

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JOHN F. GALLIHER, WAYNE H. BREKHUS, and DAVID P. KEYS.
Laud Humphreys; Prophet of Homosexuality and Sociology. Madison:
University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, 104 pp + 77 pp of appendices.

In the 1970s Laud Humphreys (1930-1988) was an heroic figure for many gay academics. He is remembered by sociologists for the bold – or perhaps questionable – methodology of his major book, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal sex in Public Places*. It was a controversial choice for the C. Wright Mills Award in 1970, which is given annually to an outstanding book that critically addresses issues of contemporary public importance. As early as the 1920s, the first generation of Chicago school sociologists had interviewed gay and bisexual men. Clifford Shaw's *The Jack-roller* is an example the authors of this biography overlook. But Chicago School sociologists never managed to produce an insider's account of gay experiences. *Tearoom Trade*, not quite an insider's account either and occasionally naïve, is nonetheless detailed; nuanced; and for the most part, convincing. The book is particularly provocative when the author casts himself as an Episcopal priest, married heterosexual, and father.

Galliher, Brekhus and Keys, who are sociologists, concentrate on Humphreys' research and activism. His personal life and ten-year career as a minister are discussed only briefly. The volume is based on archival information, personal interviews with some of the key people in Humphreys' life, as well as his publications. The file which the FBI established on Humphreys, because of his opposition to the Vietnam War, is reprinted as an appendix. One document in his file was signed by J. Edgar Hoover himself. Although Humphreys apparently left little personal information, he deserves a biography: "Just as historians have discovered that knowledge of less successful and marginal people is vital to our understanding of history and culture, the study of marginal and even trouble-making academics is necessary to our understanding of the institutional history and culture of both academia and professional sociology" (p. 5).

Humphreys was marginalized by his: (1) investigation of explicit sexual behaviour; (2) advocacy of social change; (3) gender-orientation and late entrance into graduate school; (4) writing for general readers rather than academics; and (5) unpleasant behaviour, related in part to alcoholism. On the other hand, he obviously benefited from graduate studies at Washington University in St. Louis, then one of the best sociology departments in North America. Comparisons are made in this

volume between Humphreys and Alfred Lindesmith, whose career was hindered by his unpopular opinions about recreational drug use. Having taken a graduate class with Lindesmith near the end of his career, I remember that he presented his ideas about deviance in the normal academic manner in contrast to Humphreys' provocative confessions.

Nearly 35 years after it was published *Tearoom Trade* still attracts a surprising amount of attention because Humphreys' ethics raise such difficult questions. He justified his covert observational methods by writing that they "promised the greatest accuracy in terms of faithfulness to people and actions" (Humphreys, p. 21). What should one think of an investigator who sets a bad precedent but whose intentions are honorable and whose research ultimately benefits his participants? In the expanded edition of *Tearoom Trade* which includes papers by defenders and critics of Humphreys' methods, Donald Warwick (Humphreys 1975, pp. 199-201) wrote that Humphreys had used at least seven different tactics to deceive his subjects.

Gallihier et al. suggest that Humphreys may have deceived even his Ph.D. adviser and his readers. In their opinion the interior design of the restrooms where he did his observations must have made it difficult, if not impossible, to have played the role of a voyeur who alerted participants to the arrival of the police and to men whose sexual orientation was unknown. They think it is rare for anyone to play the role of voyeur in tearoom sex. They also conclude that Humphreys may have participated in the activities he was observing. Was smiling and nodding actually enough to get the participants to tolerate his presence? Despite the activist tone of *Tearoom Trade*, Humphreys had no practical alternative other than misleading his adviser and readers to some degree because of public opinion and the laws of the time.

While this biography is admirable in many respects, the discussion of research ethics is too alarmist in my opinion, at least as far as Canada is concerned. No doubt it is true that neither the observational stage of *Tearoom Trade* nor lying to some interviewees about the nature of one's study could be replicated today. But neither method resulted in the best information. The more insightful ideas in the book were acquired from a nonrandom sample of twelve gay men who understood the purpose of the research before they gave their consent to be interviewed. A snowball sample of a similar group of men would probably pass an ethics review board in Canada. Such interviews should have provided most of Humphreys' information about illegal activities, although not in statistical form. In the expanded edition of *Tearoom Trade*, Humphreys (p. 231) seems to agree that more questioning of willing and informed respondents would have resulted in a better book. Frederick J. Desroches (*Qualitative Sociology*, 1990) was able to replicate Humphreys' research in Canada without observing illegal activities because he used information gathered by the police.

For anyone who has experienced the late 60s and early 70s, it will be a pleasure to be immersed again in the social activism of the period, although a bit disconcerting to be reminded that our generation used to be so opinionated and uncivil. For those born after this period, the book will be a testimony to an important phase in the history of sociology when, for better or worse, politics and sociology may have been more closely associated than they are today. The University of Wisconsin Press should be congratulated on producing this volume, which is refreshingly frank about Humphreys' personal failings. Despite their intention to defend Humphreys, the authors are fair to his critics and even supply them with more information.

In praising his civil disobedience over the Vietnam War, Galliher et al. seem to underestimate the impact of teach-ins and research by activist academics, which surely made a greater contribution to ending the war than the theatrical gestures that got Humphreys into trouble with the FBI. (Humphreys spent three months in jail.) More information about his "extreme sermons" and student perceptions of his non-conventional teaching style would have been appreciated. I thought it was too simple to conclude, as one of his colleagues at Pitzer College did, that Humphreys' career was ruined by his early success. I wanted to learn more about his psychology and life story which might help to explain why he abandoned the priesthood, his wife, his male lover, and sociology.

Stephen Harold Riggins, *Memorial University of Newfoundland.*