

Tribute to Dan Allman

Dan Allman, our dear colleague and friend passed away during the process of constructing this special issue. Dan's contribution to the special issue, and to the social study of medical research in many parts of the world was immense and he will be sorely missed.

Throughout Dan's career, he examined critically the nexus of public health, HIV research, and HIV vulnerable groups. His work tirelessly brought to the fore the experiences of gay and bisexual men and sex workers in research, calling for more humane, ethical and participatory practices. Sociology, and Science and Technology Studies, were not exempted from his critical analysis – he made non-negotiable arguments for the value of theorisation without applied health value, and blue-skies thinking. His contribution to this special issue continued with a long-standing theme in his work regarding bringing light to the ways in which medical research is socially organised and the ethical and political problems that may arise.

Dan Allman made an invaluable contribution with his ideas, time and insights to the discussion of this special issue's themes, and therefore shaped directly or indirectly all the papers here. At the time of his passing, Dan was working on a paper entitled *Sneaky Means and Risky Business: Intentionality, Misdirection, and Sleight of Hand in Research*. Unfortunately, he was no longer able to finish the peer review of his manuscript. However, we wanted to honour his contribution by presenting some of its key features. Dan's paper focused on one of the central ideas of misdirection: *its relation to intent*. Within it, he considered what happens when elements of research method become compromised and misdirected and what the impact is on research process and outcome.

Traditionally, as applied in magic, misdirection is understood to occur with motive and with intent. Allman challenges this understanding and reflects upon the portability and application of the concept to the topic of scientific research practice.

For Dan, as a lens, the concept of misdirection offers a unique way to think through intent, the boundaries between deception and poor methodological practice. Deception, as both enacted and perceived, can take a multitude of forms. Both the causal act of deceiving and the resulting deceptive effect can be intended or unintended. Misdirection with the intent to deceive can be referred to as *primary misdirection*. Intentional misdirection in research can be a form of 'sneaky means' deception. Misdirection, however, can also occur in the absence of intent, owing to unskillfulness or misjudgement in research design, measurement, or interpretation. Dan referred to this unintentional misdirection as secondary misdirection or *shadow misdirection* —a sleight of hand, unplanned, involuntary, and unpremeditated but which may still fracture and obscure relationships between cause and effect.

To generate a better understanding of the role of intention in misdirection, Dan used two case studies. In the first case study, he revisits a case of deception in the classic social sciences study of Humphrey's (2017 [1970]) Tearoom Trade as intentional misdirection. Humphreys, observing sexual acts in washrooms in St. Louis, uses multiple forms of deception with intent during his covert research. Within scientific inquiry an intent to deceive is often justified relative to the likelihood of harm, beneficence or intended outcome.

To illustrate unintentional scientific misconduct and misdirection, Dan used a case from the



natural sciences, the notorious 1960s example of the discovery of anomalous polymerized water known as polywater. Polywater, discovered in 1962 in the Soviet Union, was considered to have a lower freezing point and a higher boiling point than ordinary water. In time, however, critiques would debunk these assertions by concluding that polywater was the result of spoiled experimental samples. The story constitutes an example of how scientists were unintentionally misdirected for several years, leading to hundreds of publications on the topic, until the authors admitted in print that the anomalous water was merely a solution of impurities. It is an example exacerbated by the chill of Cold War politics, the fact that initial publications were only written in Russian and that some of the scientific techniques were unfamiliar to Western researchers. Today polywater stands as a valuable example of unintentional misdirection. Although the outcomes were benignly unintended, the lessons learned have important implications in terms of conceptualizing disreputable science. It is the slight-of-hand arising within the risky business of research, a form of error. Utilising intent to unpack misdirection allows

insights into the construction of achievement in research, the mechanisms scientists use to attain it, and the pressures they experience to do so.

Sneaky Means and Risky Business extends Allman's existing work on 'boundaries and points of difference' between the pseudo and legitimate (Allman, 2019). It marks his characteristic interrogation of how scientific claims are made in communities of practice, an attention to participation threaded throughout his entire body of work. This collection was shaped by his insights, and it is our hope that readers take from both the special issue and our summary of his paper, the benefits of exploring questions of misdirectional intent in the pursuit of ethical and more participatory scientific practice.

We are grateful for the time we had with Dan – the workshops, travelling to different countries and working on projects with him such as this special issue. We are grateful for the chance to experience his intellect, humour and thoughtfulness as his colleagues, friends and co-conspirators in carving out safe spaces for difference and acceptance. Thanks for everything Dan.

References

- Allman D 2019 Pseudo or perish: Problematizing the 'predatory' in global health publishing. *Critical Public Health* 29(4): 413-423.
- Humphreys L (2017 [1970]) *Tearoom Trade. Enlarged edition with a retrospect on ethical issues*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge