by powerful groups like the daily press.

agency needs. However, the research budget of that agency, which predetermines the kind of research they fund, is not set by the people operating in the local agency, but is set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington. The "ideology" of that agency necessarily permeates the relationship between the sociologist and his local contacts. While there is a certain flexibility because of the concept of "citizen participation" at the local level for the neighborhood committee and while local bodies (that is, the Neighborhood Commissioners and the city council itself) have authority in deciding with which individual or firm research money is finally spent, there are constraints that exist because the client in this case is constrained by wider involvements in an institutional framework going much beyond a simple one-to-one relationship. Likewise, the researcher is involved in certain institutional commitments which restrict him in his actions. Every university that I know has some policy for approving and monitoring research contracts. While this pattern of approval varies widely from school to school and can be perfunctory in many cases, it is true that the researcher is constrained in various ways by his university. Each university adds a portion to the budget which they entitle "indirect costs"—intended to reimburse the university for the use of its facilities in the conduct of the research. This can become a real issue when a client sees that cost as "too high," etc. It seems that in the future these institutional filters, both from the client's side and from the practitioner's side, must be considered much more carefully in any kind of applied research and particularly that which involves a relatively powerless community. Lack of consideration for the "institutional filters" and the role strain leads to conflicting interpretations of what has gone on in the attempt to fulfill the "contract."[6]

It appears that the situation of both the client and the practitioner in the applied research process is one of role strain. (See Goode, 1960). Two major forms of disagreement on role expectations seem paramount. The client, practitioner, and their "audiences" may disagree on the range of permitted behaviors (see Rodman and Kolodny, 1965 for an example of this) or they may disagree on which set of expectations take precedence in any situation. There are diverse kinds of interests and pressures placed on each individual or role which force accommodations. The researcher's role is complicated by his involvement with the university, his desire to do "scholarly" research, and his interest in the project itself. The client's role is restricted by his interest in handling budgetary problems, handling "neighborhood" or citizen complaints, and handling the interests of the wider agency. Side-payments, compromises, and other strategies of accommodation are taken out of necessity to escape the strain. Thus, pleas like that of Denzin to give "science" priority could be predicted. A hierarchy of role obligations is often used to limit role strain (Merton, 1957). The choices in such situations will be made, if we are to be guided by previous research, on the basis of perceived legitimacy of expectations, perceived strength of possible sanctions, and the degree of importance attached by the actor to the legitimacy or sanction aspects of the role expectations (Gross, Mason and McEarchen, 1958). Thus, the predict-

[6] These "ethical problems" are faced by other professionals in dealings with their clients. For example see Carlin (1966).

able responses occur again. Denzin worries about his colleagues, Etzkowitz worries about his subjects, and Josephson seems to fear the result of subjects' new sanctioning powers. Overall, a process of "role bargaining" seems to take place.

On the other hand, one of the reasons sociology is perceived as not "delivering" is a direct result of the quite naked exploitation of "applied research opportunities" by sociologists. All too often consulting agencies or individual researchers have attempted to utilize quite explicit requests for research in order to formulate and develop much broader kinds of activities, i.e., to utilize the data in a self-defined as opposed to a client-defined way.[7] The acceptance of "multiple identities," as Miller (1967) calls them, creates numerous problems. There is marked tension, at the beginning, between the scholar and employee roles. The "engineer" may be useful, but he is generally not considered to be scientifically respectable. For example, it is usual for a model cities agency or a community poverty program to have a research budget. That research budget has quite narrow goals—generally the assessment of impact in the community or the assessment of needs in a particular community. However, researchers who accept such contracts frequently attempt to build the activities into more "scientific" interests which provide for them a means to both advance their careers and, secondly, to pursue some of their scholarly interests. Sometimes the university approves or "authorizes" the contract for nothing but monetary reasons. Denzin hints at this when he mentions a problem for the professional —"to keep his client away from the real work situation . . . to hide any mistakes . . ." (1970:126). He fails to acknowledge the more common need to keep the client away so he does not find out what the practitioner is really doing. This could be exploitation and if so, demands strong censure by the profession. Misrepresenting the research activity is another kind of "intrusion" into a community and suggests that the profession, funding agency, and the universities involved do more to make sure that research funded by agencies like Model Cities is designed to serve the explicit goals of the agency and community and not the goals of the university or the individual researcher alone. In this respect an applied research contract is much more constrained than a direct grant.

A similar situation of exploitation occurs when sociologists assume the mantles of high priests but do the work of choir boys. Increasingly, "applied" research projects are taking the shape of things that do not require the "high-powered" technical skills of the professional. Much of the work is rudimentary data collection and extremely simple multi-variate analysis—if even that. In many cases agencies would be served just as well if they developed their own limited research staffs. Researchers seem to assume that a Ph.D. is required to do "meaningful" sociological research whether "applied" or "basic," and "good" interviewers must be at least college graduates. Yet, a little reflection or experience shows

[7] The argument here is not to deny applied research can have important implications for basic sociological issues. Rather, it is to re-emphasize that fulfillment of an applied *contract* must take precedence over exploration of interesting basic issues once the contract is made. In a real sense the client is "selfish" too and can have quite narrow goals as indicated in the case described above (footnote 5). The concern in this paper however, is with exploitation from the researcher's side.

that undergraduates or community residents in some circumstances can be just as good, if not better, "research operatives" than "trained sociologists." The sociologist accepting a contract for "applied" research should consider some "institution-formation" within the agency by utilizing its staff as much as possible—without co-opting them or subverting agency goals—in order to "train" the staff to carry out subsequent research, or, at least consider recruiting any paid staff from the community being studied. In a low income neighborhood this has the added virtue of "sending back" some of the research funds into the community. In that case, then, the researcher is "paying" the community for the things he extracts from it, i.e., data. Spiegel and Alicea (1970) have included this, along with some other "tactics," as part of what they call a "trade-off strategy." "The trade-off relationship results from negotiations between the researcher and the communiy, in which the researcher (contrary to the traditional role) provides certain specified goods and services in exchange for entry into, and relevant data from, the community." (Spiegel and Alicea; 1970:489). The explicit contract, thus, contains aspects which strengthen the implied contract that legitimizes the entire enterprise.

It is interesting that in survey research sociologists scrupulously avoid paying respondents for their time. However, those professionals that do their social research in the laboratory frequently do exactly the reverse and pay their subjects. A hasty review of the literature reveals no definitive study of the biases that might be introduced were sociologists to adopt the practice of compensating survey respondents. The issue of the representativeness of a sample comes to mind as one objection, since presumably people who "need" the money would be more likely to cooperate if pay was offered. However, sampling techniques have become quite sophisticated, and it seems this may be a "smokescreen" issue. For example, few studies use strictly random samples, and Sudman (1967) has shown that the use of quotas does not introduce unacceptable error. Thus, using his method, quotas could be constructed such that people who "need the money" are not over-sampled. Beyond this, much of survey research is concerned with relations between variables rather than the representativeness of a single population. Perhaps the profession should at least reconsider the "accepted" or usual practice of not paying survey respondents for their time and answers.

All these strains and problems are compounded, further, because the issue of an urban university conducting research in its own community is not simple and requires structures that traditional notions of "academic freedom" may preclude. Universities exercise what seem to be, in reality, quite limited sanctions over faculty research activities. However, the new militancy of the poor and the black in particular, means that more researchers will be asked to defend the practicality of their research conducted in the name of those same populations. Universities may be asked to "tighten" controls over community research activities if they want continued funding from a community.[8]

[8] An interesting case in this regard, though in the "opposite direction," is an incident that occurred in Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh applied for approval from the city planning commission to construct a new dormitory adjacent to the campus and within the Model Neighborhood. Because they felt the construction an intru-

A simple attempt at some solutions to these dilemmas and strains might be the establishment of a citizen-faculty committee at each university as an advisory body to all kinds of community research. This might lessen the pattern of sociological exploitation through increased awareness of possible exploitation because of multiple reviewers and the more public nature which the negotiations between client and practitioner would be forced to assume. My university has established an Office of Urban and Community Services which undertakes to review and co-ordinate all research proposals focused on the community. This office, directed by a psychologist, attempts to make sure research activities do not intrude upon the community, "interviewers" do not overlap and saturate a neighborhood, researchers are constrained in the kind of promises they make to granting agencies, and researchers at least attempt to deliver the kind of data originally requested by the granting agency. In addition to "normal" research proposals the office reviews course proposals which might involve field work to prevent "intrusions" into neighborhoods through lack of coordination, etc. While such an operation is not without its problems and some faculty members resist what may appear to be another administrative power play to control their activities, it seems to me that the community does need a voice in what we do when we conduct community research, no matter in whose name the research is conducted. Secondly, it seems to me that one way to carry out such an activity is the establishment of an interdisciplinary committee of those doing urban or community research at each university which would operate by advising individual researchers from the outset about the nature of their possible "intrusions" through community research. Most problems are not with conscious misrepresentation of research, etc., but with those cases where the "ethical" course of action is not clear. This board would allow yet another in-put into the negotiations and should serve to make manifest professional responsibilities.

Why not create the institutional filter for both client and practitioner that limits the strain placed on each?[9] Assuring that research goals are clearly stated, that clients are aware of what they are "buying" and that community groups and representatives have some voice in what is done to them and with the data they provide through a formal structure where priorities are clearly set seems one way of doing this. Moore reports on a study in which representatives of the subject population were included in discussions about the formulation and operation of research. As she notes, "Its benefits can be real, but so are its hazards" (1967:239). For example, the representativeness of community agents will be a serious problem but, it seems to me, if a university attempts to maintain a meaningful dialogue with the community, if it goes beyond the elitist assumptions that so often insulate academic institutions from their environment, the organizational difficulties are lessened. Equally

sion, the Model Cities Commissioners adopted a policy of awarding no contracts to the University if the construction was not halted. At present the issue is unresolved.

[9] In this regard, it seems more could be done in the curriculum to prepare people for jobs as contract administrators in policy research situations. The argument for general courses to acquaint potential client representatives with the problems and prospects of applied or policy research seems to carry much weight.

problematic is the influence such a strategy might have on the validity of the data generated. These risks clearly need more evaluation.

Attempts to develop a workable code of ethics for community research are probably fruitless. The issues are quite complex and the extent and basis for disagreement are so great that it is unlikely that anything beyond an *extremely* general code could be adopted. On at least one occasion, the Council of the American Sociological Association shelved a "first draft" of such a code. I suspect one of the reasons for this is the extreme diversity of views on some of the key issues that would have to be put in a general form in such a document. The debate might very easily follow, in both form and intensity, the debate at the 1970 American Sociological Association Convention over the representation of blacks on the council and committees of the A.S.A. It would not be useless, however, to re-emphasize in graduate training the ethical issues of social research and increase the dialogue in the profession about ethics and policy research. Pressures from significant others are important in role conflict situations (Ehrlich, Rinehart, and Howell, 1962). A new concern during graduate training for situations where research might be utilized for profit or utilized in a selfish manner, i.e., where sociological exploitation might take place, would provide another bulwark. Overall, good intentions alone will not stop "unscrupulous" individuals, nor will the several patterns recommended here, but taken together they should serve to lessen the social strains that generate patterns or perceptions of exploitation.

Professional ethics are never an easy issue and control of the activities of an individual professional is extremely difficult. However, I believe the future of community research demands sociologists reconsider their goals in each particular research operation, paying particular attention to the goals of the agency which is funding research and, secondly, actively including the community and its representatives at the formulation stages of research. Failure to do so will only continue the pattern of "clients breaking the contracts," therefore, forcing sociology to withdraw further within itself and to ignore pressing social issues in our society

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