

Yanomami: The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn From It- Borofsky (2005)

Chapter 6 – You Decide

Informed consent - questions to ponder (pp 75-79)

- As an anthropologist how would you explain your research to the people you are working with so that they have a clear understanding of what they are agreeing to when they consent to participate in your project
- How would you verify this agreement so that outside funding agencies would be assured that you have indeed complied with their requirement that you have gained informed consent?
- In lieu of gaining formal informed consent, is doing good – as Neel did – a reasonable way to follow the spirit of informed consent as embodied in the Nuremberg Code? Or does it set up another standard that is easier to follow but more open to a wide range of interpretations and hence abuse?
- How would you handle the problem of continuous informed consent? Would it be fair for the people involved to concur to a blind agreement? Or do you think researchers should return to the people and get their agreement for each and every additional use of the original data beyond what was initially agreed to? How should researchers handle the cases of people who have died between the time of the original research and a subsequent request?

‘Doing no harm’ – questions to ponder (pp 80-86)

- What do anthropologists do when their ethnographic representations of a group bring the group harm? Is it sufficient to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper protesting the misuse of their work, or do they need to offer a much stronger response? Equally important, should anthropologists emphasise a politically correct view of a group to foster its political cause, or should they be willing to harm that cause in the name of ethnographic accuracy?
- Should there be restrictions on the information anthropologists are allowed to collect? What should anthropologists do if, after living in the field, it appears morally problematic to collect the data promised their funding agencies?

- To what degree should anthropologists avoid undermining the political power of an indigenous activist in writing about a group? To what degree should anthropologists avoid undermining the power of a group to represent itself as it wishes?
- To what degree should anthropologists alter their research plans to help the people they study in a time of need? Should a researcher such as Neel transform his research program into a treatment program during a measles epidemic, setting aside his initially planned research despite a promise of his funding agency to carry out that research?
- What does it mean to help others in the context in which Neel operated? Who should define the best way to help?
- How should anthropologists approach righting a perceived wrong such as the continued storage of Yanomami blood in the United States? Does doing no harm mean doing nothing, or does it mean taking an active role to resolve what, for the Yanomami, constitutes an earlier harm that was never addressed?

Just Compensation – questions to ponder (pp 87-89)

- Why do you think ‘doing no harm’ has taken such a prominent role in anthropological ethics in comparison to just compensation?
- As an anthropologist negotiating with your informants over just compensation, would you tell them about the hundreds of thousands of dollars you are likely to make over the duration of your professional career as a result of research projects such as the one they are involved in?
- How would you allocate the compensation you agree to offer? Would it go to everyone or only to those who helped you or whom you liked?
- Does addressing concerns informants themselves define as important constitute a valid form of compensation that avoids framing compensation solely in terms of money – something most anthropologists, despite their living standard, feel they rarely have enough of? How would you go about discovering and addressing the concerns that are important to your informants?

Working in Foreign Countries – questions to ponder (pp 89-91)

- Is it right that a country restricts a foreign researcher when anthropologists in that country disagree with the researcher's intellectual or political views?
- Should anthropologists be responsible for compensating the inadequacies of governmental agencies in regions where they work? Is it enough to help ease certain suffering – which you know will recur – when it is politically inconvenient or dangerous to address its underlying causes?
- To save their research permits, do anthropologists become tools of foreign governments, helping those governments carry out policies in the fields of health and education? Do the anthropologists sell their intellectual and ethical souls when they fail to speak out about social injustices in the foreign countries in which they work?

Ensuring Professional Integrity – questions to ponder (pp 91-96)

- What should be the purpose of the American Anthropological Association? Should it be focused on holding together a divided community? Or should it be something grander, something more inspiring?
- How would placing ethics at the discipline's center transform the discipline? Could an ethical stance toward difference be the new cement to hold anthropology together, above and beyond the specializations that today fragment it?
- Is it enough to assume that people at a field site, away from their peers, will act morally? Or is something more effective needed to build trust among those who facilitate our research beyond the halls of academia? If so, what would this be?

Establishing Credibility – questions to ponder (pp 96-100)

- What is the best way for anthropologists to establish credibility with others – both within and beyond academia – who read their work?
- Why do anthropologists tend to visit new locales with new questions rather than return to the sites of earlier research to repeat that research? Would anthropology be more credible if more anthropologists visited the sites of other anthropologists?
- Since the credibility of many anthropological analyses remains in dispute, is it reasonable to insist that the assessment of these analyses be based on their

effectiveness in dealing with the problems of the world? Would the people we work with appreciate such a perspective?