

# **Applied Sociology Thematic Group**

## **For the Australian Sociology Practitioner**

### **Contact Email for January 2014**

A Happy New Year to you all. Behind this greeting is the question, “Can we have one?” On June the eleventh last year the age ran this headline:

#### **“Why sociologists don't dare investigate”**

It appeared on an article by Raymond Orr, a lecturer at the School of Social and Political Sciences at The University of Melbourne. His topic was the treatment of migrants, not just in Australia but around the world. His question in the headline related to the dependence of university researchers on funding and that the universities are now averse to what they see as risky research and have enacted ethical protocols that in effect restrict controversial studies. Bad press is still bad press to universities.

One of his examples was the report that in March, East Asian tourists were verbally abused by a white Australian on a Sydney bus. This quote took me back to a time when I was verbally abused by a white American school teacher, on a train in the US, at the top of her voice, because I was from that terrible country Australia that had refused her application for an exchange teaching appointment. Glaring at me she told the carriage about this terrible country, that its teacher were badly trained, and she thought she would be able help this backward country come closer to a good American education. I never found out how she identified me as an Australian, nor what she thought I could do about it. The incident still rankles, when I am reminded of it. However, my question is: was it a racial taunt?

In the broader scene is research being censored by Universities? But for our members the question might be; is community research being censored by employers or funding bodies when we suggest asking question that might produce politically incorrect answers?

Orr suggests that researchers do not pursue these types of questions because the answers might be unflattering and that few scholars would expose themselves to possible career-ending criticisms that they have fuelled racial-hatred or led to policies that favoured one group over another. Yet if that is the state of the community, we need to know, to be able to something about it. Without genuine research we only have opinions and prejudices.

Is the practice of sociology dependent on the perception of political correctness current at any particular time? As political situation change so do ideas of political correctness. During World War II, things were said about Germans and Japan, with full political blessing that would not be acceptable now. For me sociological research cannot or should not be biased in order to support one view or another. It should be research that looks at what is and tells it without fear or favour. But we have to eat and if our funding source wants to build in a bias, what does it do to our personal integrity?

Let me have your thoughts on the situation