

WCAA Ethics Taskforce Report November 2012

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The task of analysing and providing an overview of ethical guidelines has begun in earnest. More than half of the *national* associations allocated so far have been consulted and their guidelines where publicly available reviewed. In alphabetical order, cases considered so far (including those who are either in the process of developing or do not have ethical guidelines available and are indicated with an asterisk) are:

American Anthropological Association

Anthropological Association of Ireland

Anthropological Association of the Philippines (Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao, UGAT)

Anthropology Southern Africa

*Associação Portuguesa de Antropologia

Associação Brasileira de Antropologia

*Association Francaise d'Ethnologie et d'Anthropologie

Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand

Association of Social Anthropologists (UK)

Australian Anthropological Society

*Chinese Anthropological Association

*Hong Kong Anthropological Association

*Indian Anthropological Association

*Romanian Anthropological Association

Taiwan Society for Anthropology and Ethnology

Emergent themes in the overview of anthropology association ethics guidelines

Points of Consensus

Guidelines only, not regulatory

Evolutionary and responsive guidelines

Professional responsibilities, reputation and commitments

The importance of anonymity of, and informed consent from subjects that can be an on-going process

Academic freedom

The need to be prepared for diverse and sometimes unpredictable contexts and circumstances

Priority given to local community values and customs as opposed to universalising ethical values (yet as one guideline suggests ethical responsibilities ought not to be devolved to

gatekeepers, ASA UK)

Transparency and clarity in method and aims of research. Although generally against covert research one guideline suggests that 'in some research context, covert methods may be used in order to avoid participants altering their behaviour in the research process, or when access to certain arenas of information have otherwise been closed to the researcher or where other methods would compromise the safety of the researcher', AAI

Anthropologists' responsibilities for the protection of the environment and animals is common amongst several but not all guidelines

Distinctive features

Although there is good deal of overlap in association guidelines, there are certain distinctive features particular to certain associations. These include:

Justice, dignity and beneficence more of a focus in certain associations especially those countries who have a more forthright agenda and political history with respect to a clear and unambiguous take on racial/ethnic social justice eg 'dignity jurisprudence' as embedded in the Bill of Rights in South Africa and reflected in guidelines for Anthropology Southern Africa, and the treaty of Waitangi as a foundational orientation for the ASA Aotearoa/New Zealand Researchers to localise research practice, to critically engage with ideas about why they should not do so, and to ensure that their relationships accord with local understandings of respect and dignity. The clauses seek to encourage careful dialogue and critical assessments of research and local practice (Anthropology Southern Africa)

Legal requirements and responsibilities stipulated more ostensibly with reference to Australian Anthropological Society

Ethic review/approvals provided by ASAA/NZ for funding purposes (as opposed to University or government body)

Respect for indigenous people's custom rights and possible aid for their cultural rehabilitation, Taiwan Society for Anthropology and Ethnology

Challenges

Several points in the guidelines are open-ended in the face of (i) new and uncertain developments and (ii) varied views held by members of professional anthropological and other communities. These include:

Ethical implications brought about by new media

The hegemony of biomedical science

Ownership of research data and intellectual property rights between researcher, subjects and funding bodies

Limited control of researcher over material collated and fieldwork data being requested by funding bodies as with UK's Economic and Social Research Council

The maximisation of public interest in anthropological practice without compromising the

profession or the subjects of research

Assumptions that the researcher is powerful and the subject vulnerable

Lack of procedures for research misdemeanours and adjudication of allegations – most associations do not want to assume this role although some viewpoints suggest that perhaps they should and emphasise a middle ground with the formation of an *ad hoc* committee for ‘the anthropologist has the right and the obligation to criticize unethical practices of fellow anthropologists and other individuals and institutions that affect the practice of anthropology’, UGAT.

Advocacy role and the pursuit of redistributive justice

Training to integrate ethics with on-going research practice

Next steps

To continue the analysis and overview of ethical guidelines (particularly with reference to those that are not in English, Spanish, Portuguese or French)

To write a joint report on anthropology association ethical guidelines

To hold an Ethics Taskforce meeting next year

To develop lines of further research

To draw up strategies with which to elaborate, manage or pursue the above challenges