

RESEARCH ETHICS WITH MINORITY COMMUNITIES

MAP Academy Methodology Application Series

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As codified in federal regulations, human ethical research requires investigators to:

- maximize the probability of research benefits
- minimize research risks
- and demonstrate a favorable balance of benefits over harms

“The principle that underlies problems of ethics is respecting the humanity of others as one would have others respect one’s own.”

(Ward Goodenough, 1980)

“But if they do not feel such respect, then no matter how scrupulously they follow the letter of the written codes of professional ethics, or follow the recommended procedures of field (research) manuals, they will betray themselves all along the line in the little things”

(Ward Goodenough, 1980)

Today, I am going to use my experiences from working with a team conducting with Indigenous populations in the North Central U.S. and South Central Canada. The research team has over 20 years of continuous federal funding to work with over 10 tribal reservations and reserves in this region.

Trimble & Fisher (2005)

Handbook of ethical research with
ethnocultural populations and
communities

“What does it mean to be an ethical
person when conducting research with
ethnocultural communities?”

Does one consider ethical standards in the context of viewing community-based dilemmas from a principled perspective guided by the fixed rules of objectivity, reason, and impartiality?

If researchers don't closely follow and live by a set of “principled virtuous ethics,” such as prudence, integrity, respectfulness, benevolence, and reverence, then at some point they slowly alienate their hosts and may be asked to leave.

(Trimble & Mohatt, 2005)

To gather the information necessary to frame culturally informed perspective requires extraordinary patience tempered with well-developed value orientations and research skills.

(Trimble & Mohatt, 2005)

Access to the field to conduct research with ethnocultural communities is becoming more and more difficult and demanding.

(Trimble & Mohatt, 2005)

Increasingly, communities are becoming concerned about the presence of “outside” researchers; many are intolerant and unforgiving of past research efforts.

(Trimble & Mohatt, 2005)

The once popular and widely used “safari-scholar” approach to research is fading from acceptance and “one stop data mining” by itinerant researchers is no longer acceptable.

More than ever, ethnocultural communities demand that research occur in their communities under their direction and control.

(Trimble & Mohatt, 2005)

Researchers should be prepared to collaborate with communities, share results that have practical value, and accept the conditions imposed by the community in gaining access to information and respondents

The most important challenge, though, is the responsible conduct of researchers while they are in the field, especially as reflected in the relationship they establish with respondents

(Fisher & Wallace 2000).

Unfortunately some researchers take an approach in which their needs, aspirations, desires, and wants overshadow those of their host communities; and that approach, likely judged rational and acceptable by the researcher, is the foremost reason for the problems minority communities continue to experience with outside researchers.

So, what should we be doing?

Ethics requires self-reflection and an ability to recognize and share with others personal values, errors of judgment, and lessons learned along the path toward the respectful and responsible conduct of research.

No matter how the topic is expressed, researchers should frame their field-based research around the formation and maintenance of responsible relationships.

In effect, a “relational methodology” means that one takes the time to nurture relationships not merely for the sake of expediting the research and gaining acceptance and trust but because one should care about the welfare and dignity of all people

(Trimble and Mohatt 2005).

Whitbeck (2006). Some guiding assumptions and a theoretical model for developing culturally specific preventions with American Indian people.

Tribal approval of the research

Co-ownership and Control of the data

Tribal preference

Identifying the research questions

“Slouching towards culturally competent Research”

Cauce & Gonzales, 1993

Involving the community in the research
process

Community Advisory Board Review

Personal involvement in the community

Politics & Political Change

Dynamic partnership, needs constant attention

Questions?