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## Armor for Ethnographers

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*As its public readership has vastly increased, ethnography has entered a new world of social interaction, at once rewarding and dangerous. Among social researchers, ethnographic fieldworkers are unusually exposed to pressures to both make and break promises of confidentiality to subjects because they work to expose subjects to readers in a relatively transparent way. By showing individuals in their individuality, ethnographers draw the attention of nonacademic readers, which can be motivating but also terrifying because sources might be questioned and subjects sought out in ways the ethnographer may not be able to control. Tracking the schizophrenia that now threatens to pervade ethnographic work, I describe overlooked risks that all practitioners face and point to an as-yet unexplored collective strategy for resisting pressures to breach promises of confidentiality. I then switch from a collective to an individual focus and review ethnography as a multi-phased research act, suggesting ways to minimize personal and ethical risks at each stage.*

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**KEYWORDS:** confidentiality; ethics; ethnography; IRB; methodology; public sociology.

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnography has entered a new world of social interaction, at once rewarding and dangerous. Shamus Khan's problems (see Khan 2019) in responding to a subpoena for his confidential research records came years after the publication of his widely read, prize-winning, fieldwork-based monograph (Khan 2011). That his research site was a prestigious prep school made it an unusually attractive defendant in a lawsuit seeking damages for an incident of sexual predation targeting an underaged student. Plaintiff's lawyers could anticipate that the defendant would be especially vulnerable to bad publicity and especially capable of paying a large judgment. And the success of Khan's book gave him a high profile as plaintiff's lawyers sought evidence on the relationship between institutional character and student culture, which had been precisely his focus.

Khan's book is but one of a series of fieldwork-based, U.S. ethnographies that have received unprecedented public attention. Audiences to the studies written by Mitch Duneier, Eric Klinenberg, Diane Vaughan, Sudhir Venkatesh, Alice Goffman, Matt Desmond, Kathryn Edin, Annette Lareau, and Arlie Hochschild have stretched far beyond the traditional confines of academia. A vast readership for university-based social science research using methodologies of all sorts is now regularly promoted by major newspaper and magazines, which over the last several years have created slots for a new generation of idea brokers such as Malcolm Gladwell at *The New Yorker*; David Brooks and Thomas Edsall at *The New York Times*;

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TED broadcasts; and the “social science” reporter Shankar Vedantam at National Public Radio. While national attention is still rare, for the first time in history ethnographic fieldworkers who anticipate massive attention for their work beyond disciplinary academic boundaries will not be obviously self-delusional. We now have powerful agents working for us, whether we like it or not.

Among social researchers, ethnographic fieldworkers are unusually exposed to pressures to both make and break promises of confidentiality to subjects because they work to expose subjects to readers in a relatively transparent way. Other methodologies, such as social psychology lab experiments, survey research, comparative historical studies conducted in the library, and analyses of census, police, financial or other officially gathered data sets, place multiple buffers between subjects and researchers. The most common nonethnographic methodologies in social science protect subjects by describing them only in the abstractions used to create quantified data, by studying them after they are dead, or by parasitically analyzing data sets for which philanthropy- or government-funded data gatherers have done the dirty work of inducing or, in the case of the police and the Internal Revenue Service, compelling subjects to reveal themselves. Some sociologists use the rubric of ethnography for research that protects subjects’ privacy by essentially conducting interviews and describing subjects independently of each other and of any particular place. But all of the ethnographic monographs that have received extraordinary public attention have described either the web of relations among a small number of subjects and/or the web of relations between individuals and a geographically specific place as lived at a unique historical moment. They can then produce especially readable narratives, but at the same time, promises of confidentiality become especially risky.

For ethnographers, the prospect of public attention can be motivating—finally, your family and friends will see the importance of what you are doing—and because your sources may be questioned and your subjects sought out in ways you may not be able to control, terrifying. Tracking the schizophrenia that now threatens to pervade ethnographic work, I underline overlooked risks that all practitioners face and point out an as-yet unexplored collective strategy for managing the responsibilities that come with offering confidentiality to subjects. I then switch from a collective to an individual focus and review ethnography as a multiphased research act, suggesting ways to minimize personal and ethical risks at each stage.

## **IT’S WORSE THAN YOU THOUGHT**

Shamus Khan’s experience represents only one of a multitude of new challenges for ethnographers who would work out ethically defensible relations with subjects. His dilemma was having to decide whether to breach confidentiality, potentially hurting subjects in unanticipated ways, damaging his reputation and ability to conduct future research, and harming the research community’s collective reputation and investigative potential; or to honor promises of confidentiality at the cost of legal expenses, at the risk of contempt of court, in disservice to victims of sexual abuse, and by becoming complicit with an institution that had failed to

protect them. During his fieldwork and writing, Khan was not alerted to particularized criminal conduct that could draw criminal and civil law suits that might compel him to break his guarantees of anonymity. If he could find himself facing a subpoena demanding that he produce his field notes and testify in ways that would identify subjects, so might any of us.

The still burgeoning “Me Too/Time’s Up” movement is only one of several social trends that make it reasonable for ethnographers of any work setting, school, neighborhood, or kinship network to anticipate that somewhere in the social world studied someone may be charged with abusing someone, and that the ethnographer’s knowledge of social patterns in that world could be legally admissible in a criminal or civil case. No matter that the researcher’s focus is not on sexual predation, employment discrimination, or any other form of criminal or tortious behavior. No matter even that the alleged offense occurred after the ethnographer had left the field. The premise of ethnography as a contributor to social science is that research findings are generalizable beyond the time of the research. In a fundamental way, we seek the accountability now thrust upon us.

Even if the ethnographer did not identify the place studied, others will know where the study was done. The promise of anonymity implies a guarantee that the researcher does not have the power to give. University colleagues and subjects usually know where the researcher was for the year or more that the researcher was in the field, so they typically know where the study was done. If professional colleagues are honor-bound to keep the secret, the people who live in the site studied are not. They know the ethnographer does not come to them as a biographer, that he or she is also talking with and observing others about their experiences at the research site. Ethnographic data are best when they preserve personal idiosyncrasies in expressive manners because they then allow the analyst to argue that sociological patterns apply across psychological differences. But the consequence is to aid locals’ ability to identify “anonymized” subjects. For good reason, subjects commonly brush off the researcher’s offer of anonymity.

Ethnographers put subjects at risk in a range of ways they cannot anticipate. In contrast to other social science methodologies, ethnographers remain tied to their subjects’ lives long after they leave the field, whether they would like to or not. Let’s say an ethnographer studied social life at Occidental College and reproduced vulgarities as creatively expressed by students. Years later, one of the subjects runs for president of the country. His fellow alumnae can link him to the impolitic language in the text. Is the researcher morally insulated because he/she maintains a decorous silence and lets others do the identifying work?

Still another vulnerability highlighted by Khan’s case is that despite some comforting language in isolated judicial opinions praising the communal value of social research, there is no privilege protecting researchers from disclosing subjects’ identities. Journalists would like us to assume that a privilege to resist their revealing of the identities of their sources is inherent in the First Amendment, which if accepted by the courts might open a mantle that ethnographers could sneak under. But in the age of blogs and Twitter accounts, everyone can act as a news reporter. Facebook is currently the world’s largest news agency. Even for paid employees of traditional news organizations, the constitutional argument—that reporters can resist

subpoenas because the First Amendment backs the guarantees of confidentiality that effective investigative journalists must offer subjects—is being stretched to the breaking point.

## IT'S NOT SO BAD

There is an important wrinkle in Khan's case that should not be a surprise to sociologists because it is about the difference between the law on the books and the law in action. The plaintiff's lawyers backed off their demand that Khan produce his research records, not because a judge blocked them but when the costs of pursuing the subpoena became too high. Academics who should know better tend to think about the law in formalistic terms. It's common to hear the exclamation, "He can't do that. It's illegal!" or the converse, that someone "Clearly has the right to do that." But there is no logical or direct empirical relationship between the legal status of behavior and whether it can be performed. Law is always aspirational. Whatever rights Khan may have had to resist a subpoena were vulnerable to the costs of insisting on his rights. So also for whatever rights the plaintiff's lawyers had to force Khan to reveal his data and memories.

It can be comforting to realize that whether a researcher "has the right" to preserve confidentiality will not matter if it is too much trouble or not rewarding enough for a prosecutor or personal injury lawyer to press the issue. Most of the people ethnographers study do not have "deep pockets." On the contrary, to use another phrase all lawyers know, the poor are "judgment proof." The typical ethnographer will not be called to testify at a civil trial because there will be no lawsuit because there will be no prospect of recovering significant monetary damages.

When criminal prosecution is possible, the issue of cost still figures in but in ways mediated by symbolic politics. It is potentially costly for prosecutors to be seen as pressuring otherwise blameless university researchers to give up information on others' misdeeds. Why wasn't Alice Goffman (2014) pressured to reveal the identities of the criminals she famously associated with? Apart from the fact that her key subjects were either dead or already in prison when her book came out, and apart from Pennsylvania law's statute of limitations and a *corpus delecti* provision which effectively blocks criminal prosecution based only on a person's admission uncorroborated by independent evidence that a crime occurred (see Volokh 2008), for prosecutors in Philadelphia, taking on a researcher affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania has costs. It is notable that, as of this writing, the current head prosecutor in Philadelphia espouses a civil rights perspective on police misconduct virtually outlined by Alice Goffman's book (Ewing 2018).

But perhaps that is too optimistic. In Richard Leo's case of being subpoenaed to testify and reveal his notes on a Berkeley area police interrogation that produced a robbery confession, both defense and prosecutor successfully pushed the judge to compel the researcher. Protests by counsel for the University of California were unavailing (Leo 1995).

When suing a school, whether a prep school or a research university, lawyers will understand that pressuring a researcher to break confidentiality might create unfavorable publicity for the institutional defendant—which of its secrets will be revealed?; will it be seen to throw a university researcher under the bus?—and thus facilitate a settlement. On first glance, the lawyerly focus on leverage is depressing. But on second thought, it indicates a productive way of thinking about the issues. How can a researcher get “leverage” over those who might bring pressures to disclose?

## BEFORE STARTING FIELDWORK

When institutional review boards (IRBs) began compelling sociologists to submit to their power, ethnographers generally resisted. For many novice researchers, the distinctive appeal of fieldwork methods is its openness, which fits into personal projects of self-definition. Many understand that the thin, abstract, promissory quality of their research designs makes their applications to IRBs disingenuous. Graduate students have often seriously sweated the catch-22 of the process: you have to do the research before you can describe what you are asking permission to do, but IRBs insist you get permission before you start gathering data. Perhaps the only honest, ethical thing to do with IRBs is to avoid them.

But when a process server puts a subpoena into your hands (or e-mails it to you), the IRB may offer leverage. Universities instituted IRBs because the federal government required that research grantees get approval from human subjects protection committees. State governments and private foundations have added IRB review requirements to studies they would fund. Most universities have voluntarily extended the requirement to all “research” with human subjects, funded or not (Shweder 2006).<sup>2</sup> In implementing what they deem to be federal requirements, most IRBs have routinely required that social researchers, including ethnographers, guarantee confidentiality to subjects. Many also routinely require that researchers make plans to destroy their data at some future time. When IRBs require researchers to maintain confidentiality as an extension of federal and state legal requirements, they set up an argument that the researcher has federal and state legal backing to resist legal pressures to break commitments of confidentiality.

The idea that the government has embraced a legal commitment to protect researchers’ promises of confidentiality is not novel. The federal health research administration formally offers a “certificate of confidentiality” to social science researchers. Ethnographers often do not realize that even if they do not have health administration grants, they can still apply for and get certificates of confidentiality. The meaning of “health” is broad and flexible. It has covered research on crime. It is not difficult to write an application for a certificate of confidentiality which promises that research on inequality, educational achievement, network strength, sports participation, Internet use, etc., will bring advances in knowledge about emotional and physical health-related problems. While the power of the certificate has

<sup>2</sup> As of this writing, revisions of the federal rules are in process and may change significantly in 2019. For updates, check Zachary Schrag’s blog at [www.institutionalreviewblog.com](http://www.institutionalreviewblog.com).

not been thoroughly tested by appellate courts, a researcher who holds a federally approved certificate of confidentiality has leverage to resist a subpoena. A prosecutor or plaintiff's lawyer may be deterred by the hassle, costs, and uncertainty of challenging a researcher who resists a subpoena by claiming the certificate's protection.

But even for researchers who have not obtained a certificate, and even without confidence in how courts will interpret the claim, there should be significant leverage in the argument that IRB approval by itself implements government power to protect confidentiality. The researcher acts as an agent of the university, which acts as an agent of the government, federal and state, which has declared a policy of using IRBs to protect research subjects against harm from breaches of confidentiality. If a researcher presses the issue, the lawyer demanding disclosure is at the least faced with the costs of researching the IRB system, its history, regulations, and local workings. That creates delay. In personal injury cases, delay usually is understood to work in favor of the defendant. After what was an allegedly severe injury, the plaintiff may develop income and personal relationships that seem to indicate that the injury was not so severe. Delay might be extended significantly if the researcher's lawyers can get a hearing for the argument that disclosure would be an "irreversible" or "irreparable" harm and should be delayed until appeals are exhausted, which can mean years. Using this leverage is not necessarily expensive. It is notable that Khan's case ended, not with a judicial decision and not after his lawyers had to argue formally in court. The plaintiff's lawyers withdrew the subpoena after Khan's lawyer "sent a letter outlining our objection."

Institutional review board power over researchers runs with the reach of university auspices. When ethnographers conduct research off campus, without university funding, and outside of degree-granting programs, there may be no basis for IRB jurisdiction (Katz 2006). Conversely, the university's claim of a power to condition research on preserving subjects' confidentiality is an unexplored resource for a strategy with potential to aid ethnographers collectively. We all have an interest in how dilemmas like Khan's are handled because they have the potential to force universities to help us in one way or another. Universities might be forced to provide counsel to back up the guarantees they required. They might then, as a matter of institutional policy, in the future either drop pre-reviews of ethnographic research, which, given "exemption" provisions in the regulatory framework historically was an arrogation of power (Katz 2007), or compel researchers to acknowledge to subjects that they will not be able to resist subpoenas.

Khan's experience indicates that argumentation alone will not force universities to live up to the implications of their assumption of powers to constrain research. But his experience shows the potential value of a collective response to the dilemma he faced. While it is of some comfort to see how he managed to escape the subpoena, the earlier stage of the process, in which he was effectively denied legal aid by two universities, points to a more widely beneficial focus for response.

For ethnographers who find themselves in Khan's situation but without personal resources to finance professional resistance, a "crowdfunding" mechanism should be useful. Colleague-donors would understand that "but for the grace of. . ."

they might be in the dock. Crowdfunding would help finance a specialized set of lawyers and the development of legal arguments that advance collective interests.

But crowdfunding, a new mechanism for an ancient tactic of recruiting stranger allies, has many other benefits. Crowdfunding can demonstrate to journalists that there is a broad public awaiting news about the case. And news, even if not always sympathetic, should be good news for researchers. An ethnographer facing a subpoena is likely initially to feel very much alone. News coverage should also could draw the attention of lawyers specializing in First Amendment–related issues, and make a university’s constituencies aware of institutional hypocrisy in refusing to stand behind confidentiality guarantees that the university in the first place required.

Another strategy for minimizing problems in preserving guarantees of confidentiality that can be adopted before ethnographic research begins is to opt for a style of analysis that eliminates or minimizes the importance of describing subjects as whole persons. As pressures have mounted on human subjects’ regulations, on maintaining confidentiality, and on demands for “fact checking,” it has become essential to begin the empirical work of distinguishing the relationships between readers, subjects, and researchers that are set up by different types of ethnographic research. Alice Goffman has faced grueling criticism in ways that Erving Goffman never did. Why? Because of differences in the nature of their ethnographic work.

When ethnographers take types of interactions as their focus—situations and their people, not people and their situations (“Not then, men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men,” in Erving Goffman’s famous phrase)—concerns about revealing subjects fade. The Simmelian-like, atemporal, spatially indifferent propositions that Goffman, Becker, Strauss, and other analysts of situational interaction developed through their fieldwork make it relatively unnecessary to collect data in identifiable ways. Their propositions can be tested more readily in other times and places. Reading the researchers’ field notes and going back to the original site and subjects to “replicate” or “fact check” the propositions becomes less necessary. Why bother going back to the original subjects of Becker’s causal explanation of “becoming a marijuana user” when the theory can be tested by interviewing the next student who comes into your office? In advance of fieldwork, ethnographers can minimize the ethical and legal pressures they might face by gearing up to follow the model of Erving rather than Alice, Glaser and Strauss rather than Gans, Becker (1970) rather than Burawoy (1979).

## WHILE COLLECTING DATA IN THE FIELD

What to tell subjects about confidentiality? Almost always, it will satisfy IRB requirements for the ethnographer to tell subjects that he/she will anonymize the subject’s identity in anything written from the project. The ethical challenges and legal vulnerabilities in fieldwork are so extensive and unpredictable that saying more will be saying less.

For an ethnographer to offer more detail as to how he/she will preserve confidentiality (using pseudonyms, blurring time and place, omitting substantively



important passages if they would uniquely identify the subject, locking up field notes, destroying them, going to jail rather than comply with subpoenas, etc.) would usually be absurd, misleading, and dishonest. Relationships with subjects vary from fleeting interactions to formal sit-down interviews; often the researcher won't know in advance what the nature of problematic subject behavior might be; often, the researcher will not be able to know which others in the scene might "leak" knowledge of the study; should a subpoena be received, the legal issues are too unpredictable to forecast; and whether or not one will go to jail is a "badge of courage" moment that can only be known in the living of it. If one starts to speak seriously to these issues, the talk becomes a kind of boilerplate that, like the "terms of use" we are asked to consent to when using the Internet, undermines true consent.

If sociologists want to improve on a simple "promise of anonymity," ethical philosophy won't be of much help. Too many empirical questions need to be answered before ethical reflections can get traction on real dilemmas. How do subjects understand what we say to them about how we would protect them? Can the researcher, before knowing the scenes and people to be studied, know if he or she will be drawn into aiding immoral or criminal activity? Will it be possible to avoid complicity? Will it be necessary to inform the police so as to block behavior that might produce injuries?

Sociology, and in turn ethnography, covers everything that people do. In which kinds of studies are subjects' vulnerable in fact? Through which social processes, triggered by whom, under what conditions, and to what extent? To offer researchers more guidance and subjects more reliable protection, we will have to get down to the empirical work of doing sociological research on sociological research.

In the meantime, the need to offer anonymity of place and even of people should be carefully weighed. Outside of research on criminals, one or both offers are often unnecessary, done more to protect the researcher from critical scrutiny than to protect subjects (Jerolmack and Murphy 2017). In fact, subjects often hear offers of confidentiality with little patience or not at all. (For thinking sociologically about the interaction, it would be useful to compare how crime suspects hear Miranda warnings.) The ethnographer's promises of confidentiality are often unsolicited, unnecessary gifts that reflect, not subjects' hesitancy to participate but the ethnographer's uncertainty about what will be learned and the direction the project will take.

## **AFTER RESEARCH, DESTROYING FIELD NOTES**

Destroying field notes as a matter of routine should be seriously considered.

If the researcher is subpoenaed to produce field notes, they may contain information harmful to subjects in ways the researcher could not have anticipated. Plaintiffs' or prosecuting lawyers may subpoena field notes in order to get leverage on the targets of their cases or to develop witnesses to turn against their targets. If they are targeting person B, perhaps the field notes will turn up information embarrassing to person A, which might equip an investigator to turn person A against person B.

Lawyers issue subpoenas for field notes in order to develop strategies for depositions. A lawyer who has to question a researcher without having read the

researcher's data will be at a serious disadvantage. The lawyer will not be able to anticipate how the researcher will respond to questions asked in a deposition. Once the answers are on record, they may hurt the deposing lawyer later in the proceedings. Moreover, without first seeing the researcher's data, the lawyer cannot confidently assess the value of investing the time to question the researcher.

Researchers who destroy their field notes may find themselves subject to accusations that they "made up" the data, but there are other ways to do fact checking and there are ways to shore up claims made in ethnographic texts other than fact checking. Still, if the overriding concern is the protection of subjects' confidentiality, the researcher may have to risk exposure to critics' cynicism in order to insulate subjects. IRBs, whose priority is protection of subjects, often urge or even require the destruction of data after studies are written up.

The idea is not outlandish. We should consider whether, after a study is published, field notes will remain useful for scientific advance. While ethnographers may continue studying a given set of people or site throughout their careers, it is rare to continue publishing from the same data set after an initial burst of writing. It is not just that the ethnographer moves on to other sites and other projects but also that things change in ways that make fieldwork-based data sets outdated. The school, hospital, or police department is not organized that way anymore. The residents contacted during the original study have moved on and the neighborhood has a new demographic complexion. In addition, field notes are written and initially analyzed on the basis of implicit understandings not themselves contained in field notes. These include what else was then going on in other places, how a given event was meaningful as part of a sequence of such events known to subjects, and what was understood as so obvious that it did not have to be recorded. Field notes are almost inevitably cryptic. It becomes problematic to use them after a long absence from the site. It's a reasonable hypothesis that field notes are preserved primarily on the hopeful fantasy that they will be invaluable resources for the ethnographer's intellectual biographer.

If field notes are destroyed after an investigation starts, the researcher may face even more uncomfortable ethical and legal problems than would have materialized had the field notes been produced. If field notes are to be destroyed, that should happen as a matter of routine. Alice Goffman took a lot of heat for destroying her notes, but she was ethical and smart for doing it before critics started to call for criminal investigations of her and/or her subjects' conduct.

In multiple senses, it may be best routinely to destroy ethnographic field notes and get on with your life. A major confusion when considering the question of preserving field notes is about the scientific value of replication (Katz 2018). Destroying field notes undermines fact checking in the meaning that journalists understand. But in science, replication is not well understood as a process of re-creating an analysis from the original data. That may in some cases be a useful procedure—for example, when other researchers get access to a survey and try to replicate the calculations, play with other variables, uncover assumptions not stated in the original publication, and so forth. But for ethnography, replication is not usefully understood as rereading field notes. When Duneier tested Klinenberg's claims about how people died in Chicago's heat wave of 1995, he did not need Klinenberg's field

notes. About 10 years later, he conducted new research, including contacting survivors in the sites Klinenberg studied (Duneier 2004, 2006).

In many forms of scientific research, and in particular in assessing ethnographic fieldwork studies, replication is a matter of conducting new research in the same site or seeing whether the analysis holds up with subjects in other times and places. There is no need to fact check what the chemist-author says happened in the lab if one can follow the published protocol in one's own lab. Likewise, the more informative way to check Khan's claims about how elite prep schools such as St. Paul's promote a privileged life for their students is to find out what happens at analogous schools. That is partly because, in science but not in journalism, formal generalization is the issue. But also a reader who wants to fact check by reviewing an ethnographer's field notes would have to invoke myriad assumptions in order to make sense of data that were recorded without a concern to make them autonomously intelligible to other readers.

## WHAT TO DO, COLLECTIVELY

The most positive aspect of the recent controversies over confidentiality and ethical issues in ethnographic research is that they have been launched by the published self-reflections of fieldworkers themselves. Reviewers from outside academic worlds, including the fiercest critics, are doing no original fieldwork to discover ethical dilemmas. They are joining debates that Venkatesh (2008), Goffman (2014), and Khan (2019) themselves have launched.

Professional associations such as the American Sociological Association and university administrations have long sought the broad public attention that social research is now receiving. For many years, they would publicize the most minor newspaper mention of an academic study. Novice ethnographers now can reasonably, if not predictably, anticipate reaching public audiences on an unprecedented scale. Some may relish the possibility, but graduate students and junior faculty who are uncomfortable with being exposed to broad and personal criticism from outside of academia may be tempted to choose a methodology alternative to fieldwork research. Or they may compromise the contributions to knowledge that ethnography can make by limiting open-ended, personal immersion.

In order to minimize paralyzing self-reflections on the order of "What would I do if I received a subpoena for my field notes?," we might develop a sociological understanding of the diverse dilemmas that Shamus Khan, Alice Goffman, Sudhir Venkatesh, and John Van Maanen (1982), in an insufficiently appreciated paper on his unwitting complicity in police brutality, have revealed. This much-needed sociological work has at least three components. One is to create a database of social histories describing the intermediation processes through which each study became an object of public attention. Books are now appearing that collect unconnected cases of "public" ethnographies (Fassin 2017), but an empirical sociology of the publicity process has barely begun. Commentators tend to generalize about the responsibilities of ethnographers when their work becomes public, but the issues emerge case by case, through the workings of unrelated social institutions: sometimes in a civil

law suit for damages, sometimes in a criminal prosecutor's investigation, sometimes as a criminal defendant's lawyer probes for resources that will help a client, sometimes when other social scientists go on the attack at professional meetings, sometimes when bloggers and editorial writers address an already attentive public.

A second task is to analyze the strategic interaction that ethnographers enter once their work becomes famous or notorious. Once critics begin to seize on an ethnography to advance their own careers and purposes, what resources does the ethnographer have for mounting a response? What lines of self-protective, subject-protective, and knowledge-advancing exploitations of mass attentions are possible? What leverage can the ethnographer discover to resist pernicious interrogations? What pressures do the ethnographer's professional colleagues, employer, and graduate students face as they become touched by a developing public controversy? What is the meaning of courage and cowardice for each in the evolving debate?

A third area for developing helpful sociological knowledge would cover the various ethical dilemmas that arise in the field and in preparing manuscripts for publication. Ethical rules abstract from the substantive contexts that bring dilemmas to life. One striking failing of IRBs as regulatory institutions is their dogged refusal to publish descriptions of the research studies they review and to articulate reasons for their decisions in a reviewable form. IRBs have self-indulgently avoided the possibility of developing a kind of "common law" based on specific cases in which different research procedures were found appropriate or not. We need to do that ourselves. Because the social worlds that ethnographers enter are as diverse as social life itself, and because the informality of the methodology puts little if any restriction on how fieldworkers interact with subjects, the prospect is daunting. Ethical issues come alive in a seemingly infinite variety of situations. In order to develop an understanding of the patterned ways that ethical challenges emerge in gathering data and publishing ethnography, we don't need ethical philosophy so much as a rich data set. A clearinghouse of cases would be helpful in developing empirical materials for an ethnographic appreciation of the ethical challenges in doing ethnography. We owe thanks to Shamus Khan for helping us see the way to begin.

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