Book Review

Calvey, D. (2017). *Covert research: The art, politics and ethics of undercover fieldwork*. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications, Ltd.

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Covert Research … the title is both intriguing and puzzling, and Dr. David Calvey does not disappoint as he sets out to "rehabilitate the covert research practice" by seeking to "appeal for a fairer reading of that tradition" (p. 2).

Dr. Calvey is an experienced researcher and teacher, currently serving as a senior lecturer in sociology with Manchester Metropolitan University. He is both a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a member of the British Sociological Association. He has a wide range of interests including ethnography, humor studies, and "combat sports," which could also include interesting professions such as "bouncers."

Over the years, academics have readily chosen to dismiss research that appears to "go against the grain" or is perceived to be the least bit nonconformist. In response to these perceptions and actual research abuses, these reservations are often clear and, in some cases, well-founded. Some researchers elected to cut corners for fame or perhaps fortune or maybe even tenure. So, the record of abuse and excess does exist.

However, Dr. Calvey pushes back against preconceived indictments of all covert research. He provides a very vibrant, balanced and commanding voice through context, research and the use of case studies to illustrate the value of covert research. He summons the novice as well as the jaded professional and challenges one to re-examine the power and the loss that can come from quick, convenient and mistaken judgments that are applied without critical examination and thought. Covert research has a powerful role to play; it is critical to the development of knowledge and understanding. And, it should not automatically be dismissed; it has been and continues to be a valuable tool for the researcher.

The author's engaging style draws in the reader. A learning exercise is provided at the end of each chapter, which seeks to involve the reader in further exploration and additional discovery. The book begins with the importance of the *contexts of deception* (e.g., insider, media, police, journalistic) to introduce the reader to the complexity in defining covert research. And from this introduction, the roots and ongoing debates concerning covert research are surveyed.

As classic exemplars of covert research (i.e., *Asylums; Tearoom Trade; On Being Sane in Insane Places; Obedience to Authority*) are explored, each chapter provides informative critiques and examines interpretative legacies to help the reader in understanding, valuing and possibly reconsidering covert research as a viable research methodology.

Dr. Calvey sees a revival in covert research; from auto-ethnography to covert social networks. In his view, use and future of covert research appears to be bright. However, he is also very clear, "I do not offer covert research as a form of methodological panacea, which would be naïve and erroneous. The covert researcher is not removed from bias,

partisanship and fetish" (p. 178). More examination and discussion are warranted.

In my view, this book is a must read and must have for every undergraduate student, regardless of the discipline or field of study. It is essential for both the general and experienced researcher in reviewing and perhaps reconsidering fundamental questions in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Dr. Calvey provides a much-needed sober voice of reason and a clear call for dialogue. He has made a significant contribution which will hopefully generate vigorous discussion, debate and hopefully a re-evaluation of a useful and often maligned research technique.