

Tearoom Trade Study Ethical Issues

Humphreys: Tearoom Trade

- Laud Humphrey's classic study, *Tearoom Trade* (1970), was a study of "sexual deviance"
- Two parts to the research
 1. Covert observational study of impersonal sex among men in public restrooms
 - Adopted "watch queen" role to allow observation
 2. "Health survey"
 - Involved the men who participated in the tearoom in a legitimate study to gather personal information
- The men did not know that they were part of a research project focused on sexual deviance

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Tearoom trade study ethical issues have been a topic of extensive debate since the release of Laud Humphreys' 1970 study, "Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places." This research, which focused on male homosexual encounters in public toilets, has raised significant ethical concerns regarding privacy, consent, and the responsibilities of researchers. In this article, we will delve into the various ethical issues that emerged from the tearoom trade study, examining the implications for social research and the frameworks that guide ethical considerations in the field.

The Background of the Tearoom Trade Study

In the tearoom trade study, Humphreys observed sexual encounters between men in public restrooms without their knowledge. He later conducted follow-up interviews, using the license plate numbers of the men he observed to track them down. The study aimed to understand the social dynamics of public sexual encounters, but it sparked a firestorm of controversy due to its perceived violations of ethical research practices.