

JERHRE NOTES

Skills for Solving Ethical Problems in Human Research

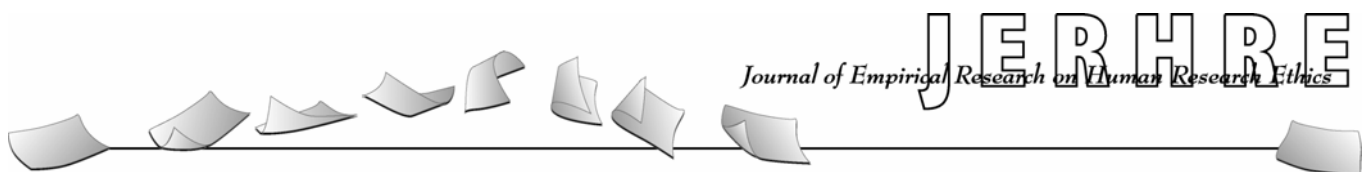
Sharing Ethnographic Data and Results

It is widely held that ethnographers and other field researchers have a duty to share their results and conclusions, and perhaps even their data, with their host community. Collaborative ethnography, action research, and research with aboriginal people (<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html#29>) often involve agreements about community ownership of the data and even community control over publication of findings. The data may be entrusted to community representatives or a local government archive. However, in other circumstances such as the following there may be compelling ethical arguments against sharing results or data:

- Old rivalries would be revived, evoking land disputes.
- Scandalous materials about individuals or groups would become available.
- Government agencies may use the data to justify policies of repression on indigenous people, and to support outsiders who bring disease and other harms.
- Research on illegal immigrant populations necessitates confidentiality. These populations become widely dispersed and impossible to locate later.
- The ostensible community leader who receives the data may have a power relationship over sectors of the community which would then be at risk.

It is vital that investigators and ethics committees not invoke an unquestioned mandate to share, or make hasty decisions or commitments about sharing, before the investigator is in a position to understand the cultural and political implications of sharing. Each question about sharing should be considered based on its unique merits. For details, see:

Cooper, M., (2007). Sharing data and results in ethnographic research: Why this should not be an ethical imperative. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 2(1), 3-20.



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