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A Humanist's Commentary on "Clinical and Research Interviewing in Sociology"

Harry Cohen
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The research results described in Carol A. B. Warren's "Clinical and Research Interviewing in Sociology" show an unanticipated consequence whereby research interviews became enmeshed in clinical functions despite intent to the contrary. An unanticipated consequence of my reading this article is that it set my mind spinning in many directions. I perceive implications for scientific sociological research, the sociology of knowledge, clinical sociology, and the meaning of human social life in general.

It has been my feeling throughout my career as a sociologist that it is not so simply possible to extract a pure sociology from the real world. Sociology ends with clinical implications. Whether teaching introductory sociology, theory, sociology of work, or writing in sociology, or researching, the sociologist immerses self and other into daily life patterns. There is no way to avoid giving students thoughts about the meaning even of culture in relation to one's own life, unless only empty facts and definitions are taught in an abstract, totally linear manner leading to boredom and charges of uselessness. Here the teacher might avoid giving ideas about life changes but may give ideas about whether to choose sociology as a career, and thus is still a clinician, with influence on life choices and processes. Linear, rationalistic, nonemotional, superobjective people may be drawn into sociology by attending classes by like-minded professors, and other types may be driven away. So even the professor who does

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not intend to, influences others and the profession in the unanticipated consequences of his/her style. In my view, sociology is always a clinical sociology and is subversive and revolutionary by seeding ideas leading to social and personal action and change.

Ask questions about marriage, sex, or love in research and ideas have been seeded into the minds of respondents that these are subjects to think about and evaluate. These people have been changed. They may want answers to questions planted in their minds; they may ask the researchers, turning the tables, becoming researchers while the researchers are the respondents! There are members of tribal groups who now demand money to travel and research an American population in return for the granted right to research their group. We research answers to exchange processes associated with transfers of shells or body mutilation and they research answers to questions about transfer of nothing, yielding homelessness, loneliness and social mutilation.

People may demand answers from intimates affecting the relationship. I am told by my female students that I often set them into conflict with lovers. I had no such intent. I only lectured about balanced exchanges, and structure of social relationships, and consequences. The women saw new possibilities which they pressed upon their lovers, who reacted with anger and conflict.

Every functional teacher is aware that the teacher ostensibly developing students grows equally as much or more than the students. Psychiatrists, physicians, parents, and lovers experience this, too. There is no life process, no communication, no relationship without effects (consequences) which yield clinical intervention, whether intended or not. Communication theorists tell us, "You cannot not communicate," for even silence communicates a state of mind and relationship, as does withdrawal. I say, "You cannot not be a clinician."

Anyone entering into a relationship with others transforms the relationship and is transformed. The "trans" part of the word "transform" infers interpersonal and social, a "bridge between," which yields "form" to each person and to the structure of the relationship. John Grinder and Richard Bandler title one of their books *TRANCE-formations*. Verbal and nonverbal symbols from someone touching on self lead to "trance," where symbols from one are shifted to the receptive, tranced other, yielding trans-form-ation. An interviewer striving for a one-sided role as interviewer trances respondents and is tranced by them nevertheless, and all are trans-formed (transformed). A partially hidden yawn on the part of one yields a yawn on the part of the other and both get the message, affecting mutual responses. Treat people as "things," as one-dimensional units, for example, for purposes of "pure" research, and the people tend to transform the relationship by fleshing it out to many dimensions (friend, enemy, ally against someone else, teacher, helper, counselor). They bring perceptions of mother, father, husband or wife into the relationship by projection techniques and the transference-countertransference mechanism and respond accordingly. They

bring "I-thou" multidimensionality and closeness from the "thinged" "I-it" (to use Martin Buber's terminology). Scientifically unsophisticated as they may be, they still teach the pure scientist about the meaning of a nonalienated relationship of mutuality. Persist in trying to keep respondents on one level and you may plant ideas about how "authority figures" "don't care." People have been transformed and may even transfer this transformation to their feeling about all authority figures and even "the system." Pure, objective research may have subjective consequences.

Even petting a dog tends to have a calming effect on the person doing the petting and on the dog. Both are transformed. A dog came into my life in youth and promptly shifted family interaction patterns. My strong dyadic bonding with the dog loosened constraining bonds from significant others in the family. As I walked the dog, the dog walked me, and I was receiving healthy exercise. My personal power, freedom, and health improved. The dog only acted in its "dog-ness" and in so doing was a clinician, comparable as I understand it now even to the work of master family therapists Salvador Minuchin and Virginia Satir. And, as I see it, so are scientists, acting in their scientism, change agents with measurable effects.

These are some of the ideas that come to my mind when reading the article. These ideas revolve around the premise that all relations are multidimensional and transformational, no matter how hard a researcher tries to arrange otherwise. This may be painful for the scientifically minded; I see it as a beautiful commentary on the transactional, systemic, interrelated connectedness of people in interaction. The social world is not in existence only for the purposes of data gathering for "pure" researchers. Pure researchers are forced into relation with the real world as it exists for its own purposes. Carol Warren's article shows how much power the real world has to pull scientists into its transformative, transactional frame.