E. REFLEXIVE STATEMENTS

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I ask my undergraduate and graduate field research students to include a reflexive statement in their seminar papers (and dissertations), which usually goes before, after, or in place of the abstract, and about that length. I refer them to *Humanity and Society* for models, but we also discuss what ought to be included. Please note that we are not only educating researchers about what they need to do, but we are also educating audiences about what they need to ask of the researchers they read/hear, as part of their critical thinking. There have been a couple of versions:

1. “How did a person like you come to do a research paper like this?” That is, tie the statement to your sociological imagination as you describe your membership in various relevant social categories. It is nowhere near enough to say “I used to study x and now I’m studying x+1.” Papers in ASR usually include who funded the research, and that is also a bare beginning of what we need to know.

2. “Explain yourself as a member of the field.” Tell us the same social data and background experiences about yourself that you will be reporting about “the people you studied.”

3. “Tell us what we readers and colleagues need to know about you in order for us to understand what you did.” This includes material that would be more completely included in the discussion of methods, such as how your subjects came to define you and your work. We will partly decide our credibility of you by learning about your credibility with them. Our main criterion is your honesty, not your objectivity (and when you realize you are often dishonest when you say you are objective, you will understand why we may wonder what else you are lying about!). Our knowing about significant involvement with, and commitment to, the people you are writing about should increase your credibility with us as the audience you care about. But of course, such revelation may be naive and actually gives your enemies ammunition to discount your work, so beware: this can be a tough business.

4. Of course such reflexivity may become a central theme of a field of research study, and could include a “reflexive conclusion” as the author explains how he or she was affected by doing the study, and how that becomes part of the next study. And so forth.

Courage to us all.

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