

M·E·L EXCELLENCE FORUM

A Typology of the Research Method – Mystery Customer

Putting Mystery Customer into a Methodological Context

Author: Dr Jill Jesson, Principal Consultant

WORKING PAPER WP05.01 APRIL 2005



M·E·L Research

Working Paper WP05.01

A Typology of the Research Method – Mystery Customer

Putting Mystery Customer into a Methodological Context

January 2005

**Dr Jill Jesson
Principal Consultant**

The M·E·L Excellence Forum provides a setting where researchers, consultants, public service managers and the wider community can share views and ideas about innovation and excellence in public service development.

The Excellence Forum is about how to use evidence to shape policy, and to ensure public services are designed and deliver first and foremost to meet public needs and expectations.

The Excellence Working Paper series is written by researchers and consultants working with M·E·L, or as guest writers, to generate debate and informed discussion on forward thinking issues. In this way we believe we are making our own important contribution to better public services.

***M·E·L Research** stands for **measurement, evaluation, learning** – the three core qualities for modern public service excellence.*

A Typology of the Research Method – Mystery Customer

Putting Mystery Customer Research into a Methodological Research Context

1. 1. Introduction

Mystery customer research, which is the same as mystery shopping, is an increasingly popular research technique. It is a technique that has been adapted from its original role in the commercial sector, whereby businesses evaluate the quality of the service they and their competitors provide to customers - to studies which evaluate the quality of public services experienced by the general public. For example, it has changed from measuring service at the supermarket or bank to assessing the cleanliness of NHS Trust hospital floors.

In research methodology discourse where does mystery shopping fit? It is clearly an example of observation, at the covert level of a continuum of observational research, where the researcher conceals their true identity. Yet mystery customer research is not the sociological and anthropological covert research approach described in sociology texts, as shown in the continuum below.

Overt/covert

Observer observer-participant participant observer participant

| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Considering wider manifestations of the approach, how closely does mystery shopping relate to covert observation at its wider extreme, undercover journalism? Does mystery shopping count as a scientific, ethical research technique and is its use valid in evaluation?

1.2. Which research paradigm?

A review of the contents of a sample of research methods text books and articles published in academic journals and on the internet raises a number of questions about the conceptual and practical application of the method. For example, there is a confusing attribution within methodological paradigm discourse: is mystery shopping a qualitative observational approach, because it is covert, or is it a quantitative approach, because it measures against pre-determined categories?

One of the fundamental questions is how does market research methodology differ from that in social science research? Wikipedia.org (2004) differentiates three types of research: basic, applied and marketing.

- ◆ **Basic research** is exploratory, often conducted without a practical end in mind. It is fundamental or pure research, whose primary objective is the advancement of knowledge and theoretical understanding of the relationship amongst variables.
- ◆ **Applied research** is carried out to solve specific, practical questions, not to gain knowledge for its own sake. It can be exploratory but is usually descriptive.
- ◆ **Marketing research** is a form of applied sociological study which concentrates on understanding the behaviours, whims and preferences of consumers in a market-based economy. It is also used for quality control and researching competitor's products.

The A-Z of Social Research, a text book dictionary of key social science research concepts, does not list mystery shopper, but does have a section on observation and overt and covert and ethnography (Miller & Brewer 2003). Malhotra and Birks (2000) 'Marketing Research' textbook describes mystery shopper as an observation technique in surveys "A *technique involving observers visiting providers of goods and services as if they were really customers, and recording characteristics of the service delivery*" (p225).

Clearly, mystery shopper technique is a form of marketing research. The British Market Research Association estimates there are 187,000 mystery shoppers in the UK, who can earn between £3 to £30 per shop, depending on the context (Little 2003). Mystery shopping is fundamentally covert research, where the researcher does not declare the true nature of the interaction, which in itself raises questions about ethical research practice.

1.3. Which 'label' depends on where it is used

In practice, mystery shopping appears in various guises, depending on who is using the term. Applications are to be found in audit and in quality assurance, in investigative journalism (BBC News 2004) and commercial espionage. There are several manifestations. It is *mystery customer or patient* in the public sector; a recent example in the NHS is '*incognito dirt detectives*' (Guardian 2004). However *mystery shopper/shopping* is the term most commonly used.

There is a long history of use in health care where the method has been used to assess behavioural change following medical education and training. *Simulated patients* (Watson et al 2004), *standardised, or pseudo patrons* (De Almeida et al 2001) and *surrogate shoppers* are firmly established as a service evaluation approach in pharmacy (Norris 2002; Anderson and Bissell 2004; Granas et al 2004). In medicine, studies using *fake patients* (Van der Geest and Sarkodie 1998) and *standardised simulated patients* (Saebu and Rethans 1997; Beullens et al 1997; Grant et al 2002) have been published. The consumer magazine *Which?* has regularly undertaken mystery shopping of UK community pharmacy for many years, although it could be argued that community pharmacies are part of the retail service sector and therefore more suitable for this research approach than some other clinical health-related services.

In the public sector it is now part and parcel of the toolkit employed by the public sector in performance evaluation management. It is used extensively by the National Audit Commission. The National Audit Office website shows 246 documents using mystery shopper as part of its audit methodology in local authority Best Value assessment. The government's Charter Mark guidance allows the data produced by mystery shoppers to count as legitimate and valid evidence that arrangements are for the benefit of customers. In the health context, the Commission for Health Improvement advises NHS health care trusts that mystery shopping can tap usefully into the patient experience. In the third sector for housing, registered social landlords (RSL) parlance there are tenant auditors and inspectors (TPAS nd). Another example is the work undertaken by disability rights activists.

1.4. Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the mystery shopper approach as a form of covert methodology, based on a typology of six forms of covert observational research. In the context of research methodology debates, we adopt an organisational framework consisting of three research categories, and four interrogatory dimensions.

This analytical framework consists of six categories of covert observation which can be considered under the mystery shopping label:

Category one: covert observation

Category two: audit, quality control, mystery shopping

Category three: investigative journalism and commercial espionage

Interrogatory dimensions:

1. The intention of the researcher, who is the researcher who carries out the study, and where is the study most likely to take place.
2. Method design, implementation and evaluation. What are the key features of the research design and application, and can the approach legitimately be labelled evaluation.
3. The research governance and ethical influences.

2. The typology

2.1. Intention, researcher and location

In an applied research paradigm, the main approach in social science ethnographic methodology is covert observation and in-depth interviews. The research intention in choosing this approach is to document and describe what is happening in a particular community or organisation. There are many classic ethnographic studies, such as *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (Pollert 1981) and *Boys in White* (Becker et al 1961).

The researcher in the ethnographic study is most likely to be a social science student or academic, such as anthropologist or sociologist, who attempts to undertake dispassionate objective scientific enquiry in a naturalistic environment. This academic enquiry usually takes a lengthy period of time as the researcher needs to become absorbed within the setting. Researchers invest their time and emotional energy into an organisation or community, mainly as part of their academic career development. The subjects of research are usually anonymised.

Table 1: Category: Covert observation

CATEGORY	INTENTION	WHO DOES IT	SECTOR/LOCATION
COVERT OBSERVATION Research approach is ethnography	Dispassionate objective scientific enquiry	Social science students and academics	Any , typically communities, organizations

Compare the ethnographic descriptive approach to the application of audit, quality assurance and mystery shopping in the public sector. Here the intention of the researcher is usually to make

external judgements against some pre-set standards for performance management. Central to this motive are normative assumptions about what can be measured and counted, with an implicit expectation of organisational or behavioural change as an outcome. There is no attempt to obtain any in-depth understanding of the context of the questioning.

Typically the researcher will be specifically recruited, trained and employed by a Market Research Agency. As a trained ‘professional’ researcher the shopper has no direct personal interest in the outcome. In the report the staff ‘shopped’ should be anonymised, although the organisation will be named. Examples from the public sector include Best Value evaluations which assess the quality of services, such as social care, social housing, advice services, and environmental services (www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk). In the commercial sector the method has been used by major commercial financial service providers, leisure and travel services, transport and utilities, motoring and retail, often making comparisons against competitor providers (Wilson, 1998).

Table 2: Category: Audit, mystery shopper, quality control

CATEGORY	INTENTION	WHO DOES IT	SECTOR/LOCATION
AUDIT health & social care; housing tenant auditors Other government services	External judgment against pre-set standards Normative assumptions appraisal and change	Agency on behalf of the service provider - not always transparent Actors in medical assessment	Public , voluntary not for profit
QUALITY ASSURANCE	Internal quality assurance and improvement.	Provider owned - internal peer reviews	All organizations
MYSTERY SHOPPER	Service assessment	Agency recruited staff	Commercial sector Public sector

The third category of covert observation we have identified is investigative journalism and commercial espionage. In its guidelines for the conduct of mystery customer research the Market Research Society states that investigatory journalism is not a research activity (MRS 2003).

The intention of investigative journalism is primarily sensationalism to sell newspapers or attract audiences to television programmes. The justification for undercover journalism is to expose corruption and fraud and to name and shame the subjects and organisations involved in their enquiry. So, the investigative journalists are not objective social scientists seeking to describe

and explain an organisation or community, neither are they acting in the service evaluation mindset with a view to helping service improvement.

Mystery shopping has also been described in one study as ‘competitor intelligence gathering’ (Ng Kwet Shing and Spence 2002). These authors highlight the grey area bounding what is legal and ethical practice in mystery shopping, in some instances obtaining competitor intelligence can be considered as industrial or commercial espionage, which would both illegal and unethical. We shall return to this point about ethics later in the paper.

Table 3: Investigative journalism and commercial espionage

CATEGORY	INTENTION	WHO DOES IT	SECTOR
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM	Sell newspapers – sensationalism, uncover corruption Name and shame	Journalists	Anywhere
COMMERCIAL ESPIONAGE	Commercial competitive analysis	Agency	Commercial

2.2. Method, design, implementation and use in evaluation.

We now turn to consider practical aspects of research design and question whether mystery shopping is a valid evaluation tool. The mystery shopper approach does not feature in evaluation textbooks. Yet it is increasingly one of a number of approaches used in the performance assessment of public sector evaluations.

A commonly used definition of evaluation:

The concept of evaluation entails, on the one hand, a description of the performance of the entity being evaluated, and on the other, some standards or criteria for judging that performance (Rossi et al 2004:16).

Evaluation uses the whole spectrum of research methods to systematically investigate phenomena. The purpose is different from applied research because of the value judgements that are made. As this definition shows, the concepts of standards and performance are central. In this context the data produced from evaluation should be used for decision making, known as evaluation utilisation. Rossi et al assert that evaluation has two arms, only one of which is

engaged in data gathering, the other arm collects, clarifies and verifies relevant values and standards (2004:17). In table 4 the six categories of mystery shopper are assessed for their utility in evaluation. Clearly three of the usages, ethnographic research, investigative journalism and commercial espionage, are not useful in service evaluation.

Table 4: All categories

CATEGORY	METHOD	EVALUATION
COVERT OBSERVATION ethnography	Covert observation is most likely to be unstructured. In all these approaches documentation takes place out of sight	No
AUDIT health & social care; housing tenant auditors other government services	Structured pro forma assessment using pre stated criteria	Yes
QUALITY CONTROL	Structured pro forma assessment using pre stated criteria	Yes
MYSTERY SHOPPER	Structured pro forma assessment using pre stated criteria	Yes
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM	Covert observation, using a camera or tape to record the activity	No
COMMERCIAL ESPIONAGE	Covert observation using photocopying, camera, recording techniques	No

2.3. Design of a research instrument

The mystery customer technique is a highly structured observation technique; the shopper makes systematic recording of individual instances and reports back in aggregate format. The recording instrument should measure 'facts', so what is observed must be directly measurable using objective criteria. The observation must focus on what people do, rather than what they say they do, or are supposed to do. It typically records against pre-set standard performance criteria, developed by the client (what they are supposed to do) and based on existing materials such as handbooks, training manuals etc. Most of the data is recorded in rating scales, checklists, and open-ended responses. The proforma is highly structured and standardized, but is based on

subjective assessment. Any other observations made by the shopper are recorded as verbatim comments, as shown in Figure 1, a section from a review of advice agencies (Pocock et al 2003).

Figure 1: Design example, mystery shopping an advice agency, example of question format

Service	Rating
Q4. How would you rate the accessibility of the service in terms of:	
a) The warmth of the welcome received	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Supportiveness of the case worker	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Approachability of the case worker	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/>
d) General impressions of the environment	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Bad <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2: Design example: TPAS audit

Mystery calling to check services by telephone	Ringling in, perhaps posing as a customer, to find out how ell and quickly phones are answered and queries responded to.
Mystery shopping services in person	Approaching organizations with requests for information and services and making judgments about the quality and appropriateness of the services received.

Source: TPAS 2004:47

2.4. Mystery Shoppers

The mystery shoppers are usually selected on the basis of their similarity to target customers. The criteria are usually age, gender, ethnicity or other defining characteristic. However, some studies in the health sector have employed actors (Grant et al 2002; Watson et al 2002). Mystery shoppers are trained in what to observe, checked for memory retention and memory recall – because they cannot always record at the point of contact. So shoppers are not ‘naïve’ - they need project specific training on schedule completion. The encounter may be basic or complex, but must be objective, observed directly rather than interpreted (facts not perceptions).

There is a question as to whether a mystery shopper, once trained, can truly represent the 'lay perspective'. NG Kwet Shing & Spence (2002;249) note that in recruiting shoppers '*you seek out those who lie easily, find face to face deceit unproblematic and are not stressed by misrepresentation, and hope that they are honest in shopping report*'. One student recruited as a real mystery shopper observed that candidates need to be intelligent, articulate, and flexible, have a good memory and eye for detail. They must have an objective approach and not be opinionated. They must repeat exactly what they experience without letting their own values or feelings interfere with the scoring (Little 2003).

2.5. Is mystery shopping ethical?

In this section we consider a selection of important research guidelines, which present contrary arguments on the ethical basis for mystery customer research.

However, there is no single set of ethical rules or guidelines; there are several drawn up by each interest group. All guidelines reinforce the notion of ethical research practice, at all stages of the process, from design, participant recruitment, how participants are treated during the research, and in reporting to cause no harm to participants or communities. Table 5 considers what each relevant organisation might have to say about the ethics of the approach.

Some observers of pharmacy practice research noted that covert research is *poor ethics and bad research* (Dingwall et al 1992). This debate was recently revisited following poor mystery shopping reported by *Which?* (Jesson 2004; Norris 2004).

For ethnographic social science researchers, covert research is a contestable method. McCauley in the *A to Z of Research Methods* states:

the ethics of social research is about creating a mutually respectful win-win relationship , in which participants are pleased to respond candidly , valid results are obtained ,and the community considers the conclusion constructive' (McCauley 2003:95).

The Statement of Practice for the British Sociological Association, sections 31 - 33 on covert research, states that:

Covert methods violate the principles of informed consent and may invade the privacy of those being studied and it is important to safeguard the anonymity of research participants (BSA 2002).

Similarly the Social Research Association guidelines confirm an implied responsibility not just to participants but also to the self (researcher) and the research community, the funder and the community from which participants are drawn.

Most market research companies undertake mystery shopping and the Market Research Society (MRS) Guidelines for Practitioners set out the core ethical requirements for agencies contracted to mystery shop (MRS 2003). It is interesting that they advise the reader to apply the guidelines in conjunction with the MRS Qualitative Research Guidelines. The MRS seeks to promote support for market research and professionalism in the conduct of customer research. The two key overlaying principles assert that the objective of a mystery customer research project should be to provide management information, in order to aid training and retraining plans.

Informed and voluntary consent is the common feature of the guidelines, governing the relationship between researcher and participant; indeed informed consent is now a requirement for all research involving UK NHS health and social care organisations, patients or staff. For the UK Department of Health, a Research Governance Framework demands that informed consent is at the heart of research. An opt-into-research approach is required of participants, which is contrary to that taken in any form of covert research (DOH 2004). This code should apply in the case of the ‘incognito dirt busters’ investigating NHS premises.

Anonymity and confidentiality in reporting are important. Anonymity means that the researcher will not and cannot identify the respondent. Confidentiality means that the researcher can match names to responses, but ensure that no-one else will be able to identify the respondent. Particularly in the case of performance evaluation the client’s own staff must have been advised that their service delivery may be checked from time to time through mystery customer research. This could be in the form of a newsletter or on a company website.

On the other hand anonymity and confidentiality have no part in investigative journalism. There are innumerable examples of journalists undertaking a form of undercover work to expose people or organisations (www.news.bbc.co 2004). In the case of investigative journalism the Press Complaints Commission clause 10 on clandestine devices and subterfuge says *‘engaging in misrepresentation or subterfuge can generally be justified only in the public interest and then only when material can not be obtained by other means’* (PCC 2005).

Table 5: Research governance – ethics

CATEGORY	RESEARCH GOVERNANCE
COVERT OBSERVATION ethnography	BSA – not ethical

AUDIT a) health & social care; b) housing tenant auditors c) other government	a) NHS DOH Guidelines. Not allowed b) ? c) ?
QUALITY CONTROL	Internal code of practice
MYSTERY SHOPPER	MRS – it is ethical
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM	Press Complaints Commission
COMMERCIAL ESPIONAGE	No, Legal system

3. Weaknesses of the mystery customer approach in evaluating public services

Taking a scientific research methodology approach there are a number of criticisms that can be made of the mystery shopper technique.

First - the mystery shoppers:

- ◆ There could be a risk of inter-shopper (researcher) variability in large studies with multiple sites where several shoppers are employed to undertake the work
- ◆ Recruited, trained shoppers are not necessarily the same as real customers.

Second - what weight should be placed on the results?

For management decisions:

- ◆ Mystery shopping may produce conflicting evidence to that obtained by other means, for example from complaints evidence. Monitoring data showed 10,000 customer complaints about National Rail enquiries, but a mystery shopping survey found that 97% of callers were given correct information
- ◆ Managers who to use mystery shopping as a means to evaluate and improve customer services should link it to human resource policies, to encourage employee participation, create positive team building, identify training needs, provide feedback, link to rewards and incentives
- ◆ There should there also be triangulation with other information. Services should be tracked over time, supported by staff development and training

- ◆ Unless customers have been involved in design, the design of questions and aspects to be measured is not taken from a customer perspective, so it may still be measuring the wrong thing
- ◆ Similarly where questions are designed by managers or consultants, the service staff might have an alternative view of what is important to customers.

As a research technique:

- ◆ A fundamental drawback to mystery shopping is that the data from the shop is de-contextualized. It lacks any input on the specific context of the organisation on that particular day, were staff off sick, were the staff experiencing work overload and so on
- ◆ From a researchers perspective reports of mystery shopping can be criticized for their lack of transparency. The research is rarely published, detail of the method used in government reports is minimal, and thus it is not subjected to peer review. Where information is provided, for example in Audit Commission reports, we learn only that mystery shopping was used as a method
- ◆ There is a negative response to the findings from those being 'shopped'. The consumer magazine *Which?* 'has been accused of employing 'undercover high street moles', to assess a whole range of community pharmacy services.

Unethical practice?

- ◆ The most controversial dimension to mystery shopping is the ethics. There is no informed consent. Under MRS conditions all those being 'shopped' must be aware of the likelihood of a visit.
- ◆ In addition to the need to inform and obtain consent there is a wider moral issue of deceit. A deeper ethical debate would focus on the notion of lies and deceit.

3.2. The strength of the mystery customer approach in evaluating public services

The strengths are those that make it a good performance evaluation tool:

- ◆ This approach fits nicely into the public participation /consultation movement which is currently popular in public services
- ◆ The data produced this way meets the criticism that service review and evaluation fails to reflect the real experiences of real customers or patients
- ◆ In addition to customer satisfaction surveys and complaints, the results add to what is already known about user attitudes

- ◆ The provider is unaware of the false identity of the client, the situation is relatively real, and there is no change of behaviour. It is often argued that people change their behaviour when they are being observed, known as the Hawthorne Effect.

4. Conclusion

We have drawn up a typology of variations of covert research. Text books tell us far more about the in-depth anthropological sociology of covert observation than mystery shopping. As described earlier, some sociologists have grave doubts about the ethical basis of covert research. One study noted a commissioner of mystery shopping saying '*you are positioning yourself as a genuine customer; you're not, so there it is a lie*' (Ng Kwet Shing & Spence 2002).

Other limitations derive from the methodology and the use that can be made of data produced this way. Taking an interpretive as opposed to a positivist approach to research and setting aside any concerns about accuracy of recording, what is recorded is the event in one shop, on one day. Not only do we have a snapshot of an interaction between two people that is false, one person is lying and the data is decontextualised. There may be circumstances within the service, on that day, which affects the interaction.

Whatever we think about mystery shopping as a research technique, it is clear that many organizations use it as a measure they can rely on. Mystery shopper research is a major industry in the UK. It is having an influence in a wide range of organizations in both public and commercial sectors, where the use of the technique helps to provide a reliable measure of performance relative to a pre-agreed service standard. It has three main uses:

- ◆ To act as a diagnostic tool for identifying failings and weak points in service delivery
- ◆ To encourage, develop and motivate service staff by linking with appraisal and training
- ◆ To assess the competitiveness of an organization service by benchmarking it against competitors.

Literature Search

The material was obtained by online and manual searches between September 2003-2004:

An internet search using: Google, Ask, Igenta, Proquest, and the RPSGB site using the key words: *mystery shopper / shopping / customer, pseudo patient*

A review of social research methods textbooks, market research textbooks

Professional guidelines published by the British Sociological Association (BSA), Market Research Society (MRS) and DOH Research Governance

In 2004 a search of the Lexis-Nexis engine for stories published in the press.

References and sources

Anderson, C. Bissell, P. (2004) Using semi-covert research to evaluate an emergency hormone contraception service, *Pharm World Sci* vol 26:102-106.

Becker, HS, Geer, B. Hughes, EC, Strauss, A. (1961) *Boys in White*, Chicago: University Chicago Press.

Beullens, J. Rethans, JJ. Goedhuys, J. Buntinx, F. (1997) The use of standardized patients in research in general practice, *Family Practice* vol. 14:1:58-62.

BBC News (2004) Undercover BBC reporter released, www.news.bbc.co.uk 06/05/04.

De Almeida Neto, AC. Kelly, F. Benrimoj, SI. (2001) Shaping practice behaviour: novel training methodology, *IJPP* 9:203-10.

Dingwall, R. Watson, PJ. Aldridge, A. (1992) Covert research – poor ethics and bad science, *Pharmaceutical Journal* vol. 249: 182-3.

Editorial. (1996) *Pharmaceutical Journal*: vol. 256: 3.

Granas, AE. Haugli, A. Horn, AM. (2004) Smoking cessation advice provided in 53 Norwegian pharmacies, *IJPP* vol. 12: 79-184.

Grant, C. Nicholas, R. Moore, L. Salisbury, C. (2002) An observational study comparing quality of care in walk-in centres with general practice and NHS Direct using standardised patients, *BMJ* :324:1556-1562.

Carter, H. (2004) Hospital mop and bucket become history, *Guardian* 26/11/04:10.

Jesson, J. Mystery shopping demystified: is it a justifiable research method? *Pharmaceutical Journal* vol. 272: 615-617.

Little, J. (2003) Secret of shoppers who spy in the aisle, *Mail on Sunday* 5 January: 35.

MacCauley, C. (2003) Ethics, in Miller, RL. & Brewer, JD, *The A- Z of Social Research*, London: Sage.

Malhotra, N. & Birks, D. (2000) *Marketing Research An applied Approach* (European Ed) London: Pearson.

Mason, P. (2003) Impact of pseudo-patients, *Pharmaceutical Journal*: vol 271:345.

Miller, RL. & Brewer, JD (2003) *The A- Z of Social Research*, London: Sage.

Ng Kwet Shing, M. & Spence, L. (2002) Investigating the limits of competitive intelligence gathering: is mystery shopping ethical? *Business Ethics: A European Review* 11: (4):343-353.

Norris, P. (2002b) Purchasing restricted medicines in New Zealand pharmacies: results from a 'mystery shopper' study, *Pharm. World. Sci.* vol 24 (4): 149-153.

Norris, P. (2004) Reasons why mystery shopping is a useful and justifiable research method, *Pharmaceutical Journal* vol. 272: 746-747.

Pocock, R. Jesson, J. Khan, A. Western, K. Sharred, T. (2003) *Advice Services Mystery Shopping, A Consultancy Research Report*, Birmingham: M·E·L Research and Service Development.

Pollert, A. (1981) *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, London: Macmillan.

Rossi, PH. Lipsey, MW. & Freeman, HE. (2004) *Evaluation a Systematic Approach*, 7th ed. London: Sage.

Saebu, L. Rethans, J. (1997) Management of patients with angina pectoris by GPs: a study with standardized (simulated) patients in actual practice, *Family Practice* vol 14 No 6: 431-435.

TPAS (Tenant Participatory Advisory Service) (2004) A Toolkit for Tenant Auditors and Inspectors, www.tpas.org.uk/pdf/tenantauditorstoolkit.pdf 27/04/2004

Van der Geest, S. & Sarkodie, S. (1998) The fake patient: a research experiment in a Ghanaian hospital, *Soc.Sci.Med.* vol. 47; 9:1373-1381.

Watson, M. C. Skelton, JR. Bond, C. Croft, P. Wiskin, C M. Grimshaw, J M. Mollinson, J. (2004) Simulated patients in the community pharmacy setting, *Pharm. World Sci.* 26:32-37.

Which? Report Can your pharmacist cope? February 10th. 2004 www.which.net.

Wilson, A. M. (1998) The role of mystery shopping in the measurement of service performance, *Managing Service Quality* 8 (6):414-420.

Research Guidelines

Bacon, J. Olsen, K. (2003) Doing the Right Thing, DWP approach to ethical and legal issues in social research. www.dwp.gov.uk

BSA Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (2002) www.britsoc.co.uk

DOH Research Governance www.doh.gov.uk

Market Research Society Guidelines on Mystery Customer Research (2003) www.mrs.org.uk

Press Complaints Commission Code of practice www.pcc.org.uk/cop.cop.asp 13/01/05.

Social Research Association www.the-sra.org.uk

Websites

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

www.bestvalueinspection.gov.uk

www.chartermark.gov.uk

www.chi.nhs.gov.uk

www.nao.gov.uk

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/research 30/11/04